

The Art and Science of Collecting

The internet has opened up the vintage markets in watches, jewellery and other accessories to ever more connoisseurs. However, detailed research is more important than ever to track market developments and the tiny differences in provenance between items that make all the difference

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1. How has watch collecting changed in the last decade? How has the internet changed things in terms of audience and prices?

Watch collecting has been around for decades, but in recent times it has evolved from a handful of connoisseurs to a widespread global trend. Watch collectors have cropped up all over the world inspired by high-profile tastemakers, auction houses and, of course, the internet. Indeed, through the rising number of online marketplaces, blogs, forums and social media, the watch community has grown rapidly. Today, there are collectors with a special interest in every different type of watch (vintage, military, chronographs) and from every period.

Whilst the middle market accommodates watch lovers and enthusiasts from all ages and backgrounds, there is still a small section of the market that is not obtainable for the common collector; that small world has turned into a speculative heaven. The internet has created one global market. It has broken down divisions between marketplaces so that prices are now uniform and transparent from one place to another. From your coffee table in London, you can check the price of a watch in Hong Kong, Paris, Mumbai or Los Angeles. Moreover, thanks to the internet, you can always find what you're looking for in terms of price, condition and information.

2. What do you suggest investing in right now?

Depending on the particular brand and model, there are some good investments to be made. Watch prices have been on the rise for the past 10 years, with only a few losing value over time. Others have surpassed all expectations and given collectors a return of over 10 per cent each year. In general, it is a good idea to invest in models whose production has stopped, such as the [Rolex Air King ref. 14000](#), the [Jaeger LeCoultre Reverso](#) in gold and stainless steel and [Cartier Santos automatic](#) from the 1990s. Limited editions are good investments as well as watches that have been treated specially for a particular occasion, such as the [Rolex Submariner](#) that was adapted for the trench diving company, COMEX.

Brands are often adapting their historic and iconic models in order to add value to older models. Designed in 1956 for the Pan American World Airways, the GMT Master was re-launched under the name GMT Master II in 1980. The adapted version has a second hand that can be manually adjusted. The GMT Master has seen its price multiply by 10 over the last three years, while the evolution of the GMT Master II is also steady and stable.

Meanwhile, the [Rolex Daytona](#) has seen its average price grow by 83 per cent and the [Rolex Submariner](#) by a staggering 320 per cent, according to the Lux-Price Index. You can get a good idea of the investment potential of a watch by using the [LuxPrice-index©](#), a unique database developed by Collector Square which aggregates and analyses hundreds of thousands of auction results since 2003.



3. Which brands/models have outperformed and surprised you in the last decade?

Patek Philippe and Rolex have always performed exceedingly well, but other mainstream iconic brands have also outperformed such as the Omega Speedmaster, which should be watched closely as it's celebrating its 60 year anniversary this year, or the Royal Oak, the sister piece by Audemars Piguet designed by Gérald Genta. Today, the speculative market is trying to find every gap possible in the vintage market.

4. Can you offer your insights into the strength of the female market for watches? What trends are you witnessing?

The European market is seeing an interesting trend for women buying men's models and sizes (Rolex Submariner, Omega Seamaster, Tag Heuer Monaco, etc.) With regards to Collector Square's sales, one in every four men's watches is sold to a woman. Conversely, the trend for small watches is back, especially the Cartier mini Baignoire watch, Chanel Première, Cartier Mini Panthère and Poiray Ma Première.

5. Watches or jewellery – which sees a greater return on investment?

Broadly speaking, there is no greater return on investment with watches or jewellery, as both are dependent on a number of factors. Besides trends, rarity and age, the value of jewellery is closely related to the evolution of the price of gold as well as the carat, purity and colour of the diamonds used. There are 'safe havens' in the worlds of jewellery and watches, such as the Cartier Trinity bracelet and Alhambra collection from Van Cleef & Arpels; the Rolex Daytona and Cartier Tank watches.

6. Have there been any surprising (good or bad) watch auction results? How does this affect the LuxPrice Index?

Many auction houses and pre-owned websites like Collector Square hold special sales dedicated to a particular brand, which can have a significant impact on the brand's value. In 2011, Artcurial presented a unique auction dedicated to Jaeger-LeCoultre; this boosted the value of the brand, not least because of the 12 new world records that were set.

Moreover, we have been surprised to see how much of an impact watch anniversaries can have on the price that collectors are willing to pay at auction. When a brand or model is celebrating a landmark anniversary, it can rocket in value by a surprising amount. The LuxPrice-index© allows Collector Square to observe peaks in value as a direct result of watch anniversaries. On the 50th anniversary of the Rolex Daytona in 2013, the model increased in value by 79 per cent.

