

STORY *Nicholas Foulkes*

Welcome to the week

The new Calatrava Weekly Calendar is serene and practical. However, the simplicity that it radiates outwardly belies the complex task that the development team faced when adding a new complication to the collection

A month is determined by the phases of the moon, a celestial pageant of waxing and waning, crescent and gibbous, that takes an average of 29.5 days to complete. If nothing else, it gives Patek Philippe's watchmakers the opportunity to include a visual indication of the progress of the lunar cycle on the dials of classics such as the REF. 5270 and REF. 5940. But while months are governed by the moon, the year and seasons follow the sun's system of equinoxes and solstices that give us spring, summer, fall, and winter every 365.2422 days.

By now, even those of us with limited mental arithmetic can see the rather glaring inconvenience that 12 lunar months do not make one solar year. This calendrical untidiness has dogged mankind for as long as he has been telling the time; the Julian calendar was Caesar's shot at reconciling the influence of both astronomical bodies. By his time, the civil calendar and the seasons were out of sync by about three months. As an empire builder, Caesar needed a tool with which to regulate a growing realm. The Julian year of 365-and-a-quarter days was divided up into 12 months that had nothing to do with the moon but enabled the beginnings and ends of seasons to be fixed. Mathematically inexact, this scheme needed tweaking by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. He bequeathed us today's Gregorian calendar, with its months of uneven length, its leap years, and its century leap years, which were the mathematical gymnastics necessary in

The new Calatrava Weekly Calendar REF. 5212 in steel exudes sophisticated simplicity. As well as indicating the day and date, this timepiece is the first Patek Philippe watch to indicate the week number – a useful function, even in the age of smartphones



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Unusually, there are 5 central hands on the dial of the REF. 5212A. They indicate hours, minutes, seconds, the week number, and day of the week. There is also a date in an aperture at three o'clock. Correction of the day and number of the week is via pushers at eight and ten o'clock respectively, while the date is adjusted via the crown

order to cling to the old notion that 12 units of time based on the movement of the moon should fit into the single perceived cycle of movement of the sun.

If Caesar were building an empire today, I reckon that as a pragmatic man he would probably welcome the simplicity and practicality of the new Patek Philippe Calatrava Weekly Calendar REF. 5212A. This timepiece showcases the calendrical unit to which almost everyone can relate: the seven days of the week. Counting the year in weeks, with a new week beginning every Monday (rather than Sunday), is a system used by industry and one that makes sense for the rest of us. After all, we do not say TGIWGM (thank God it's a waning gibbous moon); the end of the working week is more commonly welcomed with the well-known acronym TGIF.

The REF. 5212A is the latest addition to Patek Philippe's family of so-called "small" or "useful" complications, which includes such famous modern-era Pateks as the Annual Calendar REF. 5035 and the Calatrava Travel Time REF. 5134.

"The number of the week is a new complication, one we didn't have in the collection," explains Philip Barat, the head of watch development at Patek Philippe. First mentioned almost 10 years ago, the watch

is now finally revealed. "For a long time, we didn't launch small complications – a useful complication such as an Annual Calendar or a Travel Time – so we are adding to an important category of watches that are popular with clients."

This steel watch bears the characteristic hallmarks of Thierry Stern-era design: the double-stepped lugs and bezel reminiscent of the REF. 5320 and highly legible indicators that make full use of the dial to provide maximum clarity. In addition to the date window, this dial has four concentric rings of information: month, week number, time, and day. There are five hands: hours, minutes, and seconds, and two red-topped hammerhead hands that guide the eye instantly to the crucial information of the week number (above which is the corresponding month) and day of the week.

It sounds like the dial should be busy and crowded, but there is an almost restful harmony about it, due, in part, to the fact that the font used for the letters and numbers is not a font at all but the handwriting of one of Patek Philippe's designers. Although it is as clear and as neat as a printed font, it has a human quality reminiscent of the past, according to Thierry Stern.

"During the creation process, looking at the drawings of the new model I loved the

style that the hand-drawn letters and numerals gave to it," he says. "I asked the designer to draw each one individually, creating a manuscript font. Each letter and each numeral is different and unique. This specially created font gives the dial a vintage and poetic look, and I really like it. For me, this new complication is reminiscent of the not-so-distant past, when only printed weekly calendars were available."

