

A-Z Glossary of Luxury Watches

ALARM

A device that sounds a signal at a predetermined time.

ALTIMETER

A device that determines altitude by responding to changes in barometric pressure.

ANALOG DISPLAY

A display that shows the time by using hands and a dial.

ANALOGUE

A watch that uses hands to tell the time.

ANTI-MAGNETIC

A watch or device that is not affected by magnetic fields. Watches can be demagnetized, but anti-magnetic technology—such as the use of silicon components or inner "Faraday cages" of soft iron—offsets the effects of magnetism.

APERTURE

A small opening or window in the dial that displays certain information, such as the date, day, month, or moon-phase.

ANNUAL CALENDAR

A watch that shows the day, date, and month (and possibly phases of the moon) and only needs adjusting once a year at the end of February.

ARABIC NUMERALS

Script numerals 1 to 12, or 5 to 60, used on a watch dial to indicate hours, minutes, and possibly seconds, as opposed to Roman numerals or baton hour markers or indexes.

AUTOMATIC

A mechanical watch that is powered by the motion of the wearer. It needs no batteries, and winding occurs through motion on the wearer's wrist rather than manually.

AUTOMATIC WINDING

Winding that occurs through motion on the wearer's wrist rather than manually winding the watch. An automatic watch that isn't worn for a couple of days will need to be wound again to start.

ACCURACY

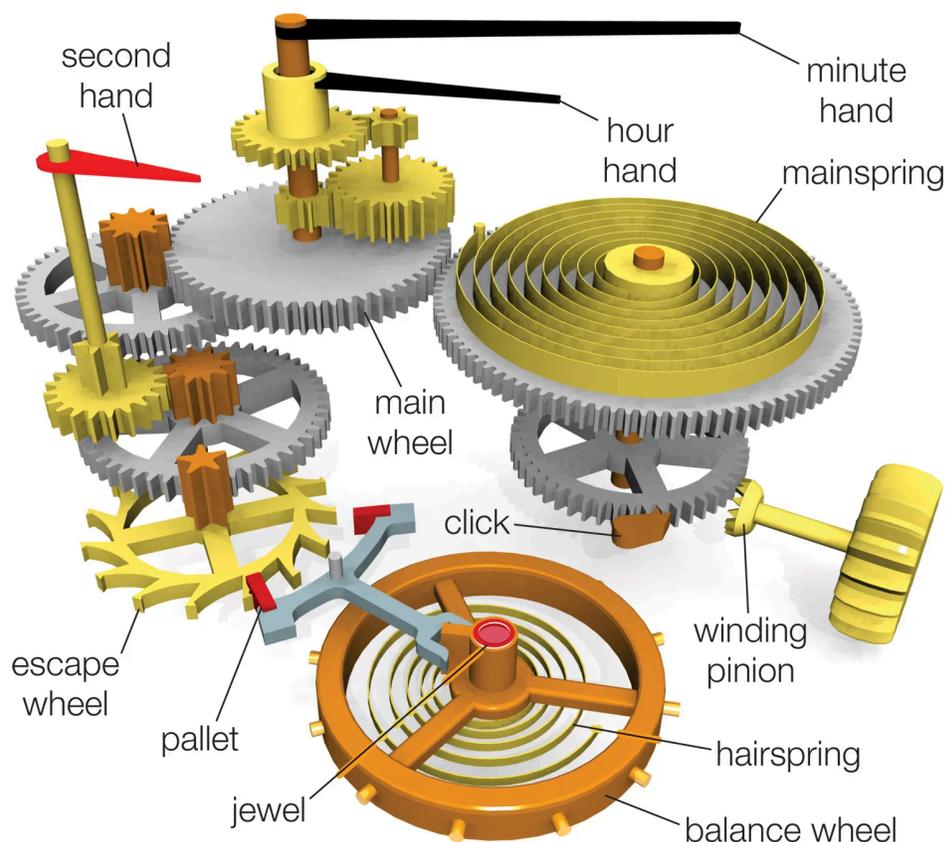
The measure of how well a watch keeps time. Mechanical watches are generally less accurate than quartz watches. To carry the prestigious chronometer certification for accuracy, a mechanical watch needs to be accurate to $-4/+6$ seconds per day.

