

HARRY WINSTON PROJECT Z12

What, no diamonds? Beyond the precious stones it's famous for, Harry Winston is a company with serious horological credentials.

Harry Winston's foray into horology began in 1989 with the launch of its Premier watch collection. The collection immediately asserted its presence with standout pieces like the Bi-Retro Perpetual Calendar, which featured a movement designed by renowned watchmakers Jean-Marc Wiederrecht and the late Roger Dubuis. Then in 2001, the American maison deputed the Opus collection: an on-going collaborative series that sees Harry Winston team up with master independent watchmakers to produce some of the most avant-garde timekeepers around. Started and initially managed by Maximilian Büsser (now best known as the founder of MB&F), Opus has so far has seen the production of 14 limited-edition watches and – I write without hesitation – is truly contemporary horology's magnum opus.

A full catalogue of Harry Winston watch collections has grown over the years. Beyond Opus and the still-going-strong Premier, one of the most interesting is Project Z. Introduced in 2004 as another avenue for HW's work at the cutting-edge of mechanical timekeeping and named for the high-tech Zhalium metal used throughout all the pieces made under its banner.

Zhalium has its roots in the aerospace industry and is a zirconium-aluminium alloy produced exclusively for Harry Winston. It is super light, super strong, highly resistant to corrosion and non-allergenic – an ideal material for a watch case.

The latest Project Z offering is the Project Z12, as its name suggests, the line's twelfth. Powered by the automatic HW3306 calibre, it displays hour, minute and date information in a pretty novel way. Highlighting the relevant digit, a ring graduated 1-31 around the edge of the dial serves as the date indicator. Two crescent-shaped retrograde sub-dials, placed opposite one another to form a full circle, display the hours and minutes with red triangular-shape pointers. As



retrogrades, when either of the two pointers reach the end of their respective hour or minute track they “jump” back to their start position at the top of an hour or the start of a new AM/PM cycle. It's a charming and imaginative re-interpretation of time and date display.

The 42.2mm case is, naturally, Zhalium and serves as a nice example of industrial chic styling with its raw-metal hue and clean lines set against numerous facets. Also made using Zhalium, the central arched bridge adheres to the industrial theme and has been made to resemble the steel beams used in Manhattan skyscrapers (a subtle reference to Harry Winston's New York heritage). The bridge is coloured blue to ensure it isn't lost against the rest of the watch; it also proudly bears the brand's lozenge-shaped logo. Giving the Z12 a dash of welcome technicolour, blue is found again on the inner chapter/signature rings, the hour/minute markers and the “denim” strap. Rubber-backed with what looks to be a denim cotton inlay at first glance, the inlay is in fact calfskin with a denim-effect pattern stamped onto it.

With its industrial design code and reappropriated blue-collar looks, one imagines the Project Z12 wearer to be, say, a self-respecting property tycoon or captain of industry on a site visit to inspect progress of their latest edifice. After all, slim yellow-gold cased dress watches don't pair that well with hard hats and rubber boots. Everyone needs a proverbial “beater” watch.

Story by Alan Seymour