And if the reference number 5212 sounds oddly familiar, that is because the watch's case design was inspired by the REF. 2512/1, a large unique piece from 1955, which sold at auction in 2012 for almost a million dollars (more than six times its high estimate) and uses the same reference numbers as the new model but in a different order.

However, while there are echoes of Patek Philippe's past in the styling of this timepiece's case, its movement offers a taste of things to come. The REF. 2512/1 was a time-only watch, and the Weekly Calendar REF. 5212 is an entirely new complication chez Patek. The latter required the development of a new module with asymmetric wheels that have differing tooth lengths, calibrated for the weekly cycle. But in addition to the development of a new assembly for the new function, the watchmakers



The REF. 5212A introduces the automatic caliber 26-330 S C J SE, which can be seen through the model's sapphire crystal caseback. This new caliber, which consists of 303 components and measures 27 mm in diameter with a height of 4.82 mm, offers a number of improvements in overall performance and reliability, such as enhanced setting precision via the new stop balance wheel and a new patented anti-backlash wheel. The automatic winding system has also been completely revised and refined by the company's engineers



have taken the opportunity to redesign the entire base caliber as well.

It is the caliber 26-330 S C J SE that makes its debut in the REF. 5212. The new base caliber is vintage Patek in that while it is new, it is also familiar. For a start, it is interchangeable with the company's self-winding caliber 324 base movement – used in a large number of current collection models, including simple and complicated timepieces – but while the new caliber fits perfectly within the references that house the caliber 324, it offers significant gains in performance.

The progress embodied in this movement is composed of numerous careful improvements, some so small that they barely register as changes and yet they all combine to create a substantial overall benefit while remaining true to the spirit and style of Patek Philippe movements. For instance, the engineering team spent months working on a new profile for screw threads to address one of the oldest problems that the watch industry faces – screws working themselves loose. The result is an improvement of 20 percent in terms of performance. It may not be the sexiest of claims, and it is hardly the stuff of headlines, award ceremonies, and red

carpets, but it is the essence of careful, considered, quality watchmaking.

This is a movement that reveals its benefits subtly, the wearer encountering such little refinements as, for example, the stop seconds – actually a stop balance wheel – for setting the hands with enhanced precision.

A further incremental improvement has been achieved through refinement of the self-winding system. The rotor has been

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redesigned, and the central screw has been replaced by a locking nut that secures the oscillating mass in position without exposing the movement to the hazards of last-minute slippage of the screwdriver.

Historically, tooth wear on the wheel train and a certain amount of backlash were accepted as part of the price to pay for self-winding movements with central

seconds. However, this caliber uses LIGA technology to create a patented anti-backlash wheel that replaces the standard third wheel. Instead of the traditional toothed profile, each “tooth” on this new component is divided into three parts: the leading flank of the tooth, a strip-spring that looks like a tiny hook, and the back flank, which limits the play in case of shocks. This has enabled the inertia of the balance wheel to be increased to that of the hand-wound caliber 215, resulting in greater stability of performance.

It is such a level of detail and care that makes this a beautiful movement; the benefits derive from the logical progression of cumulative improvements, and that makes it a perfect metaphor for the calendar system that it celebrates and calibrates. If you see beauty in logic, you probably already use the weekly calendar. Week one begins in the week that includes January 4 (in 2019, this was Monday December 31, 2018). However, with that little quirk aside, each new week reliably begins every Monday; there is no waxing, no waning, no leaping, nor any uneven months, just the simplicity of the seven-day rhythm and the simple elegance of the REF. 5212A. ♦



The REF. 5212A has a vintage-style “box” sapphire crystal on the dial side, and its case, in steel, measures 40 mm. The model's design was influenced by a piece from 1955, the REF. 2512 (shown above). The specially created typography on the dial of the new model was inspired by the hand-drawn letters and numerals in the

illustrations created during the design process (shown left); this human touch calls to mind the handwritten notes in a paper diary. In one of the dial's concentric rings, a graduated scale measures 53 weeks, taking into account years that have one more week than usual. This phenomenon occurs every 5-6 years and is due next in 2020