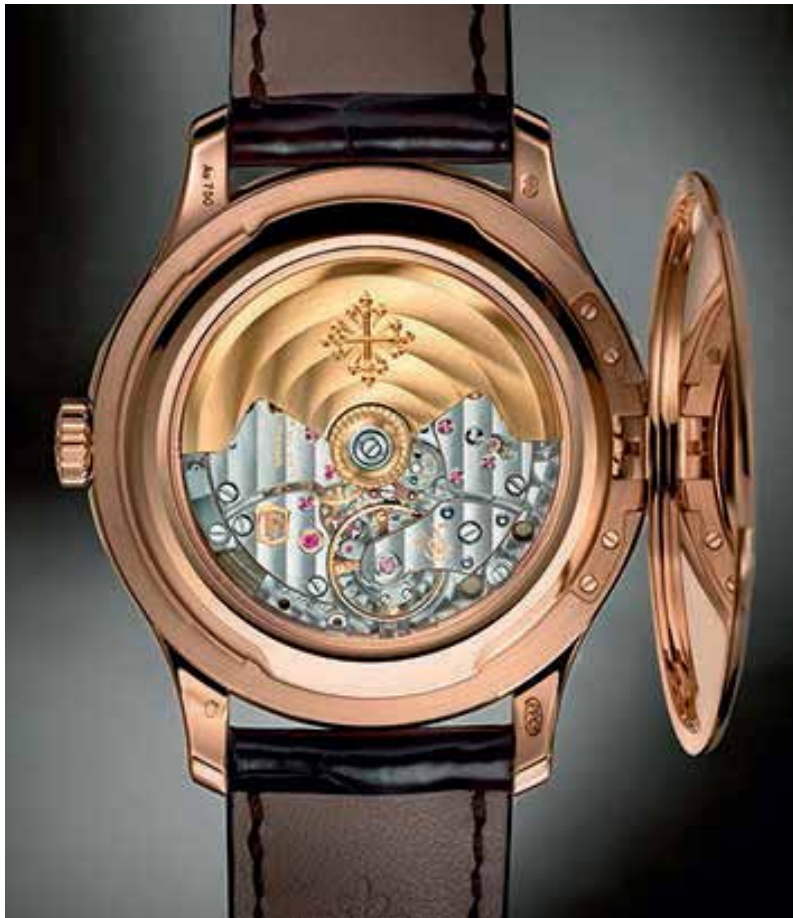


Story **Riccardo Valente**

AN OPEN AND SHUT CASE

Once used to protect from the rough and tumble of hunting, and then from the conditions of trench warfare, a hinged cover was an essential component of a gentleman's watch. Now it has been reinvented for the modern age



The elegant lines of the Calatrava Ref. 5227 are emphasized by the gently curved flutes extending seamlessly from the side of the case to the lugs (right). Left: the watch features a sapphire crystal display back protected with a dust cover – but this comes with an added twist. The cover is attached to the caseback by a hinge, concealed on the inside, making it invisible even to the watch connoisseur





As every Patek Philippe aficionado knows, the Calatrava family of watches was launched in 1932, the same year that the Stern family acquired Patek Philippe. The first model produced that year was the legendary REF. 96, inspired by the Bauhaus creed that “form follows function.” Thus, since the hands of a watch go around, it was decided that this timepiece should also be perfectly round. And in the current collection, all the round watches without complications still belong to the Calatrava family. It’s become a name synonymous with simplicity and elegance, the quintessential example being the REF. 5119, with its guilloché *Clous de Paris* (hobnail pattern) bezel, a motif that dates back to the Middle Ages but was particularly popular with Louis XIII’s cabinetmakers.

The earliest round wristwatches (which were anything but elegant) were produced during World War I. They were based on the Savonnette-style pocket watches popular at the time, which were extremely durable and known in England as “hunters,” since they were generally used for hunting and other outdoor activities. Crucially, they featured a spring-hinged circular metal lid or cover that closed over the watch dial and crystal, protecting them from dust, scratches, and other damage or debris.

Trench warfare and the use of artillery relied on precision time-keeping. Officers had to be able to check the time quickly, and they needed a watch worn on the wrist that could be glanced at in an instant, not a timepiece that needed to be extracted from a pocket after undoing a coat. Hunters could be converted into wristwatches simply by adding two strap lugs to the case at 12 and 6 o’clock. The winding crown of a hunter was in the right position, at 3 o’clock, to accommodate the lugs, unlike the less sporty Lépine-style pocket watch, where the winding crown was at 12. From its origin in the trenches, the new wrist-worn hunter evolved into the watch now known as Officer’s-style, its hinged back cover a nod to its roots.