BALANCE

The heart of a mechanical watch movement. The mainspring provides the energy, and the balance (coupled with the hairspring) swings to divide time into equal parts.

BALANCE SPRING

Also known as a hairspring, it is a very fine, delicately coiled wire that returns the balance wheel to its neutral position, regulating its rate of oscillation.



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BALANCE WHEEL

A wheel at the heart of a mechanical watch movement that vibrates, dividing time into equal portions. It regulates time and powers the watch's gears through oscillation.

BAND

Refers to a bracelet or strap of a watch. The term "band" is commonly used, but technically, it is referred to as a bracelet or strap.

BAR

A measure of pressure that indicates water resistance. Roughly, one bar equals 10 meters, or about 30 feet.

BARREL

A mechanical battery, the barrel houses the mainspring—a metal coil that stores power. This power is released over a period of time, depending on the watch's sophistication.

BASEL

The largest watch show in the world, held annually in April in Basel, Switzerland.

BEZEL

The ring that surrounds the face of the watch, usually made of metal or ceramic. It holds the crystal in place and can be decorative or functional. Bezels on dive watches can be rotated to track time underwater, while others can have scales such as tachymeters.

BI-COMPAX

A chronograph watch with two subdials, usually symmetrical, typically showing the watch's running seconds and the chronograph's 30-minute scale.

BI-DIRECTIONAL ROTATING BEZEL

A bezel that can be moved either clockwise or counter-clockwise, often used to make mathematical calculations or to keep track of elapsed time.

BIENFACTURE

A Swiss term that refers to the high quality of a piece of work or craftsmanship. In French, it means "to make well."

BIG DATE

A larger date display on the watch, which requires more power to operate due to the increased size.

BLUED STEEL

A process that gives watch parts, such as hands or screws, a shimmering blue finish, historically used to show the watchmaker's craftsmanship.

BRIDGE

A part of a mechanical watch movement that is mounted to the mainplate, providing a frame to house the inner workings and hold components in place.

BRUSHED

A technique, usually done by hand, that gives the watch case a matte finish. When combined with polished elements, it creates a three-dimensional effect.

BUBBLE-SHAPED

An old-fashioned, bubbled or domed crystal shape that has been repopularized by the resurgence of vintage watch designs.

BUCKLE

The metal pin system that secures a watch strap to the wrist.

CALENDAR

A feature that shows the day of the month, and often the day of the week. Some calendar watches show the date on sub-dials, while others use a scale on the outside edge of the watch dial.

CALIBER

Also known as calibre, it refers to the size or style of a watch movement. It is another term for "movement."



CASE

The container that protects the watch movement. Cases come in various shapes, such as round, square, oval, tonneau, and rectangular, giving the watch an attractive appearance.

CASE BACK

The underside of a watch that lies against the skin. Some case backs are made of crystal, allowing the movement to be viewed.

CHRONOGRAPH

A watch that features a stopwatch function that can be started and stopped to time events.

CHRONOMETER

A watch certified by the Contrôle Officiel Suisse des Chronomètres (COSC) for high accuracy. Mechanical watches must meet stringent requirements and maintain an accuracy of ± 4 to ± 6 seconds per day, while quartz watches must be accurate to ± 0.07 seconds per day.

COMPLICATION

Any function of a watch other than simple time indication, such as a chronograph, calendar, or moon-phase display.

COTES DE GENEVE

A decorative wave pattern achieved through engine-turning and polishing, often found on high-end watch movements.

COUNTDOWN

The time remaining in a predefined period.

COUNTDOWN TIMER

A provision in a preset timer that helps the user find out how much time has elapsed. Some watches give a warning signal before reaching the set time.

CROWN

The knob or button on the side of the watch case used to wind the mainspring in mechanical watches, set the time, and adjust the calendar. A screw-down crown improves water resistance and keeps out dust.

CRYSTAL

The transparent cover that protects the watch dial. Crystals are usually made of acrylic, glass, mineral crystal, or synthetic sapphire. Some crystals feature non-reflective coatings to prevent glare.

CYCLOPS

A small lens on the crystal that magnifies the date for better visibility.

