

Personal Reverso

J.C. Randell will turn your Reverso into a customized work of engraved art

BY JONATHAN BUES



J.C. Randell in his workshop, where he turns Jaeger-LeCoultre Reversos (and other miniature collectibles) into one-of-a-kind works of art.



In addition to engraving the Reverso, J.C. Randell is also skilled at applying his art to fine knives, such as the William Henry Knife seen above. The monogrammed Reverso with cherub (right) is typical of J.C.'s artwork.



Certain major purchases, such as fine watches and jewelry, are said to communicate the personality of the buyer. The consumer who desires one simple watch for everyday wear is rarely simpatico with the collector who prowls vintage-watch websites or the person who knows his way around an Antiquorum auction.

Devotees of the watch brand Jaeger-LeCoultre are among the most fervid fans of fine watch-making in the world: they prize the *grande maison's* status as one of the industry's few true manufacturers and its long line of legendary designs, especially the iconic Reverso.

Considering how personal fine-watch purchases are, how much deliberation and time are required before “pulling the trigger,” and how long a purchase of such magnitude tends to stay with the buyer, it is not surprising that many collectors are turning to professional engravers to decorate their watches.

Domestic fans of the Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso often consider one West Coast artisan they can turn to for the very best in personal engraving. His name is J.C. Randell, a master engraver who resides in Washington State, and, according to many collectors, he has perfected the art of hand-engraving the Reverso wristwatch.

Over the years, he has engraved countless pieces for clients from across the country and around the world—people who wanted their special watches to say something special about themselves, even to become one-of-a-kind works of art.

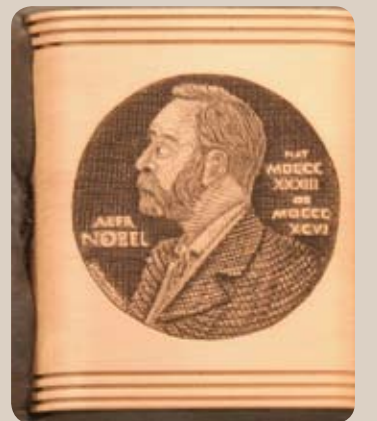
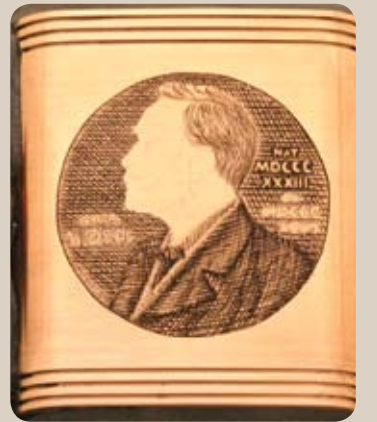
And though he is known best for his work on the Reverso wristwatch (he has visited the Swiss headquarters of Jaeger-LeCoultre at its request), J.C. also channels his creativity by custom-engraving fine knives, firearms and other miniature collectibles. For information about how to obtain your own custom engraving, visit www.jcengraver.com. →

Step by step

The progression from concept to finished product is a painstaking process requiring hours of careful precision. The next two pages feature step-by-step photography of two of Randell's most recent custom-engraving projects. One Reverso has been engraved with a depiction of the Hindu deity Ganesh, completed for an Indian-American physician; the other is an engraving done for Dr. Louis J. Ignarro, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Medicine, to commemorate his joining the ranks of Nobel Laureates. →

