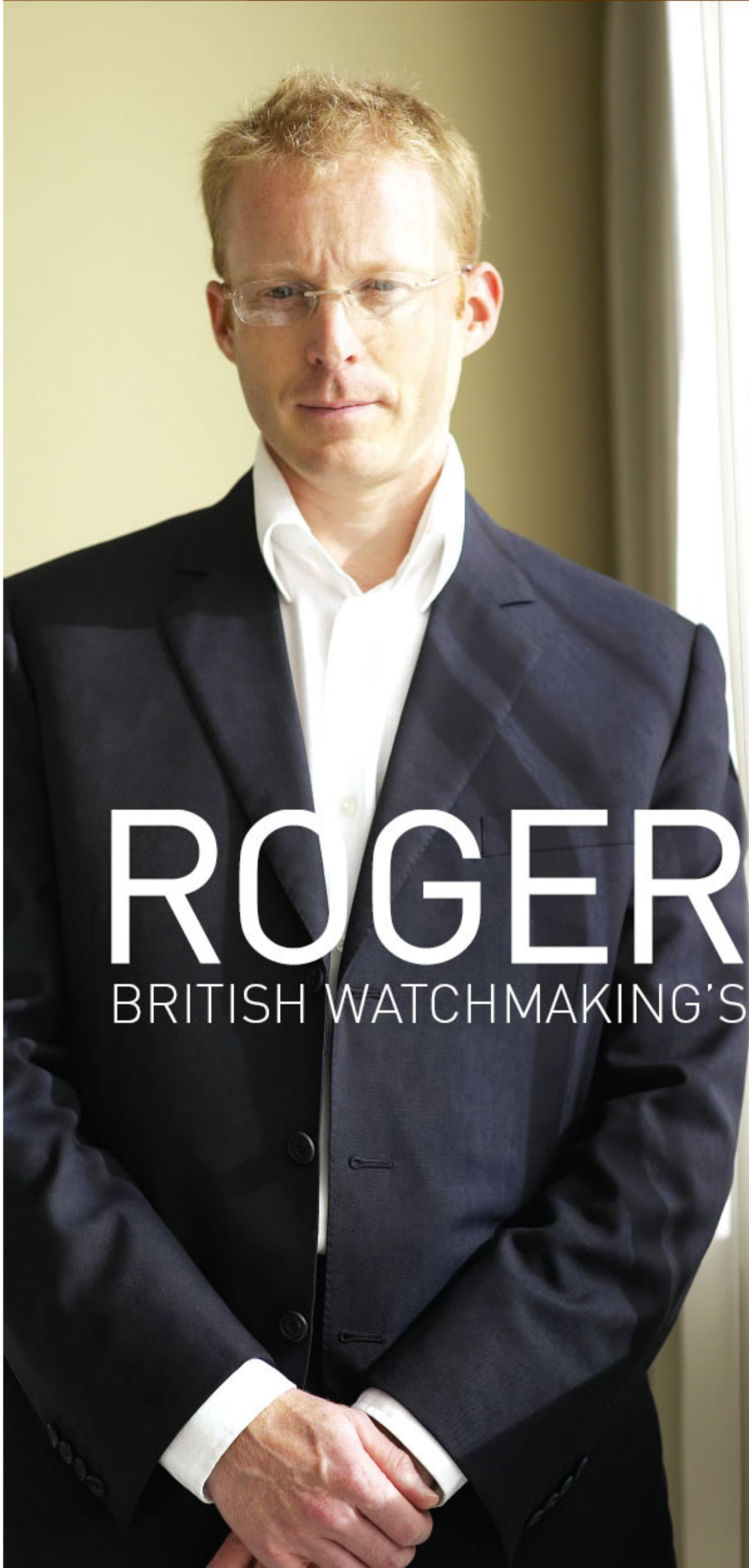


THE HOURGLASS
SHOWCASE



ROGER SMITH

BRITISH WATCHMAKING'S NEW CHAMPION

THE ROGER SMITH STORY has all the structural elements of a classic Kung Fu legend. In Part One of The Legend of Roger Smith, the student seeks out the master (George Daniels) who dwells in a remote austere rock in the sea (the Isle of Man). The student is burning with desire to learn the master's skills but instead, he is sent on a seemingly insurmountable task (to build a perfect watch).

Our pupil takes five years to accomplish this task and in this time, learns and refines his own skills by teaching himself. In Part Two of the epic, the master calls the student to join him in his most important adventure (his first series production wristwatch). Together, they accomplish something truly stellar.

