

# Making His Mark

Engraver J.C. Randell carves a name for himself

BY JORDAN A. ROTHACKER

If you appreciate fine wristwatches, especially those that have been made truly original and personal by the demanding art of engraving, then you might be familiar with the work of J.C. Randell. If you are still having trouble placing the name, you might be able to place the craftsmanship by looking at Jaeger-LeCoultre timepieces engraved in the United States, because Randell is the official U.S. engraver for the brand.

J.C., as he known among collectors, began his career with the best possible experience. Before becoming a watch engraver he was a watchmaker.

After several years in retail, Randell began his watchmaking studies at the tender age of twenty-one. In two years, he had completed his education at Spokane



# A DRAGON CASE STEP BY STEP

Most often, J.C. Randell's canvas is the case of a Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso, but wherever he is making his mark he always works from the same place of exacting concentrated proficiency. Let us take a look at just how his methodology works.



The finished product: The area around the circle is polished and all the weeks of work this miniature relief sculpture necessitated are on display.



The first stage of a dragon engraving: a light engraving to give the design shape.



The same dragon at the beginning of the detail process. Most of the features are in place. The masking of the unworked area ensures no mistakes are incorporated at this stage. The background of the image has been matted for an easier workability than that of a highly finished piece.



Here the dragon has all of the details added and only needs a crosshatched background to give greater emphasis to the foreground. These fine details are precise but not deep; the deeper the cut, the less detailed the work.



The majority of engraving work is done with these tools, which have different cutting angles for different shapes. They all make V-shaped cuts of different widths. Different shaped “gravers” are employed for specialty cuts as needed.

Community College and stood on the threshold of a successful career as a certified watchmaker. His path set in the watch trade, Randell studied at a school ranked third in the country in his field. Watchmaking work followed and eventually he had his own wholesale trade shop before getting back into retail with a jewelry store. He did everything befitting the expectations of his chosen profession. It served him well, and by anyone’s standards he would have been described as successful.

Notwithstanding these achievements, Randell was discontent and his attentions wandered. In his free moments, he practiced the art of engraving. Over time, this hobby gave way to a passion. Self-taught,

he found true self-expression in making marks on metal, little marks that added up to an infinite possibility of images, symbols or patterns. For just over ten years now Randell has followed his passion in a new life and career. In 1994 he moved from retail jewelry store proprietor to

professional engraver. Though he can carve on any quality metal—his work is found on knives, guns, cigarette lighters, jewelry—Randell has never strayed too far from the watch trade.

Once he embraced his professional engraver status, Randell

J.C. Randell at his work bench



# FOR HER EYES ONLY

**The spectacular news** from the workshop of J.C. Randell involves the engraver embracing his watchmaking roots inside and out. This amazing piece of grand artwork on a miniaturized scale is called Mary's Eyes. It adorns the caseback of an E. Howard pocket watch that has been thoroughly worked over by Randell. This size 14 American pocket watch could be in no finer hands as Randell takes his time and pleasure in engraving every inch of the movement down to the screw heads visible through a display back underneath the lid when opened. More engraving will cover the sterling silver dial along

with flourish for every other part of the pocket watch.

The prize is, of course, the caseback with twenty-seven small diamonds circling the beautiful Art Nouveau-styled woman at the center modestly clutching her breast. Not only does this engraving provide exquisite detail in such an arduous process, but the color process is an original one with a patent pending by Randell that employs a high-temperature dye (500 degrees F) instead of any kind of more traditional material, such as paint, ink or enamel.

This one-of-a-kind pocket watch is not yet finished and still without a buyer.





This image of a commissioned engraving on a Jaeger-LeCoultre Grande Reserve combines portraiture—of the buyer's wife—along with a common initial request, "B." The feat of the work was the incorporation of the reserve window and the wording seamlessly into the engraved composition.

began a relationship with Jaeger-LeCoultre and was able to secure his place as the brand's exclusive engraver. Always one for going his own way, Randell has become the custom shop of Jaeger-LeCoultre, and as he strives for continued self-expression in the medium of engraving he is now one of the world's foremost freelance contractors in his field. He retains his independence. Proudly, Randell states that "he works with Jaeger-LeCoultre, not for them."

J.C. Randell, engraver, has carved out a niche for himself in not only the art world but also the world of industrial design. In this niche, he has combined fine arts with true craftsmanship. ⌚