DATE CORRECTOR

A small, usually hidden button on a watch case that, when pressed, adjusts the date. Mostly found on high-end watches with sophisticated calendar mechanisms.

DAY-DATE

A watch that indicates both the day of the week and the date.

DAY/NIGHT INDICATOR

A colored or shaded band on a world time watch, showing which time zones are in daylight and which are in darkness.

DEPLOYMENT CLASP

A strap closure that folds into itself and is held in place with a clasp, extending the life of leather straps by avoiding the damage caused by regular buckles.

DESTRO

An Italian term that translates to "right." It refers to a watch designed to be worn on the right hand, commonly associated with Panerai timepieces.

DIAL

The face of the watch, featuring numeral markings and manufacturer branding. It is visible through the crystal and can have a metal base that displays hours, minutes, and sometimes seconds.

DIGITAL WATCH

A watch that shows the time through a numerical display rather than via a dial and hands (analog watch).

DIVE WATCH

A watch specifically designed for divers, often water-resistant to at least 200 meters. It has luminous hands, a uni-directional rotating bezel, and is designed to signal the amount of time spent underwater.

DIVER'S UNI-DIRECTIONAL ROTATING BEZEL

A bezel on a diver's watch that can only rotate in an anti-clockwise direction, preventing accidental shortening of the indicated dive time. It is used to accurately relay dive time by aligning the bezel's zero marker with the minute hand.

DIVER'S WATCH

Defined by ISO 6425, a diver's watch must be water-resistant to at least 100 meters, have a uni-directional rotating bezel, running seconds, and offer legibility at 25 cm in darkness.

DLC (DIAMOND-LIKE CARBON)

A carbon coating, often black, applied to watch cases. DLC is generally superior to PVD coating, providing added durability and scratch resistance.

ETA

One of the big third-party movement manufacturers. Owned by Swatch Group, parent company of Omega, Longines, and Tissot, it also produces movements for dozens of other Swiss brands.

ESCAPEMENT

One of the critical parts of a mechanical watch movement. It controls the wheels, suspending their motion at regular intervals so that power is delivered evenly through the system.

ELAPSED TIME ROTATING BEZEL

A bezel with markings on it that can be turned. It is used to track periods of time. By turning the bezel, the user can align the zero on it with the minutes or seconds hand. Merely looking at the bezel, the user can find out the elapsed time. This saves him the trouble of calculating time without having to do the subtraction.

FINISHING OR FINISSAGE

Top watch companies employ skilled craftspeople to finish watch parts—cases, bridges, hands, etc. These finishes are often highly detailed and are one of the qualities that separate luxury watches from others.

FLYBACK CHRONOGRAPH

A stopwatch that allows multiple timing functions, often featuring a flyback function.

FLYBACK HAND

In a chronograph, an additional seconds hand that moves along with the main seconds hand. This hand can be stopped independently and then allowed to "fly back" to catch up with the constantly moving seconds hand.

FREQUENCY

The number of oscillations performed by the balance wheel, determining the precision of time measurement. For example, a 28,800 vibrations per hour (vph) chronograph measures time in quarters of a second, while a 36,000 vph chronograph can measure it in tenths of a second.

GASKET

A rubber or plastic ring used to seal gaps when closing the case back, crystal, or crown, preventing the entry of water or dust. Most water-resistant watches are equipped with gaskets, which should be checked every couple of years to maintain water resistance.

GEAR TRAIN

A system of gears that transmits power from the mainspring to the escapement.

GENEVA STRIPES

A wave-like decorative pattern created on the bridges and oscillating weights of high-end watches, such as those made by Patek Philippe. The tool required for this decoration is crafted from boxwood, coated in abrasive paste, and pressed manually to emboss the design.

GERMAN SILVER

A special alloy composed of copper, zinc, and 10% nickel. The nickel minimizes oxidation, eliminating the need for electroplating and allowing the material to remain untreated.

GMT (OR DUAL TIME)

Stands for Greenwich Mean Time, and describes a watch that displays a second time zone, usually with an additional central hour hand, allowing two time zones to be indicated simultaneously.