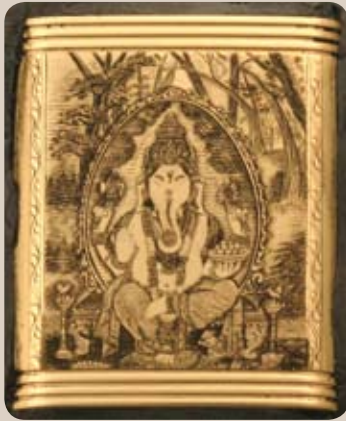
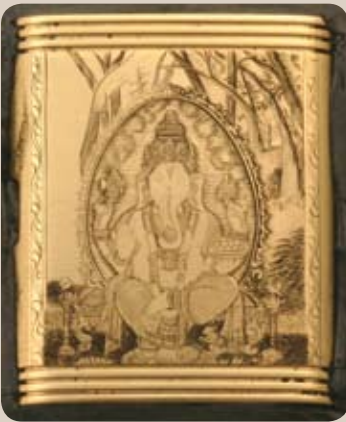
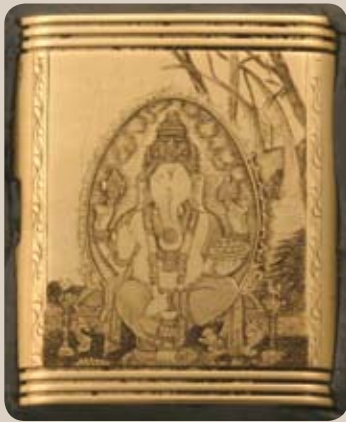
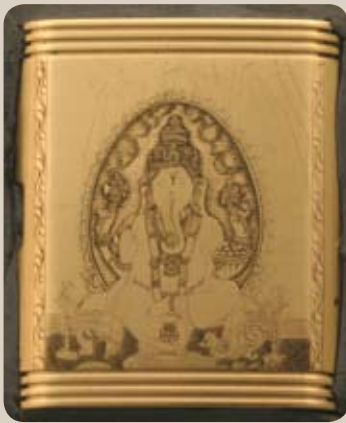


Starting with an image of the Nobel Medal as his guide, J.C. carefully laid down several stages of marks, which culminated in a remarkably accurate copy of the original.

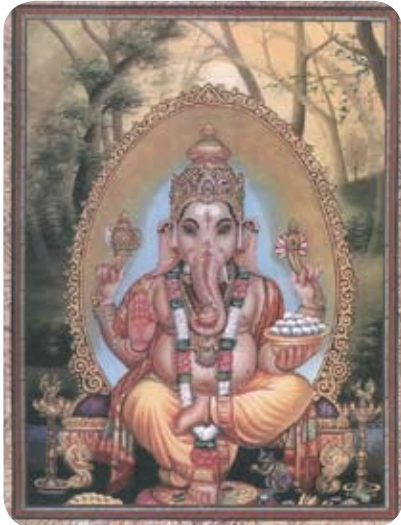


A close-up Randell's engraving shows the details he places into his artwork. In the case of this piece, one can even see the individual hairs on Alfred Nobel's head.





Find hand-engraving is a careful process requiring many steps, as seen in this step-by-step photography.



The original artwork of the Hindu god Ganesha was supplied by Randell's client.



The finished Reverso bears all the details of the original artwork.



J.C. Randell says that the most critical detail when engraving a living thing is to get the subject's eyes right.

The engraving process

Randell, who prefers to be called simply J.C., says that his engravings start as “a blank canvas, the venerable Reverso.” He begins by removing the watch’s caseback and placing it into a warmed, pitch-like substance. This allows him to secure the caseback in his engraving ball vise and eliminates any risk of damaging the watch while he is applying his art.

“The next step is to lay out very faint and fine guide lines from the original artwork (often a photograph, supplied by the client) with a fine point similar to a needle,” explains J.C. “These lines I do not follow exactly when cutting, but rather merely as ‘guide

for balance and proportion.”

All of his engraving work is performed under a microscope, which he says is a great aid but also takes a lot of getting used to.

“I find myself constantly looking at what I have cut under the scope with my unaided eyes to ensure the engraving is progressing properly,” adds J.C. “A line cut under the scope will appear to be a deep trench, when in reality to the eye it is a very delicate fine line.”

Once he has laid down the guidelines, J.C. then begins engraving the main lines of the image. After those are laid down, he applies some of his signature detail work to the piece. In en-

graving pictures of living things, the most critical detail is the subject’s eyes.

“All things live in the eyes,” he confirms. “If the eyes are not done as realistically as possible, the rest of the engraving, no matter how well executed, will be for naught.”

When he is satisfied that the engraving is finished, J.C. removes the caseback from the holding material and polishes any areas that need it. J.C., who is also a fully trained watchmaker, then reassembles the case and frame. The watch is then shipped off to its owner, who will hopefully enjoy his or her new miniature heirloom for many years to come. ☺