

# TIME FOR A CHANGE

Watch wardrobes are a healthy obsession.

BY BETH BERNSTEIN



**CAN'T REMEMBER** a time that I wasn't obsessed with jewelry. Antique, modern or retro. Rubies, diamonds, or sapphires. Platinum, yellow gold or mixed metals. Like most women, I change pieces daily to work with my clothes. Along with earrings, necklaces and bracelets, I even collect cufflinks.

Yet for the past 10 years, I've worn the same 3/4-size steel Rolex Oyster Perpetual DateJust. It's a great and reliable basic. But lately, I've started hankering for something different.

So I decide to get advice from George Aloï, a well-known watch expert I know. As I begin to describe my dilemma, he assures me that I'm not alone. "Up until recently, I've met very few women who are drawn to watches the way they are to jewelry." He looks down at my Rolex. "Most of the time, like you, they own one good watch. But, I've also seen women dressed in chic designer clothes, accessorized with incredible jewelry and sporting a huge plastic watch. Which to me is kind of like wearing a sable coat with Keds. Fortunately, women's interest in timepieces is definitely on the rise; more and more of them have begun to view watches as part of their jewelry collection."

Ed Faber, the co-author of *American Wristwatches: Five Decades of Style & Design*, has discovered the same phenomenon. "Traditionally watch collecting was gender-oriented. The professional man has very few pieces of jewelry with which he can be creative, change often and express himself. Basically he's got cufflinks and timepieces," he says. "But over the last couple of years, women have begun to bend the gender rule. As they continue to compete with their male counterparts in

the workplace, timepieces have become more important to them. Just as a great watch can individualize men's business attire, women can wear a sophisticated, streamlined suit and then accessorize it with a large modern face or a really edgy retro design. This immediately adds character, completes the look and gives her instant credibility."

After speaking with both men, I discover that there are five definitive looks that women should have in their watch wardrobe.

- A high-quality, understated tailored strap style for everyday, such as a Cartier tank.

He cites Patek Philippe, Cartier and Rolex as great choices for vintage men's styles. "These brands will appreciate in value if the design is inspired and the condition of the watch is original," he says. "Among American makers, Hamilton and Illinois from the 1940s through 1960s are great for both the styling and quality."

However, when it comes to buying vintage watches, looks aren't everything. "When shopping around for timepieces, speak to a jeweler you trust and ask about the maker, the metal, and look for the most interesting designs," says Faber. "If you're drawn to a vintage watch, always inquire about the provenance,



**“As women continue to compete in the workplace, timepieces have become more important to them. The right watch means they’re taken more seriously.”**

- A watch that can be worn as a sport or dress watch. For this look, you can consider a Rolex Perpetual Oyster Datejust in either steel or two-tone steel and 18-karat gold, or the Cartier Panther or Cougar.

- An elegant diamond watch for evening from Patek Philippe or another ultra-luxury brand.

- A funkier watch, either with a large face or one with trendy colored watch dials and/or bands, for casual wear.

- A vintage men's chronograph that has a bit more style than the basic utilitarian version. Try to find one that's less bulky and has either has an unusual case and lugs or an enamel dial with tricolor printing of numerals and track.

If you don't want to buy new, that's fine too. "An Art Deco platinum and diamond watch from the 1920s or 1930s is perfect for evening if you prefer an antique watch for dressy events," says Faber.

the brand, if all of the parts are original, how many jewels, if it's triple-signed, and about the service and warrantee."

As far as service is concerned, be careful not to expose leather or skin straps to water. If you notice a crack in the crystal, bring it in as soon as possible to be replaced. Approximately 90 percent of all women's watches (and a significant portion of men's timepieces) are quartz, which means they just need a battery change once every year or so. If you own an automatic watch, check with our store for how often it needs to be serviced.

Since time waits for no man (or woman), I immediately dash out and start shopping around for my new wardrobe. While I'll continue to wear my Rolex, I've already fallen for a couple of special watches that express my personal style as much as my jewelry does.

And what fun it is to have a new obsession! ♦