GOLDPLATING

An electro-deposited layer of gold, with thickness measured in microns. It is indicated by stamps such as "GP," "HGE," or "GE."

GRAND SONNERIE

A repeater that sounds the hours and quarter hours by pressing a lever.

GRANDE COMPLICATION

A watch that features multiple high-end complications.

GRAY MARKET

Unauthorized sellers of new watches.

GREENWICH MEAN TIME (GMT)

The standard for which all other 23 time zones are based, sometimes referred to as UTC.

GUILLOCHÉ

An old-fashioned dial-engraving technique used to create uniform, intricate patterns, usually on the watch dial.



HACKING SECONDS

A function that stops the seconds hand when the crown is pulled out, allowing synchronization with other timepieces.

HAND

The indicator that moves over the dial to point at the hour, minute, or second. Watches generally have three hands to show the hours, minutes, and seconds. Hands come in various shapes, such as pear, Breguet, sword, skeleton, baton, and arrow.

HAND-WOUND

A mechanical movement wound manually by rotating the crown, as opposed to using a free-spinning rotor (see Automatic).

HELIUM ESCAPE VALVE

Found on some advanced diver's watches, this valve is used to release helium that has entered the watch during compression dives, preventing internal pressure from damaging the watch. It is either automatic or manually operated.

HOROLOGIST

Someone who is interested in or practices the science or art of time, including the making of clocks and watches.

HOROLOGY

The science, or art, of measuring time.

HOUR MARKERS

Arabic numerals, Roman numerals, or symbols placed around the dial to mark the hours.

HUNTER POCKET WATCH

A pocket watch with a cover, distinguished by having a winding stem at the 3 o'clock position.

INCABLOC

A trademarked shock absorption system built into some watches' balance wheels to protect against shocks.

IN-HOUSE

A term used to describe a watch or movement that is developed, produced, and assembled by the same company whose name appears on the dial. Few brands create every part of a movement, as historically the industry consisted of specialist producers supplying assemblers who then branded the watch. The trend toward in-house production is a more recent phenomenon.

INDEX OR HOUR MARKER

Used instead of Arabic or Roman numerals to indicate hours. They can be painted, applied by hand, filled with luminescent material, or made from exotic materials such as diamonds.

INDICES

Hour markers applied to the face of the watch.

JEWEL

Traditionally rubies, now usually synthetic stones with very smooth surfaces. Jewels are used to hold moving parts in place with minimal friction, reducing wear in the movement of a watch.

JUMPING HOURS

A system of displaying the hour via a single digit seen through an aperture on the dial. Under the dial is a rotating disc that jumps forward at the start of each new hour.

KNURLING

A finishing technique that creates a grippy surface defined by a pattern of straight, angled, or crossed lines.

LAP TIMER

A utility in a chronograph watch that allows the user to time laps of a race. At the end of each lap, the timer can be stopped and reset to zero to start timing the next segment.

LEPINE WATCH

A pocket watch without a cover, characterized by a winding stem located at the 12 o'clock position.

LEVER ESCAPEMENT

A mechanism divided into two pallets that alternately stop and release the escape wheel, regulating the timing function of the balance wheel. It was invented by Thomas Mudge and later improved by Breguet and Massey. This remains an integral part of all mechanical watches.

LIQUID CRYSTAL DISPLAY (LCD)

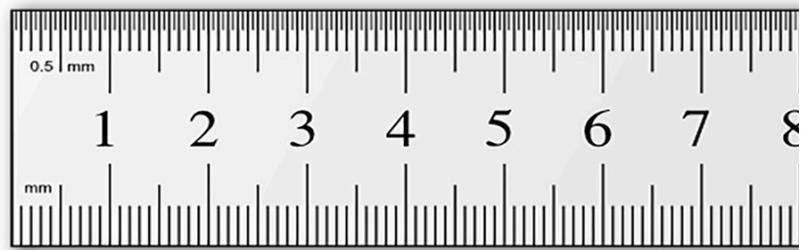
A display technology that shows time in numbers using liquid held in a thin transparent tube. The display is segmented, with seven segments forming each number. Liquid crystals were first discovered in 1888, and the first modern LCD watch was produced in 1972.

