

CLASSIC DRIVER

Behind the scenes at the Bamford Watch Department

Lead

Late last year, we spent an afternoon exploring the wonderfully eclectic car collection of George Bamford – and now we've witnessed the non-prodigious son at play, it seemed appropriate to see what keeps the other side of his work/life balance ticking along...

"My father didn't want me to have a silver spoon, as his mentality is one of 'go and do it on your own two feet'," we remember Bamford telling us on our [visit to his country retreat](#) late last year. "That's what he did – it means you're not living in anyone else's shadow," he continued, describing his father's work of taking the family business of cart-making, and transforming it into the earth-moving empire JCB.

It was this mentality instilled in George Bamford from an early age – and characterised by the family motto that directly translates as 'Never Content' – that drove him to create his own business, his preferred alternative to taking the controls of HMS JCB and merely directing it further along an already successful course. To get a little more depth on the story of Bamford Watch Department, from its fate-born beginnings to its current customisation activities, we visited the company's London HQ.



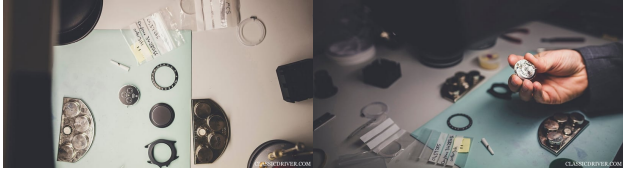
[Bamford Watch Department](#) operates from a discreet five-storey Mayfair townhouse, a nine-iron's swing away from the iconic Dorchester Hotel. A subtle 'B' on the doorknob is the only clue to what awaits upstairs. We're ushered into one of the two client rooms, where we have just enough time to browse the horological memorabilia – including the model Concorde in the signature black BWD scheme – before George enters, attaché case in hand. Before its locks are sprung, however, he takes us on a figurative step back in time.

"I started experimenting with customisation using a pair of vintage Rolexes, but before that I had started collecting watches. When I was in my teens, my parents gave me a Breitling Navitimer for Christmas and that started my love affair with watches. It wasn't particularly expensive, but I was in love with it – I took it to bits in order to gain an understanding of the micro-engineering, the movement, the tiny little screws. I just found it all fascinating.



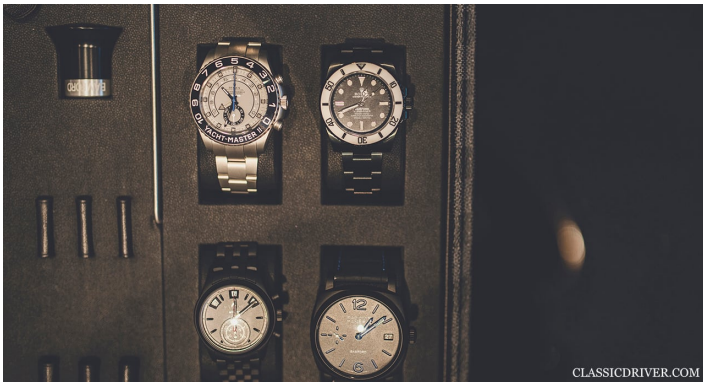
"From there, I started trading watches: Heuers, Omegas, things like that. I'd exchange them with my friends, or I'd go to flea markets and say, "I've got two Omegas, can I swap them for a Monaco?" From there I started building my collection, but slowly, and with not much money.

"A little later on, I was given a vintage black-dial Rolex Daytona for one of my landmark birthdays. I was infatuated, it was by far the coolest thing I'd ever had in my life. But then I turned up at a dinner party, and everyone else was wearing the same watch – something I had considered to be the pinnacle suddenly wasn't that rare. It's like turning up at a car event with a car you consider to be very special, and there are 20 others the same colour with an identical spec already there. After the dinner party, I thought about what I could do to make it special again.



"Anyway, I started customising a pair of old vintage Plexiglass Rolexes, one Submariner and one GMT, with two very simple designs: just a black dial, a black exterior coating that I worked on with one of the JCB materials engineers, and a black bezel, with NATO straps fitted. At the time, my trade was a car and fashion photographer; I never intended to make money from customising watches, it was just something I wanted to do for myself. I gave one to my father as a 'thank you' for the Daytona, and kept one, which I still have today. Then I went on holiday, and when I came back I had 25 orders. It was at that moment that I realised there was a business here."

There was indeed. Since its 2003 formation, the company has created numerous themed product lines – including those based on cult phenomena such as Peanuts, Star Wars and Popeye – and a range of limited-edition designs that incorporate BWD's patented Military-Grade Titanium and Graphite Particle coatings. Finally, the attaché case (which had previously looked about as impenetrable as the bulletproofed doors downstairs) is popped open to reveal some of George's hand-picked highlights, which include not only Rolexes, but Panerai's and Pateks, too.



Should you fail to find an existing design that strikes a chord, and are unable to create one through the [BWD online configurator](#) (click the link at your peril if you don't have a spare few hours...), you can immerse yourself deeper in the design process with a one-to-one consultation. After a tour of the spotless workshop on the top floor of the townhouse, we challenged Bamford to demonstrate the company's business mantra, 'If you can imagine it, we can create it'. Within 15 minutes, we'd been fast-tracked through the consultation process and presented with three Rolex-based designs for a bespoke Classic Driver x Bamford timepiece, incorporating our signature colours and a healthy dose of George's creativity.



Few of us are fortunate enough to earn a living in a trade that simultaneously indulges our passions, and George fully intends to build on the success of his company so far. "I haven't come up with a cool name for the business; I just put my name on the dial, which is the best guarantee you can give."

Photos by Amy Shore for Classic Driver © 2016

Gallery

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