7. With pre-owned watches, are there any global trends?

Every country has its own specific trends. Europe is a really important market for watches. In the UK, we have noticed an interest in vintage watches from the 1970s. In Italy and Germany, Rolex watches are the most sought-after. In France, the market is really driven by vintage Rolex, Cartier and Jaeger-LeCoultre. Outside of Europe, Asians are very particular about condition; a watch must be impeccable. Meanwhile, in the US, the Rolex market completely dominates. Americans really do have the "Rolex Culture".

8. How does this compare with pre-owned bags and jewellery?

In terms of jewellery, Asia is most interested in the latest collections, presented in excellent condition. Asians like classic jewellery but with coloured stones, like yellow diamonds and vibrant emeralds. In Asian culture, it is very common for men to wear jewellery, from rings to bracelets. French taste, by comparison, is more geared towards classic pieces in white gold and white diamonds, whilst Britain has developed a market for antique jewellery.

As for bags, Asians love small bags in bold colours – again, always in perfect condition – whereas Americans tend to prefer oversized bags in classic colours. Finally in France, cross body bags are very sought after, as well as in Asia. Across the board, collectors are looking for recognisable models such as the Hermès Constance with its iconic 'H' buckle, the Louis Vuitton Twist with its big silver logo, Gucci and Louis Vuitton with their distinctive monogram canvas.

9. What makes an iconic item?

An iconic item is always created by a prestigious luxury brand, sometimes to mark an historic occasion or to honour a famous person (Grace Kelly, Jane Birkin, Lady Diana...), and it always represents the brand's DNA. Since iconic items are likely to be better investments, it is important to make the distinction between "it" pieces, which are trendy for a period of time, and iconic products, which never go out of style.



10. How important is provenance? Are blood diamonds an issue in vintage jewellery?

Provenance is a key factor in watches and must always be taken into consideration when purchasing a watch, but most luxury brands are produced in Switzerland. Provenance can be more important to some people than others. For instance, German collectors will only buy watches bought first-hand in German shops. There is no real logic behind it but every market is different. The key factor is to ensure that the watchmaker or retailer is skilled and that all individual parts are genuine. Plus, original papers are always an added-value when buying (or selling) a luxury watch since it ensures that the provenance is secure.

Regarding jewellery, blood diamonds are quite recent (1990s) and would be really marginal on the occidental jewellery market since both governments in the West and big diamond suppliers blocked the importation and use of such stones. Plus, the most interesting vintage jewellery pieces date back to the 1940s and most certainly before the 1990s.

When purchasing bags in exotic leathers, such as crocodile, varan or alligator, provenance is especially important. All bags with these kinds of leather needs to be sold with a CITES official document (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) ensuring that the provenance is secure and legal.

11. What mistakes do you see new collectors making?

Collecting should be, first of all, about passion. Collectors should only buy what they like and not what they think the next trend will be. The other common error is considering price before condition. A beautiful piece in great condition with original papers is always a better investment than one which has not been looked after. You must be prudent when comparing prices on the Internet; two watches might look the same but won't necessarily be worth the same, due to the existence of the original papers and box, as well as specifics relating to the movements.

12. What top tips do you have for buying pre-owned?

- **Condition and restoration** are everything when buying a pre-owned watch. At Collector Square, we only accept items in excellent condition. Watches are fully serviced and are sold with a one-year warranty.
- **Authentication:** Each individual component of the watch must be authenticated by an expert. The movement might be by Rolex, but it may not be the original movement built for the watch. In this case, the value can fluctuate significantly. At Collector Square, after an initial selection, each item goes through a rigorous selection process and is checked twice in person by two experts.
- **Where to buy:** For watches valued between £1,000 and £15,000, the best option is to buy in one's local region to avoid custody issues or currency fluctuations. When buying an especially rare piece (e.g. less than 10 pieces in the world) or a very valuable piece (over £20,000), it is best to go through an auction house because the price of these pieces is more difficult to determine and is ultimately set by the buyer and collectors
- **Investing:** If you are looking to invest, you can get a good idea of the investment potential of a pre-owned bag or watch by using a unique tool developed at Collector Square. The **LuxPrice-index®** is an unprecedented international database that compiles and analyses almost 300,000 auction results of luxury bags and watches from the last 12 years, offering a benchmark for the value of pre-owned luxury goods. **R**