

Glossy TROVE

Attorney keeps time close at hand with watch collection



This 1943 German watch by Hanhart was designed for pilots during the war. The band is original.



This 'transitional' watch with numbers at an angle is a creation of Waltham of Switzerland.



This Ball Special from Cleveland Watch Co. was made for World War I. It has a shrapnel guard.



This late 1920s watch from Hamilton employs Egyptian numerals, the fashion of the time.

By Jenny Miller

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The wristwatch would seem to be the most straightforward of accessories, but collectors such as Joe Anderson know otherwise. A trip through his trove of antique watches illustrates the dozens of iterations this everyday object underwent before reaching the form we know today.

The Austin attorney owns mostly watches made before 1945, either military styles or those that showcase the decorative arts. "I'm a student of history and am fascinated with all things aesthetic," says Anderson, happily surrounded by timepieces on the back patio of his Tarrytown home. And he means it about the history: He's able to talk at length about every piece in his collection, thanks to extensive reading during nearly two decades.

A brief history of time (the wristwatch kind) reveals watchmakers struggling to settle on just the right design. We must recall that for centuries the watch inhabited the pocket, and only settled permanently on the wrist during World War I. Some of the early designs in Anderson's collection include the "wristlet," a piece of leather meant for strapping a pocket watch to the wrist; the "transitional" style, which had numerals skewed at an angle, supposedly for easier reading; and those with a "shrapnel guard" to protect the glass during combat. "Men were so used to having pocket watches

they thought if you carry them around you're going to smash them," Anderson explains.

By the mid-1920s, the shape and orientation of the wristwatch pretty much had been settled upon. Anderson's collection from the between-wars era includes a delicate specimen with Egyptian numerals and motif — a relic of the Egypt-mania that consumed the globe following the 1922 discovery of King Tut's tomb. Another standout is a whimsical model with telephone dial face that happens to be the first piece he ever bought off eBay. Anderson underscores the importance for collectors of eBay and other Web sites. "I think the Internet has really exploded collecting."

And unlike those who traffic in rare books or, say, devilled egg plates, Anderson's collection is wearable and all of his watches work. "For men, we don't get to carry purses, so a lot of times a watch is a statement," he says. In the summer, the snappy dresser likes to pair his custom seersucker suits with the decorative-style watches.

"The lines are timeless," he muses. How very apt.



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Austin attorney Joe Anderson especially enjoys watches that were made before 1945.