In the final installment, the student launches a new product with his own name on it and becomes a master in his own right. At the same time, he becomes the guardian of his master's signature invention (the Co-Axial escapement) and the all-round champion of British watchmaking. Sounds interesting? Read on...

The Pupil Seeks Out The Master

Roger Smith was barely out of his teens when he graduated at the top of his class from watchmaking college in the UK. But he found the level of education at school unsatisfying. Then he chanced upon a book on tourbillons by England's greatest living watchmaker, George Daniels. Full of enthusiasm, Smith plunged into a creating a tourbillon pocket watch. One year later, he brought his functional timepiece to the man who had inspired him.

"This pocket watch, dubbed Number One, showed me I was able to make a watch that worked. But when I brought it to George Daniels, he was not very impressed. Essentially, his problem with my watch was that it looked handmade. He explained that if a watch took a year to make, it should not show any sign that it's been created by the human hand. The finish should be so perfect that it should appear as if it has just materialised from thin air. His suggestion to me was that I put this watch at the back of the bench and start again."

The 36 Skills of Roger Smith

Still young and heady with a somewhat successful first meeting with his hero, Smith steeled his resolve. This time, he was determined to make a professional level watch. "In watchmaking in England, there were 36 different skills involved in making a pocket watch. Traditionally, there were five trades involved in making the case and many more for the movement. One man would make the escapement while another would just make a set of wheels." Eventually, all of these parts would be consolidated to create a watch.

But Smith wanted to master all 36 skills. He sought older craftsmen associated with this dying trade and questioned them relentlessly. He dug up old 19th century watches and chronometers to see how they worked. As he did this, he became filled with admiration for his forefathers' handicraft. "I was amazed by the watches by Arnold and many of the great British watchmakers of the past. They were not just great watches from a technical perspective but works of art." In deference to these great men, Smith wanted his watch to have the hallmarks of the British style of watchmaking such as rose engine turned dials and gilded plates. He sucked up the different techniques like a sponge, "I learned how to use a lathe, how to polish the different types of metals and the techniques involved."

As he worked on pocket watch Number Two, which had a tourbillon and a perpetual calendar, he became obsessed with finish. "Basically, I would get to the end and look back at my work. Because I was unsatisfied with certain parts, thought they were too crude or just felt I could do better, I kept remaking the watch."

Finally five years later, Smith gathered himself by his bootstraps and headed back to George Daniels' home on the Isle of Man. As he knocked on Daniels' door, his heart was in his throat. When asked if Daniels



Pocket watch Number Two represents five years of Smith's labour and studies on British watchmaking.

George Daniels' Co-Axial Escapement

George Daniels is a living legend in the world of watchmaking. He holds an MBE and an honorary Doctor of Science. He has been the past master of the Clockmakers Guild of London and has won the Tompion Gold Medal. He is revered by watchmakers such as FP Journe.

Amazingly enough, if you do not include the Millennium watches, Daniels made only slightly upwards of 30 watches. But each and every timepiece he has produced has become something of a legend in its own right. For instance, one of his watches that originally sold for 40,000 pounds, was sold in 2003 for a staggering US\$350,000.

What sets Daniels' watches apart from the rest? Simply put, they are the most exquisitely finished products made today and are rivalled only by the timepieces made by such masters as Antide Janvier and Abraham Louis Breguet. Each watch takes a minimum of 2,500 hours to create. Daniels never draws a plan for each watch preferring, as he puts it, to "figure out in my mind beforehand how it's going to work."

As with cars, watches are heavily dependent on oils to keep them functioning properly, especially in an area called the escapement, which transmits power to the watch's regulating mechanism called the balance. In 1976, Daniels created the Co-Axial escapement to increase precision and end the need for lubrication in watches. In traditional escapements, the escape wheel engages the rubies in the pallet fork, which drives the balance in a way that creates sliding friction. Daniels' Co-Axial design uses a special Co-Axial escape wheel that engages the pallet with rolling friction. This generates only seven percent of the friction that is caused by sliding friction in a conventional escapement. This kind of escapement does not need to be lubricated.

remembered him, Smith laughs and says, "Yes. He recalled me as the guy who made that crap watch. It was terrible and really nerve-wrecking because after five years, if he still did not like my watch, I was thinking, what the hell will I do next!"

