

How to smarten up your wrist

The luxury industry's relationship with wearable technology was stand-offish at first, but as these high-end smartwatches show, that's all changing



HERMÈS FOR APPLE WATCH
OK, so it doesn't matter how you dress it, it's still an Apple Watch – right? Judging by the response to last year's Hermès Apple Watch straps, no. Sprinkling Cupertino's debut smartwatch with Parisian luxury has earned it a new following. So successful was the first entente between the two that they've released a second run. It includes this single tour strap in Hermès's iconic orange. Apple Watch Single Tour in Feu Epsom by Hermès, £270 (band only), apple.com



BREITLING EXOSPACE B55 CONNECTED
Breitling's take on the smartwatch is, in keeping with the company's heritage, a tool watch aimed at pilots. Paired with a smartphone, it can be programmed to calculate and record all manner of flight information that can then be reviewed either on the watch or the phone – as you wish. So no gimmicks, and no harassment from alerts. Its case is titanium, and the dial and strap come in blue, dark grey or black. £6,540, breitling.com



BULGARI DIAGONO MAGNESIUM CONCEPT WATCH
Bulgari's connected watch is a hybrid. It's not a smartphone proxy, so you won't find activity trackers here. Instead, what you get is a 'digital vault' created by Swiss cybersecurity firm WiseKey, and an automatic mechanical movement housed in a magnesium case. The in-built NFC chip stores passwords, bank account details and so on, all managed through the Bulgari Vault app. £TBA, bulgari.com



DE GRISOGONO SAMSUNG GEAR S2
Samsung has tapped black diamond specialists De Grisogono for a luxe take on its flagship smartwatch. This limited-edition connected timepiece is focused on the ladies' market and decorated with more than 100 black and white diamonds. It's got a rose gold bezel and push buttons, and comes on a black galuchat band. A bold entry into the high-technology jewellery world, it's unlikely to be the only release the collaboration yields. £TBA, degrisogono.com

The Pick

Raising the bar

Can Sharps Pixley persuade Britons to invest their money in gold?

Ross Norman, the CEO of bullion brokers Sharps Pixley, ushers me into the conference room of his lavish store on St James's Street, Mayfair, but, before he has a chance to sit down, darts straight out the door again. 'One moment,' he says as he scuttles off towards what looks like a bank cash desk around the corner. 'Let me show you what we do here.' When he returns moments later, he places a vacuum packaged, iPhone-sized 1kg gold bar on the table and slides it towards me. 'This is actually mine,' he says, leaning in. 'It may not look much, but it's worth around £30,000.'

Sharps Pixley is Britain's first – and currently only – high-street store where customers can walk in and buy physical bullion, Wild West-style. Prices for its 200 products range from £35 for 1 gram of gold (the size of a fingernail) to £900 for 1 ounce (the proportions of a stamp) all way up to £30k plus for bars such as Ross's. The company handles every part of the process, too, including testing bars' purity and authenticity via X-ray machines and magnetic currents to handling storage: if you don't fancy popping out with your

Words by ADAM THORN



purchase in a carrier bag, for instance, they'll hold it for you in one of their 2,500 safety deposit boxes hidden away in the basement, each big enough to hold £1million pounds worth of gold and protected by high-tech gizmos such

“*We get young mums buying a few coins and high-net individuals investing millions*”

as facial recognition cameras and fingerprint scanners.

'We get everyone from young mums buying a few coins for their children to high-net worth individuals walking into our store and investing millions,' adds Ross. 'What we're doing is democratising gold so that ordinary investors have an escape route.'

It's a mentality that appears to be catching on: the shop will typically take around half a million in revenue each day while profits are trebling month on month. It's a success that plays into Britons' fears that another recession is imminent and general distrust of the banking system. While gold prices are



Clockwise from top left: The shop offers customers the choice to either take away gold or hold it in a safety deposit box, soon to be protected with fingerprint technology; drawers can hold up to £1m worth of gold; the plush reception area; the dramatic vault securing the bullion



down from their high of \$1,900 per ounce in 2011 to \$1,200 now, they are significantly up from the 1999 value of \$256 – when then-chancellor Gordon Brown controversially sold off 400 tonnes of the UK's reserves. Gold will likely not make money as quickly as a flutter on the stock market then, but, as a long-term investment, it's as safe as the property market yet far less hassle.

Or as Ross puts it before our interview comes to an end: 'It's as if we're selling life jackets on Southampton harbour as the Titanic sails out. Your choice if you want to hop aboard, but at least you're covered if it goes down.' **GJ**