LUBRICATION

Mechanical watches contain hundreds of small moving parts that need to move freely and regularly. Special watchmaker's lubricant is used to achieve this, and it needs to be replaced over time as part of routine servicing.

LUGS (OR HORNS)

The projections on the top and bottom of the watch case used to attach the strap or bracelet. There is a spring bar between the lugs that fixes the strap or bracelet in place.



LUMINESCENCE

The glow applied to numerals and hands, commonly found on dive watches to read time in the dark. Most manufacturers use strontium aluminate, which is non-radioactive, as the luminescent material.

MAINPLATE

The base of a movement on which all the mechanical parts are mounted.

MAINSRING

A tightly wound metal coil contained in the barrel that stores the power in a mechanical watch. The unwinding of the mainspring supplies the power to the watch.

MANUFACTURE D'HOROLOGIE

A company that develops its own parts and movements rather than sourcing them from suppliers.

MECHANICAL MOVEMENT

A watch movement powered by a mainspring and regulated by gears and a balance wheel, requiring regular winding.

MILANESE BRACELET

A metal bracelet made from thousands of small links, woven together to create a fine, supple mesh.

MILITARY TIME

Time measured in 24-hour segments (e.g., 10 pm is referred to as 2200 hours).

MINERAL CRYSTALS

Heat-hardened glass that is about ten times harder than plastic. It is extremely scratch-resistant but must be replaced if scratched.

MINERAL GLASS

A softer, less scratch-resistant glass compared to sapphire crystal, sometimes used in case backs.

MINUTE REPEATER

A high-end complication in a watch that can chime the time on demand.

MONOPUSHER

A chronograph that is started, stopped, and reset using a single pusher, sometimes integrated into the crown.

MOONPHASE

A watch feature that displays the phases of the moon during its 29.5-day cycle.

MOVEMENT

The assortment of parts that combine to create the mechanism that powers all the functions of the watch. Movements can be automatic, hand-wound, or battery-powered (quartz).

MAGNETISM

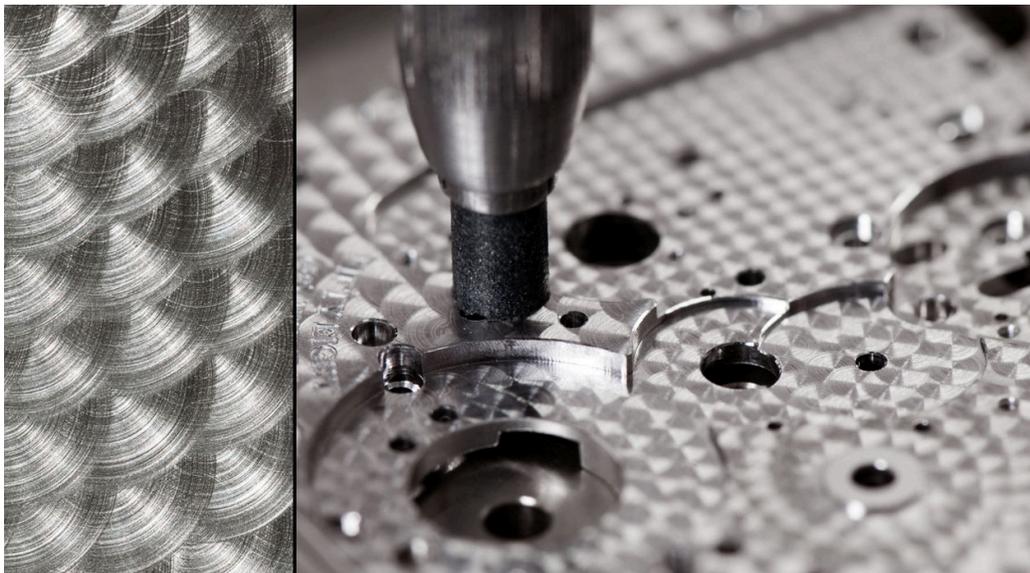
The loss of accuracy caused when the balance spring becomes magnetized. This can be remedied by a watchmaker. Some watches are anti-magnetic, protected by soft iron cages, or use silicon balance springs that cannot be magnetized.

