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Hedge funders aren't the only ones who can afford classic

YOUR

watches. A growing community of microbrands is helping

FATHER'S

the common man channel his inner McQueen

ROLEX



LIFESTYLE

When Paul Newman's Rolex Daytona sold for \$17.8 million and became the world's most expensive watch, it was an exclamation point on the recent trend of exploding vintage-watch prices. Nostalgia-starved hipsters, Instagram watch selfies (wristies?)

BY **STINSON CARTER**

and the ever-rising fortunes of the one percent all play a part, but other modern developments such as crowdfunding and microbrand retail culture are eagerly filling the vacuum—and making classic watches accessible to the rest of us.

"Microbrands are booming," says Robert-Jan Broer, founder of the online watch connoisseur magazine *Fratello Watches*. "There's not a day

that I don't get some Kickstarter e-mail for a new watch project." (A search for *watches* on the crowdfunding site recently returned more than 1,300 projects in the design section.) According to Broer, these new microbrands are for "people who like the look of vintage watches but either cannot afford the originals or are not willing to take the risk." The risk is real: If a single non-original gear or spring has been added to a vintage watch during service, your investment can be deemed a Frankenwatch—the collector's equivalent of a salvage title on a car.

Money may have put vintage collecting out of reach and turned eccentric wrist charms

into objects of Gollum-level obsession, but microbrands offer a return to the feeling that compelled collectors in the first place. "I like watches as objects of design and style, and it's harder to enjoy something that's worth a ridiculous amount of money," says Zach Weiss, co-founder of online watch authority Worn & Wound. The result? A growing sense that this new and proudly derivative breed has just as much merit as its progenitors. "The more I've gotten into doing what we're doing," Weiss adds, "writing about these microbrands and getting to know the owners, the more I'm moving away from my interest in actual vintage watches."

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Six true classics side-by-side with the modern (and far more accessible) models they inspired



The Paul Newman Rolex Daytona Ref. 6239 currently sells for \$200,000, but you can pick up a mechanical-movement Bicompanx from French microbrand Baltic Watches for around \$600. Owner Etienne Malec's watches are inspired by a collection of vintage chronographs he inherited from his father. ([baltic-watches.com](#))



A Breitling 765 AVI Pilot chronograph fetches around \$20,000, but lifelong vintage-watch collector Dan Henry's 1963 Pilot chrono can be yours for \$230. "The models I choose to make in my collections are my favorite watches," says Henry, who draws on an encyclopedic knowledge of vintage-watch designs. ([danhenrywatches.com](#))



You're unlikely to find a rare 1943 Omega tachy-telemeter outside Timeline.watch, Dan Henry's photographic watch history. A former gray-market Rolex smuggler, Henry has spent the past 35 years scouring the flea markets of São Paulo for vintage pieces. His \$220 1939 Military chronograph is far more easily acquired. ([danhenrywatches.com](#))



The mid-six-figure Rolex Dato-Compax worn by Olympic skier Jean-Claude Killy is the inspiration behind Undone's Killy model, which retails for just \$265. Better yet, the microbrand's customization tool lets you design your own timepiece, from the case finish to the color of the hands. ([undone.com](#))



The 1967 Yema Yachtingraf has a red, white and blue subdial for regatta countdowns. It can be found for \$6,000, but since the company no longer exists, neither do parts for servicing. Undone's Skipper has a similarly striking subdial for only \$295, and its Seiko mecha-quartz movement makes service a much easier proposition. ([undone.com](#))



The Heuer Monaco worn by Steve McQueen in 1971's *Le Mans* is still offered by Tag Heuer as a \$5,900 reissue, but Kyle Schut, designer and founder of Straton Watch Co., makes the Speciale chronograph with a distinctive square case and bright blue dial for \$499, or \$1,200 with a mechanical movement. ([stratonwc.com](#))