



FIT FOR A KING

Jaipur Watch Company's coin watches are rooted in history, and making history

BY AISHWARYA SATI
PHOTOS BY AAYUSH GOEL

Actor Colin Firth moved many hearts when he essayed the role of King George VI in the 2010 historical drama *The King's Speech*. The Reluctant King, as the monarch was famously called, had a major stuttering problem. But he overcame it with sheer grit, went on to lead Britain in World War II and emerged victorious with allies.

This legend of determination inspired Gaurav Mehta, the founder of Jaipur Watch Company, to find his true calling. Mehta has dedicated his first collection of watches to George VI, who was the last emperor of India and the first head of the Commonwealth. And, what makes these timepieces unique is that they use coins from the British Raj era.

"Perseverance pays in the long run," says Mehta, 31. "When I returned from London to India, after quitting a job in the insurance sector, I did not find anything suitable here in Jaipur. So I went to Mumbai and started working for an insurance company. But I did not enjoy working for someone else, so decided to start an insurance broking firm. A little after a year, I left the business and ventured into family entertainment, such as video games, and set up three outlets in Jaipur, Ludhiana and Kathmandu."

That venture, too, did not satisfy him for long. He sold it in about four years. Finally, Mehta listened to his heart, and set up the Jaipur Watch Company in February this year. He says he had no prior horological knowledge and it was just the passion that led him to the world of watches.

"I was always attracted to watches," he says. "After I became financially independent, I started buying watches—one piece every three months. So now I have about 90 timepieces of various



The King George VI coin used in the watch and the stamps from Mehta's personal collection

brands. I prefer chunky sporty watches; I have a TAG Heuer Monaco and I bought a Hublot recently."

The conception of his company's coin watch has an interesting root. Mehta has been an avid coin collector since the age of seven. "Over time, I realised that my collection was more of an accumulation of coins, without any theme or direction. And as I grew up, I got an opportunity to interact with some serious

coin collectors in India such as Prakash Kothari, who has the world's largest collection of Jaipur coins, and that made me realise that whatever I had been doing was a waste of time. Anyone can collect 10,000 coins by spending about ₹30,000, but that won't qualify as a collection. Then, I started focusing on British India coins, especially from the period of King George VI."

Mehta owes his love for antiques

and vintage coins to his hometown, Jaipur. He is completely smitten by imperial charm and loves collecting old postcards belonging to the British Raj era. He also collects vintage watches and clocks, stamps, medals and any quirky artefact that catches his fancy.

The idea of making a coin watch was a fluke, says Mehta. "I would disassemble watches to see what was really giving them life," he says. "One day, over a

discussion with a friend on the absence of an indigenous Indian watch brand, I realised I could try and combine two of my hobbies. I bought a cheap watch, disassembled it, fitted a coin and wore it for about four months. Whenever I went out wearing the watch, people inquired about it. That was when I thought about making coin watches for the market. After a series of designs, we zeroed in on the King George VI watch.

THE WATCHES IN THE KING GEORGE VI COLLECTION, EQUIPPED WITH JAPANESE QUARTZ MOVEMENTS, ARE PRICED BETWEEN ₹20,000 AND ₹23,000

We made around 300 watches; just 37 pieces are left now."

Mehta buys the coins only from renowned numismatists or collectors. "Mostly, I end up paying around ₹2,500 for a coin worth ₹1,000 coin, as it takes a lot of convincing to let collectors part with their coins. I do not buy from the market because the quality is sub-standard and the coins might not be genuine. I also get the coins certified."

“AMITABH BACHCHAN IS A HUGE WATCH COLLECTOR, WHO REFUSES TO PICK A FAVOURITE. HE WAS INTRIGUED WITH THE CONCEPT OF A COIN WATCH AND ASKED ME HOW I SOURCE THE COINS”

GAURAV MEHTA, founder, Jaipur Watch Company

Jaipur Watch Company sourced about 700 coins for the 300 watches, and all the coins were put through a rigorous selection process. “First, my staff sifts out the good coins and then I analyse each one of them. An inconspicuous scratch is enough to reject a coin.”

The watches in the King George VI collection, equipped with Japanese quartz movements, are priced between ₹20,000 and ₹23,000. “We imported everything, right from movements to cases to sapphire glass,” he says. “Once we had all the components, the watches were assembled in Hong Kong. We do have to grind the coins a bit to fit them into the cases, but there is no customisation required.”

Mehta pays personal attention to the colour scheme and even the paint for the packaging boxes, which resemble vintage trunks.

In the past couple of months, Mehta has garnered some rave reviews from the likes of legendary actor and watch enthusiast Amitabh Bachchan, who was recently presented with a customised coin watch.

“Bachchan is a huge collector, who refuses to name a personal favourite,” says Mehta. “He was intrigued with the concept of a coin watch and asked me more about the idea and how I source the coins. We got a call from Boman Irani, too, and we are doing a watch for him.”

Mehta is chuffed that Jaipur Watch Company is being recognised for its

work in such a short span. “We are almost ready with our new collection, which uses coins from the World War II period. It will be available in the market in a month’s time,” he says. “Other than that, we are working on many other designs; we plan to introduce about eight collections in the next six months. In terms of scaling up, we have almost finalised dealers in Delhi and Chennai. For now, our watches are sold through The Big Door in Bombay. We are planning to have seven to eight stand-alone outlets in the next one and a half years.”

Mehta, however, plans to limit every collection to 500 watches. This is because of two reasons. First, Mehta wants to maintain exclusivity and secondly, procuring coins is not easy.

He wants to create a pan-India presence and is targeting Indians and NRIs. “We started selling online, and I owe a lot to the social media since our

first five watches were sold through Facebook. We will maintain online presence, but won’t be selling aggressively on that forum,” he says. “When it comes to sales and marketing, we are very selective about our partners. Unless the store owner is passionate about watches, we would be hesitant to partner with them.”

Jaipur Watch Company’s expansion plan includes setting up a case factory near Gurgaon, Haryana. “We are tying up with an auto component company,” says Mehta. “This is going to be a huge step for us in becoming independent. We will invest with them to buy the required machinery because getting good-quality cases is a problem in India. And we are hoping that once it works out for us, we will be able to supply to other companies as well.”

Talking of the upcoming World War II era collection, Mehta says each time-

piece would be equipped with a Swiss quartz movement. “The shape and design of the coin for this collection is very different because, during that period, it was difficult and expensive to mint coins given the scarcity of metal,” he says. “So, to minimise the use of metal, they started producing coins with a hole in the centre. These coins have a beautiful floral engraving on the back and the crown symbol denoting India’s allegiance to the Commonwealth. We have modified the movement a bit and made it into a rotating disc movement sans the hands. It will be a 43mm watch, and there will be 250 pieces in stainless-steel and 250 gold-plated versions.”

There is good news for ladies as well. Encouraged by the response from women buyers, Mehta is planning a silver ladies’s watch with three coins, depicting queens Elizabeth and Victoria. ○

A watchmaker examining coins at the Jaipur Watch Company