Wristwatches became so widespread after the war that they almost completely replaced the pocket watch. By the time the first Calatrava was launched, they were hugely popular. Not only were they more convenient, they were cheaper to make than the pocket watch, so even private soldiers and civilians could afford them. In the increasingly hectic and time-aware post-war world, they became essential to the industrial and financial economy.

Patek Philippe’s collection doesn’t include an Officer “family” as such. The style, characterized by screwed strap bars as well as the aforementioned back cover, tends to be reserved largely for complicated watches. In fact, until now there has been only one Officer’s-style model in the company’s signature Calatrava collection, the REF. 5153. It is instantly recognizable because of its straight lugs (soldered on a hunter-style case that looks ready for military action) and its side-hinged cover.

As well as belonging to the Calatrava family, the new REF. 5227 also includes a hinged dust cover. Made of gold, this important

Left, from top: the new REF. 5227 has a beautifully uncluttered, ivory, 12-layer lacquered dial reflecting the Bauhaus philosophy that “form follows function”; this new Calatrava is made in yellow, white, or rose gold. Right: despite being a mere 9.24mm in height, the REF. 5227 features a hinged dust cover operated by a barely discernible lip. It is so cleverly integrated that even Philippe Stern, the honorary president of Patek Philippe, could not detect it on first sight when presented with the final model by his son, Thierry Stern, who personally led this whole case project over the course of two years. The dust cover can also be engraved to personalize the timepiece, something that is no longer possible in the majority of watches with sapphire crystal casebacks. The opening/closing movement, meanwhile, pays tribute to the “hunter” pocket watches of the early 1900s



feature traditionally reserved for Officer's-style watches protects the sapphire crystal caseback. As with the REF. 5153, the protective cover opens laterally, though in this case from 3 o'clock to 9 o'clock. However, on this particular model, the hinge is invisible even to the connoisseur – a marvel of engineering that requires extreme dexterity in its construction. The caseback features a tiny hairline joint and lip that enable the dust cover to be opened with a mere fingernail and are completely invisible when the watch is being worn. They can actually only be seen on close examination of the caseback, perhaps to read an engraved dedication or to admire the magnificent self-winding movement through the transparent, sapphire crystal cover. The result is that the simple, clean lines of the Calatrava are left undisturbed.

And what of that movement within? The new REF. 5227 is not a “complicated” Patek Philippe watch but a “simple” one, whose date must be changed five times a year (for the shorter months). So it is not an Annual Calendar watch, let alone a perpetual calendar; it is not a chronograph, nor does it have a minute repeater or tourbillon. Nevertheless, the mechanical self-winding movement 324 s c does boast state-of-the-art technology in a Spiromax® balance spring, which beats at a frequency of 28,800 oscillations per hour (4 Hz). The spring is made of Silinvar®, an innovative silicon-based material much stronger than the finest steel alloy

alternatives and completely non-magnetic. Make no mistake: this is a cutting-edge movement for a modern age.

But it is the aesthetic features, rather than the purely technical ones, that set the REF. 5227 apart from other Calatrava watches and in fact from other timepieces with Officer's-style dust covers. In addition to that fiendishly clever invisible hinge on the back cover, two indented flutes on each side of the case flow into the curved (rather than straight) lugs to give the watch an even slimmer, more streamlined appearance. The ingenious cover, and the overall architecture of the watch, is typical of Patek Philippe's innovative approach to watchmaking – innovation that always cleverly builds on the past, whether it is the exhilarating hunting pursuits of the nineteenth century or trench warfare in the twentieth century, when simple design and dust covers were more than just a nice-to-have.

At 2013's Baselworld, the new Calatrava REF. 5227 was introduced to Patek Philippe's waiting audience as “an officer and a gentleman.” This is a perfect summing up – it is a timeless classic, with a secret hinged dust cover that offers a new interpretation of the Officer's-style of case. But REF. 5227 is also a watch designed and crafted for a twenty-first-century gentleman with a deep respect for heritage.✦

Translated by Luisa Nitrato Izzo

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