

Valeting and Restoration

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The importance of keeping it original

For a watch enthusiast owning and wearing a beloved watch on a daily basis can either be a pleasure or a scary thought – or sometimes even both! The main reason for this is that the owner is often worried about scratching or damaging it.

I believe that the valeting of a watch is just as important as the servicing of the movement. Valeting is a very labour intensive process that focuses on the aesthetics of a watch, transforming the watch case, bracelet and clasp back almost back to the original factory finish.

Each watch that passes through my workshop undergoes a process which involves ultrasonic cleaning and removal of day to day scratches and indentations before several intricate polishing techniques are completed.

Before carrying out any procedure, I always discuss with the client the benefits of restoring dials, bezels, cases, bracelet and clasps rather than a simple replacement. One of the most important benefits is that the watch is kept to its original standard.

Watch collectors are always keen to keep all the original parts, even if they are showing signs of ageing. For sellers, replacing parts can affect the resale value. In some instances, however, there is simply no choice, but even if you do have to replace some parts due to damage, it is important to keep as many of the original as possible.

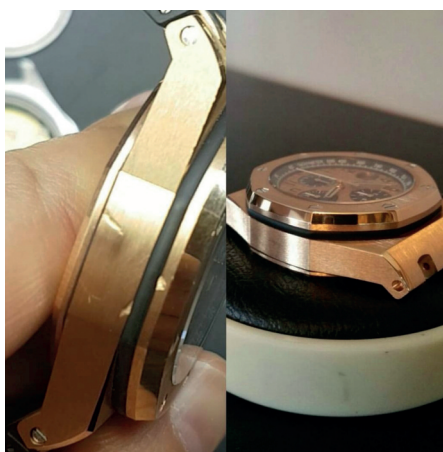
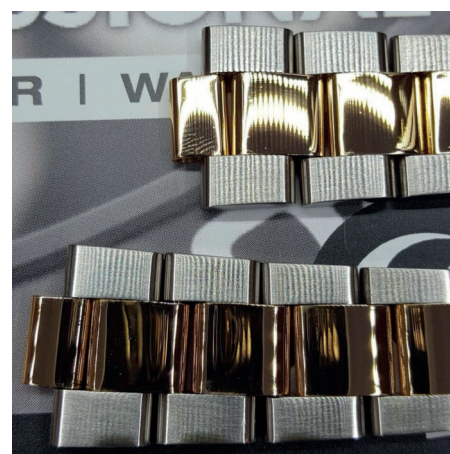
I am find that an overpolished or incorrectly refinished watch, that no longer resembles its factory specification, is unfortunately becoming more and more common place.

The old style day/date 18ct hollow gold bracelet is a strap which I frequently see. Unfortunately many are in poor condition, with the thickness of the links often inconsistent, indicating a previous repair where a large dent or damage cause during everyday wear has been polished out.

The best way to keep the thickness of the link is to laser add gold onto the link itself and refinish till it's the same level.

Re-lasering gold onto a bracelet is time consuming and requires the skill of a master jeweller. Although it is a more expensive option than 'polishing out dent' it does extend the life of the bracelet and is much cheaper than replacing a link or even a full bracelet.

The valeting of a steel and gold submariner bracelet requires a specialists technique. Most valeters polish the gold on the same speed as steel which results in the thinning of the gold and deforms the centre links which can have a sinking/receding look. The best method to re-finish the bracelet is to carefully mask and use a variable speed motor. Each style of bracelet or case requires a different technique mop and correct tooling



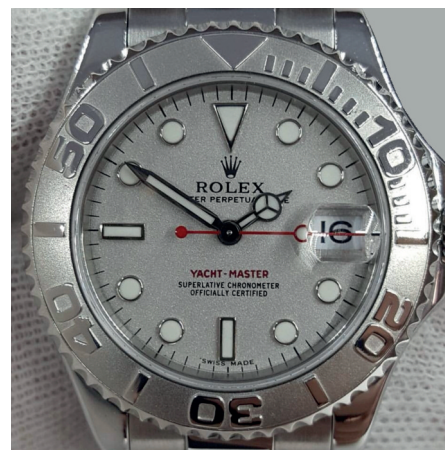
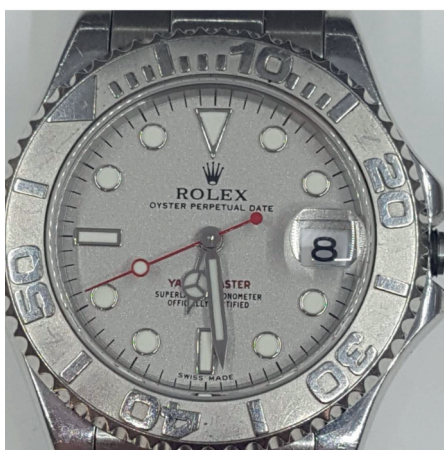
The ladies Santos Cartier is a popular watch and the bracelet is often a perfect example of how an incorrect refinish can ruin the aesthetics. The bracelet should have a satin finish and each link has two screws that should have a high lustre mirror finish. It is becoming common place to see that an inexperienced valeters will grain over the screws, as they use a single polished rather than a combination of techniques. This is a time consuming processing that is often rushed.

I have seen many excellent examples of a watch where the case, bracket and clasp have been refinished, but the bezel has either not been restored or has had a new replacement fitted. I re-cut all fluted bezels back to almost original condition, resulting in a drastically improved appearance.

The Rolex datejust bezel and the yachtmaster bezel are great examples of the difference this can make

The yachtmaster bezels, are a bezel insert that is not re-finished by Rolex service centre instead of full replacement.

The steel yachtmaster's house a platinum insert which can be bead blasted. On the steel and gold versions this is done to



bring out the overall look which is superb and always makes the watch look incredible.

If neither of these restoration are done naturally your eyes are drawn to the imperfections. I believe this is no different to completing an excellent valet and not replacing the worn sapphire glass.

I think it is very important to offer a valeting service that reverses, as I call it, 'the signs of ageing' by re-finishing the case and bracelet back to almost its original specification – note that I say 'almost' as the watch may now be well loved and used.

WOSTEP-trained Alex runs his own business, Perpetual Time Ltd, which is based in Liverpool, and offers a bespoke service, repairing and servicing a wide range of watches from high-end through to vintage.

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To re-cap I will explain the process step by step.

1. Assess the watch condition once stripped down. If there are marks or dents that are too deep to remove through polishing then material needs to be added by a jeweller to build up the surface ready for refinish.
2. Heavy marks and scratches can be removed with silicon carbide wheels such as Manhattan or artifex. Depending on the shape of the watch different grades of buff sticks can also be used to prepare a case for polishing. On a round case surface for example this is a safer option than using a carbide wheel as it won't create flat spots on the curved surface.
3. Once the deep marks or scratches have been prepared for polishing, move on to a hard cotton mop with a cutting compound which is meant for improving heavier marks before finishing.
4. Once the heavier marks have been improved and the surfaces that have been smoothed by the carbide wheels have come back to polished, move on to a soft cotton mop with a finishing compound (yellow colour). The idea here is to get the polished areas to a mirror finish with no drag marks, which the correct techniques and compounds will do.
5. Next look at any grained or satin finish that need to be brought back. Most bracelets will have a contrast of highly polished and grained areas, eg Rolex Oyster bracelet. A grained finish is done with a bufflex wheel (flap wheel). Some flat case surfaces would be refinished with a graining belt to create a harsher effect and machine finish. Cases that have a heavy grained finish need to be done by hand with emery/buff sticks to create a consistent finish on a flat surface.

