



Eric Ong
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The Art of Value

What should one consider when buying jewelled timepieces?

While not many men in this part of the world sport jewelled timepieces, who knows – a trend may just develop over time. Meantime, jewelled timepieces are still the favourite accessories of women.

But what should those new to jewelled timepieces consider when making their first purchase? "A jewelled timepiece is a reflection of one's lifestyle and should be chosen accordingly. When and where will you wear your jewelled timepiece? At work, sporting events or evening functions?" asks Eric Ong, founder of Bonfield Traders, a firm specialising in the repair and servicing of watches, and offering customised services for the setting of jewellery and precious stones. Ong is also a jeweller certified by the Gemological Institute of America (GIA).

But jewelled timepieces tend to be expensive and at times, perceived to be excessively priced, yet there are still willing buyers. Why? "A jewelled timepiece certainly qualifies as art; and as with any type of art, its value can be very subjective," explains Ong.

When considering a jewelled timepiece, Ong suggests looking beyond the 4 C's, and understanding the craftsmanship involved

and the exclusivity (how limited in numbers are these jewelled timepieces?) as well. "The higher-end jewelled timepieces tend to be very exclusive because they are produced in limited quantities; high quality stones and materials are used, and very exacting standards are imposed during the production process."

The brand does play a part too and credible names include Cartier and Tiffany, says Ong. But do jewelled timepieces command good resale value in the secondary market? "The diamonds and other precious stones must be valued as part of the whole when it comes to a jewelled timepiece. Exclusivity and the brand's standing also play a part in the resale value. Generally, the more exclusive the jewelled timepiece is, the higher the resale value."

Ong adds that the value of a jewelled timepiece is more than the sum of its parts. "Is a Louis Vuitton handbag only worth the value of its parts?" he asks. One must not forget the craftsmanship involved as well.

As a jeweller and gem setter, Ong should know. After all, he also customises jewellery pieces. "The labour involved can only be performed well by someone who is highly trained. It is difficult to place a price on such 'labour'. Moreover, the level of difficulty varies from item to item. The value is derived from the work of art created. For the customised pieces, if you can imagine it, I can create it."

But if precious stones and the work involved are so valuable, why do mechanical timepieces still cost more? "Mechanical timepieces are more sought after by collectors and this explains the higher pricing. The finishing on the movement can also rival the finest engraving and this is done on a much smaller scale as few people in the world can achieve this," says Ong. "The work is tedious and very time-consuming. Complications also add significantly to the value and cost of a jewelled timepiece. It is the combination of all these components that add to the final value of the watch," says Ong.