Smith recalls, "He asked me who made my escape wheel and I replied that I did. He asked who made my case and hands, and I replied I did. Then he told me it was well done. After that, we chatted for hours but I must admit I wasn't really hearing anything he said after "well done". I was over the moon."

The Master Beckons

Smith was working in trade repair when he received a fateful call from George Daniels. Says Smith, "At first, I couldn't believe it. But George called me up to tell me that he was working together with Omega to develop his Co-Axial escapement. In addition, he would be allowed to produce a limited series of 50 watches to be called the Millennium watches using these movements, and he wanted me to help him. These watches were to showcase George Daniels' signature hallmarks. I knew straight away I had to go. A few months later, I moved to the Isle of Man and we started work right away."

Smith describes the first nine months of life there as "Finishing School", one in which George Daniels "knocked out all his bad ideas." He learned how to engine turn and master equipment. He explains, "To work productively, you need to be in charge of the machine instead of the machine being in charge of you." By the second year, Smith had so gained Daniels' confidence that the latter left him entirely in charge of the product. Even then, Smith feels he was still evolving as a watchmaker. "To be honest, it wasn't until the second year that I really felt I was making dials that satisfied me," he says.

Of the 50 Millennium watches made, 49 of them bear Daniels' name while a single piece has Smith's name on it. This is the watch that he wears on his wrist at all times. He explains, "It took me a couple of years to pluck up the courage to ask George if I could have one of these watches, and then another six months before I got around to asking him. At this point, we were almost finishing production and I knew it was now or never. He kind of looked at me and said, 'You've got to make it on your spare time'."

The Series Watches

After the three-year project was completed, Smith was filled with a new confidence. "When I first went from making clocks to pocket watches, it was terrifying. And then from pocket watches to wristwatches, it was just as daunting. But the three years with Daniels drove the fear out of me."

Bursting with fresh ideas but committed to making distinctively English watches, Smith started making a signature run of watches dubbed the Series 1 watches. This rectangular case watch was made in a limited run



Roger Smith's personal Millennium watch.



The movement of Smith's Millennium watch.

of 12 pieces and featured a retrograde display and modern gold Roman indices. Cases were 18-carat gold and dials are hand engine turned by Smith. At the same time, he made several impressive one-off pieces for special clients. Smith also collaborated with Theo Fennel, England's leading jewelry designer. For Fennel, Smith made a rather more ornate version of his Series 1 watches. These watches are labeled "Onely" on the case back to designate them as one of a limited series. "Onely" in Middle English means "one of a kind".

Inside The Series 2

Smith's new Series 2 watch represents an impressive evolution of his philosophy and skills. The Series 2 watch is "intended to have all the virtues of a handmade watch in a serial product timepiece. It is also meant to showcase the best of British heritage and craftsmanship." This forms a major reason for Smith's decision to use only Co-Axial escapements in his watches. He explains, "This is a really remarkable British invention. Omega has shown after the several thousand watches they've made with this escapement that it is more than capable of standing up to the rough old life of a wristwatch."

Still in its prototype phase last year, Smith's Series 2 wristwatches will be officially launched at Basel 2005. The case will be made from yellow, rose or white gold and will be 37mm in diameter. Dials will all be hand engine turned in silvered yellow gold. Each watch will come in a handcrafted box made by renowned British furniture maker, Linley.

The Series 2 will be made entirely in-house. "Ninety percent of the components are manufactured by us, including the Co-Axial escapement." Smith will use an early form of the Co-Axial that is somewhat simpler than the "extra-flat" version used by Omega. This version uses an extra wheel in the going train that engages a multi-purpose impulse wheel. Unlike the Omega version that is lubricated, Smith will use the Co-Axial as it was originally intended - with no lubrication. He further elaborates, "This movement is intended to be the base for greater complications, such as a perpetual calendar or a chronograph, as the Series expands."

The look of the Series 2 watch is even more thoroughly English than the stylised Series 1. It brings to mind watches by Arnold, Benz and James Fergusson Cole. All watches are fully jeweled with expensive gold screw-in chatons, blued screws, engine turned hand engraved dials, handmade gold hands with scalloped tips, and frosted and gilded plates (a remarkably painstaking hand work creates the frosted finish).

In a nutshell, the Series 2 watches, which will be available in Singapore exclusively through The Hour Glass, are premiere watches that represent the resurrection of the British watchmaking industry. All thanks to a talented and tenacious young man named Roger Smith. 🕒



Roger Smith's Series 2 watches boldly proclaim the return of English watchmaking.