



REVERSO: TIMELESS STORIES SINCE 1931

Created 90 years ago, the Reverso has remained eternally modern, daring always to be itself, without compromise, through nine decades of social change, shifting tastes and advancing technology. During the last 30 years, thanks to the revival of mechanical watchmaking and the blossoming of the artistic crafts, it has fulfilled a potential that could not have been imagined at the time of its creation. As a singular example of Art Deco design, it has become an icon in the true sense of the word. In 2021, Jaeger-LeCoultre pays tribute to a timepiece of rare longevity.

THE STORY OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

The design of the Reverso had unexpected benefit. While its blank metal flip side had begun as a purely functional solution to avoid damage to the dial, it was an ideal surface for personalisation with monograms, emblems or personal messages using lacquer, engraving or enamel. The owner can keep this decoration as a personal, hidden treasure or flip the case over so that its back becomes the front.

Among the examples from the 1930s in Jaeger-LeCoultre's museum collection is a Reverso decorated with the emblem of the British Racing Drivers Club, a piece with the Eton College coat of arms, and a 1935 Reverso that commemorates the record-setting flight from Mexico City to New York by the aviator, Amelia Earhart. In India, the Maharajah of Karputala commissioned 50 Reverso watches, with a miniature-painted portrait of his wife reproduced on the caseback in enamel. Although these pieces are all believed lost, Jaeger-LeCoultre has a similar Reverso in its collection, dating from 1936, with a portrait of another Indian beauty, thought to be Kanchan Prabha Devi, Maharani of Tripura State.

From the mid-20th century onwards, as changing tastes rejected ornamentation in all areas of design, the traditional artistic crafts such as enamelling, miniature painting and guillochage began to disappear – the skills dying out along with the older generation of artisans. Fortunately, the revival of mechanical watchmaking in the 1990s, sparked a renewed interest in these crafts before they were lost forever.

In 1996, the Maison released its first timepieces to be decorated with grand feu enamel in modern times. Crafted by Miklos Merczel, a former watchmaker at Jaeger-leCoultre who established the Manufacture's in-house enamelling studio, the set of four Reverso watches each bore a perfectly reproduced miniature of a work by the Art Nouveau master, Alphonse Mucha. Enamelling became a signature of the Reverso collection and, to this day, Jaeger-LeCoultre remains one of the very few Manufactures to have its own in-house enamelling atelier.



The Manufacture's enamellers were joined by engravers, gem-setters and guillochage masters – all of them eventually brought together in one vast studio in 2016, with the establishment of the Atelier des Métiers Rares®. As the full potential of the Reverso as a canvas for artistic expression became apparent, these artists created increasingly elaborate and spectacular embellishments. High Jewellery models have featured invisibly set baguette diamonds over the entire case; the cordonnet bracelet has been reinterpreted entirely in diamonds; and casebacks have been transformed into glittering expanses of snow-set diamonds. As the most recent releases of artistic Reverso models suggest, the creative possibilities have almost no limits.

ABOUT THE REVERSO

In 1931, Jaeger-LeCoultre launched a timepiece that was destined to become a classic of 20th-century design: the Reverso. Created to withstand the rigours of polo matches, its sleek, Art Deco lines and unique reversible case make it one of the most immediately recognisable watches of all time. Through nine decades the Reverso has continually reinvented itself without ever compromising its identity: it has housed more than 50 different calibres, while its blank metal flip side has become a canvas for creative expression, decorated with enamel or engravings. Today, 90 years after the Reverso was born, it continues to epitomise the spirit of modernity that inspired its creation.

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