



MAN OF THE HOUR

Julien Schaerer, Managing Director of Antiquorum Geneva speaks to David Messiah.

Julien Schaerer's love for collecting can be traced back to his childhood. Schaerer was inspired by his father to become a keen collector, "I remember my father was a big dinky toys collector, because of his passion he pushed me to collect things, at the time I started collecting police cars," he says. As time passed Julien's experience with collecting evolved, in time he started collecting watches by the age of 20.

"As a man I understood that it was the ultimate accessory you can have. I wasn't into jewellery – chains, or earrings, I always liked the old things," he says. This year Julien Schaerer has been selected to represent The Hour Glass Boutique in Thailand in its initiative to preview the watch world tour showcasing vintage and one-of-a-kind timepieces for auction. All proceeds from the Only Watch tour auction will fund muscular dystrophy research.

The Only Watch tour was showcased in Thailand from August 26 to 27, it then moved on to Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Tokyo, Los Angeles, New York, Milan, Geneva, and finally Monaco for the grand auction in September.

Schaerer has years of experience in the world of horology. As a watch expert he set many records working for a number of auction houses ranging from Phillips dePury auction house in Luxemburg to Bonhams and other popular European auction houses. In August 2005, he joined Antiquorum New York as director and watch expert and in 2011; he was promoted as managing director at Antiquorum Geneva. Among his accomplishments are record auctions for vintage watches from a number of brand name companies and vintage watches owned by world famous personalities.

At Antiquorum Schaerer's job includes a variety of tasks, which involve sourcing watches for auctions, at times he has to personally travel with vintage timepieces. At the same time

auctioneering is an important part of his career. He has to discuss and promote advertising campaigns and oversee potential business strategies, which include different marketing strategies as well as pitching new ideas for auctions.

Despite having to deal with watches all the time, Schaerer admits that he enjoys collecting vintage watches not only as part of his job but also as a hobby. "I look for watches wherever I am in the world, whether I am on holiday or in an antique market. I don't really collect modern timepieces; most of the watches I collect are from the 1950s to 1970s, I also collect clocks from the 1920s to the 1950s," he declares.

When collecting watches Schaerer believes he is driven by passion, he does not buy watches with the inten-

tion of investing in them but first and foremost to enjoy them.

"I buy them because I like them, that is the number one factor if they gain value then great but if they lose value then so be it, the stupidity is when you collect them and don't use them," he says. Schaerer believes that if watches aren't used and are stored in a safe somewhere then it is more useful to auction them rather than have them consumed by rust.

He also admits that there is a growing market in Thailand for watch auctioning that deserves to be addressed, which is why the Only Watch tour stopped in Bangkok. Globally Schaerer thinks that Asia has great potential, especially China, which is slowly catching up with markets like Singapore and Hong Kong, known for always being leaders in terms of modern or vintage watch marketing.

Offering advice on purchasing a vintage watch Schaerer believes that one must not be lured by impulse buying. "Wristwatches at times lose their value just as anything else," he says. His primary advice when purchasing a vintage watch or a designer watch is to look out for the design.

"Don't go on a whim and buy something you just think you like temporarily, when you buy timepieces it can be like fashion they can change," he says. He advises people to do research on the Internet, and read web forums and see what others are saying about the watch brand. He also recommends potential buyers to look out for the condition of the watch. "If you are buying a vintage watch make sure that the dial is working and the case is polished," he advises.

For those planning to purchase a designer wristwatch Schaerer encourages people to look out for its certificate of authenticity and to ensure that it comes with all its accessories. He believes it's equally important to keep those factors in mind especially if you plan to re-sell the watch later on. "When you buy watches it's like a luxury car, some watches will lose some of their retail value, you are going to use it and they are going to devalue," he says.

Being in this industry and handling priceless timepieces everyday, one has to admit the possibility of being enticed or lured by an all time favourite. Schaerer admits that he has one or two special timepieces that he would love to include in his collection. One of his favourites is the vintage Patek Phillip in stainless-steel waterproof chronograph. Another piece he would love to own is from his favourite designer Francois Paul Journe.

Having gone through hundreds of vintage watches, Schaerer must have come across special timepieces; perhaps ones that are legendary with great histories behind them. Such vintage watches are unique in their own right, having survived decades of being treated well. Schaerer describes two unique vintage watches he helped auction, one was a pocket watch that belonged to Mahatma Gandhi, the pocket watch was sold at an auction in New York. It was initially consigned at an estimate of ten to twenty thousand dollars



THIS PAGE: The Only Watch event in Bangkok.

and it sold for over two million US dollars. "The pocket watch had a broken dial and was missing some of its hands, if you just wanted to talk about pure value of the item it was probably worth about a hundred dollars. It's a nice example because it's the importance of the person who owned that timepiece that represents ninety nine percent of its value," he says.

Another example of a vintage watch that sold at a high value was a piece that was owned by Henry Graves who was an ardent American watch collector and a client of Patek Phillipe. Schaerer describes his experience coming across one of the unique timepieces owned by Graves. "Three years ago I had an elderly couple who came to my office in New York, they said they had a Patek Phillipe it was missing its hands and its glass dial. When they took it out I realised that it was a Platinum Patek Phillipe that was made for Henry Graves, they had no idea. The watch ended up making 650,000 US dollars."

Of course he also has many other experiences auctioning vintage pieces, with great historical background, some of which include German models dating back from 1600s and a submariner timepiece from Steve McQueen which sold for over 240,000 US dollars.

When it comes to watches and being in the world of horology Schaerer believes that he could have hardly done any other job in the world. He is glad to see a wide variety of vintage pieces with different designs and structures without having to personally purchase them all. "It's the whole concept that humans with their hands could build a mechanical timepiece that can actually keep time to the second over months and months without having to be overhauled, I find that technically fascinating," he says.

Reflecting on his vision for the future Julien Schaerer still anticipates being in the same field doing what he likes most. One of his aspirations is to auction a Rolex timepiece owned by famous American actor Paul Newman. "I never thought I would sell Mahatma Gandhi's pocket watch but I did, you never know you just have to be patient, that's part of the fun," he concludes. ■