PANDA (AND REVERSE PANDA)

Term used for chronographs with white dials and black or grey subdials. A reverse Panda has a black dial with white subdials.

PERLAGE

Also known as circular graining, this is a cloud-like decoration found on the plates and bridges of a watch movement.



PERPETUAL CALENDAR (OR QP)

A high-valued complication in watchmaking that keeps track of the date, including leap years. It often shows detailed information such as day, date, month, year, moon phase, and leap year.

PLASTIC CRYSTALS

Soft and flexible crystals used in watches, resistant to small impacts, allowing surface scratches to be buffed out.

PLATINUM

A precious metal that is extremely tough and rare. It maintains its sheen and glow without dimming over time, making it a preferred choice for high-end and limited-edition watches.

POLISHED

Polishing is a skill that takes years to master. Many watches have both brushed and polished surfaces to showcase hand finishing. Note that fashion watches are often polished by machines.

POWER RESERVE INDICATOR

A feature on a mechanical watch that shows the remaining power in the movement, indicating how long the watch will run before needing to be wound again.

PULSOMETER

A scale running around the dial of a watch used to measure heart rate.

PUSHER

A button on the side of the watch case used to activate a function, most commonly in chronographs.

PUSH-PIECE

A button or pusher used to start or stop functions in a chronograph, alarm, or date indicator.

PVD (PHYSICAL VAPOR DEPOSITION)

A thin coating applied to a watch case for aesthetic purposes, often giving it a colored finish, typically black.

QUARTZ

Quartz movements, powered by batteries, are more accurate and affordable than mechanical ones but lack the latter's charm. Popularized in the 1960s-70s, quartz technology triggered the Quartz Crisis, endangering Swiss watchmakers. Mechanical watches regained popularity in the late 1980s and have since grown in appeal.

AUTOMATIC



QUARTZ



QUICK-SET

Also referred to as Quick-Date, this mechanism allows the user to set the date directly without having to turn the hands through a full 24-hour cycle.

REGULATEUR

A watch with non-coaxial hands, featuring a central minute hand and an hour hand in a separate subdial. The term comes from highly accurate clocks developed by observatories to be used as reference clocks.

REGULATING ORGAN

The balance wheel and balance spring in a mechanical watch movement, responsible for regulating the timekeeping of the watch.

REPEATER

A watch that chimes to tell the time in response to the push of a button.

RETROGRADE

A scale, either lateral or vertical, used to display functions such as time, date, or power reserve. The indicator moves across the scale and then jumps back to the starting point.

RIDER TABS

Four markers placed around the bezel, used as points of reference to mark a departure time or a set time to remember.

ROMAN NUMERALS

The use of Roman numerals to display the hours, an old-school alternative to Arabic numerals or indexes/hour markers.

ROTOR (OR OSCILLATING WEIGHT)

The semi-circular weight in an automatic watch movement that spins to wind the mainspring.

SAPPHIRE CRYSTALS (OR GLASS)

A hard, scratch-resistant glass used by most luxury watch brands to cover the dial. Sapphire crystals are 2-3 times harder than mineral glass and are virtually scratch-proof, although they are more brittle and more likely to crack or shatter than mineral glass.

SCREW BACK

A case back with a thread that screws into the watch case.

SCREW-DOWN CROWN

A crown that screws down into the case to make the watch more water-resistant and help keep out dust.

SCREW-IN CROWN OR PUSHERS

Some diver's watches feature a screw-in crown and screw-in chronograph pushers, which need to be securely screwed down before a dive to ensure water resistance.

SELLITA

A major third-party movement manufacturer and ETA's primary rival. Known for producing reliable, tried-and-tested movements, though without the prestige of in-house calibres.

SERVICING

Manufacturers recommend servicing a new mechanical watch every three to five years and vintage watches every two years. A service involves dismantling, cleaning, and relubricating the watch to maintain accuracy, which can be costly depending on the complexity of the watch.

SHOCK ABSORBER

A resilient bearing in a watch that absorbs shocks to protect the balance staff and prevent damage to delicate pivots.

SHOCK RESISTANCE

A watch's ability to withstand an impact equivalent to being dropped from a height of three feet onto a wooden floor.

S.I.H.H.

The Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, an annual trade show held in Geneva where watch brands unveil new models.

SILICON

A material introduced into watchmaking over the past 10 to 15 years, particularly in balance wheels. It is resistant to shock, magnetism, and temperature changes and requires minimal maintenance.

SKELETON WATCH (OR SKELETONISATION)

A watch with its case, dial, and parts of the movement cut away to expose the inner workings. It creates an intricate look admired by many collectors. A crystal is mounted on both the front and back of the watch.



SLIDE RULE

A rotating bezel used to perform mathematical calculations, such as conversions of miles to kilometers or currency exchange rates. It can also calculate rate of descent or fuel consumption for pilots.

SMALL SECONDS

A subdial on the watch's face that displays the running seconds, as opposed to a central seconds hand.

SONNERIE

A high-end complication that automatically strikes the time every hour (petite sonnerie) or every quarter hour (grande sonnerie).

SPLIT SECONDS (OR DOUBLE) CHRONOGRAPH

A chronograph with two hands that can time two events that start simultaneously but finish independently of one another.

SPRING BAR

A spring-loaded metal bar mounted between the lugs of the watch case to attach a strap or bracelet.

STANDARD TIME

The local time kept in each time zone when daylight savings time is not in effect.

STEM

The shaft that connects to the movement's winding mechanism, with the crown fitted at the opposite end.

STRAP

A non-metal band, such as leather or rubber, that holds the watch to the wrist. A metal version is referred to as a bracelet.

SUB-DIAL (OR SUBDIAL)

A small dial within the main dial that relays secondary information, such as a chronograph, dual time zone, or calendar. Also known as counters when displaying chronograph hours and minutes.

SUPER-LUMINOVA

A brand name of a high-quality luminescent material used by most brands for readability in low-light conditions.

SWEEPING SECONDS HAND

A second hand mounted in the center of the dial that sweeps across the entire dial, as opposed to a subdial.

SWISS MADE

A watch is considered "Swiss Made" if its movement is Swiss, it is cased in Switzerland, and the final inspection is carried out in Switzerland.

TACHYMETER

A scale running around the outside of a dial or sometimes on a bezel, used to calculate speed.

TELEMETER

A scale running around the outside of a dial used to calculate the distance between an event you see first and hear second. Originally used by military officers to determine enemy fire positions, it is now more useful for storm chasing.

THREE-HANDER

A term used to describe a watch that only tells the time, featuring hour, minute, and seconds hands.

TOURBILLON

A device perfected by Abraham-Louis Breguet in 1801 to offset the impact of gravity on a watch movement's accuracy. Though originally designed for pocket watches kept in a single position, it remains a symbol of quality watchmaking today. Technically not a complication, as it does not perform an additional function, it is nonetheless widely considered one.

ULTRA-THIN

A watch characterized by its slimness, often considered a complication due to the complexity involved in making thinner watches. Typically, a watch with a case measuring under 8mm is considered ultra-thin, though some brands have reduced the thickness to just a few millimeters.

UNI-DIRECTIONAL ROTATING BEZEL

A bezel often found on diver's watches that moves only in a counter-clockwise direction to indicate elapsed time. This feature ensures that if the bezel is accidentally moved, the error will only result in increased safety by showing more remaining time than less.

VIBRATION PER HOUR (VPH)

The movement of the oscillating element is limited by two extreme positions. The balance vibrates at a rate of five or six times per second. These vibrations per second are measured as vibrations per hour (VPH), which could be 18,000 or 21,600, depending on the watch movement.

WATER RESISTANCE

Typically measured in bar, atmospheres, meters, or feet, water resistance determines the watch's ability to withstand water exposure. Generally, a watch resistant to 30m is rainproof, 50m is showerproof, 100m is good for snorkeling, and 200m is suitable for diving.

WHEEL

Also known as a pinion, it is a circular part that revolves around an axis to transmit power within the watch movement.

WINDER

A rotating box that keeps an automatic watch fully wound when it is not being worn.

WINDING

The action of tightening the mainspring of a watch, either by hand (turning the crown) or automatically (by the motion of the rotor).

WORLDTIMER

A watch that displays local time as well as the time in any of the world's time zones simultaneously.

