

THE MAN WITH THE MIDAS WATCH

He's bought into some of the world's most niche companies, which include a supercar company, a bespoke shoe company and two independent Swiss watch brands. Come 2016, Surrey-based Rahul Kapoor is set to give India a taste of the rarest and most exclusive watches in the world, including the Cecil Purnell ₹1-crore watch

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Limited-edition watches from independent watchmakers and Rolls-Royce form a heady mix





RAHUL KAPOOR

The natty Rahul Kapoor, wearing an impeccable Ermenegildo Zegna suit, silk Duchamp tie and bespoke sapphire cufflinks, is a man who indulges his passions, by literally buying into those companies that interest him, which just happen to be some of the world's most luxurious brands. The Surrey, London-based entrepreneur, owns a company called Excedo Luxuria, a 'luxury showcase' of some of the most niche brands (37 brands in all), that one will find, such as EL Chaussure for customized, handmade shoes, Fabiov leather accessories, and Hayari Couture gowns, dresses and scents as well as two Swiss watch brands, Cecil Purnell and Breva. "I am a private investor in independent watch brands, and I came to India with the ₹1 crore watch, the Cecil Purnell 001," says Rahul. "I just went to Basel and told them I want to invest in the company. The owner said, 'What? You must be mad', as I'd just bought a watch from them in three seconds. We then became friends."

I am riveted by this story, as we sit at the Taj Palace hotel, in New Delhi, where he has just organized a special preview of his 'Independents of Time', a special showcase of some of his most expensive, limited-edition watches, for the city's cognoscenti, those, for example, who're just itching to get their hands (and their wallets) on a custom-fitted Rolls-Royce. "I had a partner in Switzerland, and we wanted to open a private salon, for those guys who are not interested in showing off, but just picking up limited-edition pieces," says Rahul. "In our first showcase, we had ₹900 crore worth of watches, and had people fly in from all over the world." So Formula One legend Niki Lauda and hip hop mogul Jay Z flew into London on their private jets just for Rahul's first-ever event. This was 2013. It then travelled to Monaco, Geneva, Tokyo, Shanghai, Poland, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, sometimes as small gatherings in rooms, suites, or houses. And now it is in Delhi.

Rahul's modus operandi is to show a few select pieces. "We are not here to try and force people to buy our pieces," he says. "I would love to educate, inspire." He likes to add an antique element to the event — for example, today, he's showcased old gold coins owned by a royal family from south India. "I also invest in ostrich-skin handbags that cost ₹10 lakh. We'll give you a notarized piece of paper, so the value will go up manifold in a few years." Each bag takes 10 months to create by hand, using real whale bone from animals that have died naturally, by Hayari, a small atelier from the 1980s, that Rahul bought

- ❶ Fiona Kruger Celebration Skull, Emotions. ₹23L + tax
- ❷ The Breva Génie 01 in Rose Gold. ₹1.4cr + tax
- ❸ Cecil Purnell Excedo Luxuria LaCroix in White Gold. ₹1.9cr + tax (Special edition for Excedo Luxuria only available through Excedo Luxuria)
- ❹ Cecil Purnell CP-V17 World Time Bi-Axial Tourbillon in Rose Gold. ₹2.2cr + tax





into, and rebranded. He also has a suiting brand, Montgomery, that will source fabrics from any part of the world — he had a client demand a replica of the suit Winston Churchill used to wear, fabric and all. At EL Chaussure, the slipper company, clients can custom-make their own slippers at ₹40,000 a piece. “You can put diamonds, gold, palladium,” says Rahul. “A celebrity even wanted *minakari* shoes.”

Rahul also owns an ‘economical’ supercar brand, Noble. “It goes from 0-60mph in 3.1 seconds, and cost £295,000 (around ₹3 crore),” says Rahul. “Ian Botham’s a client.”

Rahul’s love for niche brands doesn’t stem from a desire to make profits. “Every brand of ours is based on a concept, craftsmanship, and quality,” he says. “I have brands that are making a loss for the last four years, but I’m not worried.” What makes Rahul smile is when he runs into clients at airports (which he says are his second home). The client then tells him that he’s bought 25 custom-made

❶ Cecil Purnell CP-V11 LaCroix in Rose Gold.

₹1.4cr + tax

❷ Cecil Purnell Lucky Lady in Rose Gold with Pavé

Diamonds in Pink (Showering Stars). ₹1.8cr + tax

❸ MAD Collections x Excedo Luxuria Rolex

Milgauss, Skulls Edition. ₹24L + tax

❹ Vicenterra GMT-3 in Rose Gold. ₹22L + tax

shoes from Rahul, and a watch that beats out all the Patek Philippes he’s ever owned because it’s from an independent brand that nobody else has. And so it stands out.

In terms of his watch brands, why Cecil Purnell and Brevia, one asks? “Cecil Purnell only makes tourbillons,” says Rahul. “It’s a striking watch. It’s a family-oriented firm, and is obsessive about quality. Brevia has merged the gap between science and haute horlogerie.” So you have the Brevia Génie 01, which is a barometer within a watch, and acts as a weatherman on your wrist. The watch features an altimeter from 0-5,000 metres, with a barometer dial at 2 o’clock. “It took four years of R&D with Michel Douarde, a

weather forecast specialist who belongs to the third generation of one of the most well-known barometer dynasties in Europe,” says Jessica Grasser, communications director for Brevia. “So when the pressure is high, it shows good weather, and if the forecast is rainy, the barometer goes down.” The watch is limited to 55 pieces, and cost US\$150,000.

The next Brevia masterpiece, showcased at today’s preview is the Speedometer, which indicates the speed if one is a skier, or even driving a convertible. “You can get the speed instantly, just like on a car’s dashboard. The Génie 03 Speedometer by Brevia costs US\$48,000,” says Jessica. Lastly, we have the Génie 02 Air Black Titanium, which is an altimeter. “It works from 0-5,000 feet on one dial, and 0-2,500 feet on the second dial,” says Jessica. It’s the perfect watch for mountain climbers and light aircraft pilots.

Having sated my knowledge for scientific Swiss haute horlogerie, I venture to ask Rahul, when will his next ‘Independents of Time’ showcase happen in India? “We will have our big event in Delhi in September 2016, as 2015 has been a major year for the Swiss industry, since many brands have suffered losses. So let the dust settle a bit.” There is also a polo cup in the offing, between the Swiss official Brevia team, and the Indian team, and a dinner for 150 people. “One applies through the website, and there are ticket prices with all the money going to charity,” says Rahul. Prices go from ₹20,000 all the way up to ₹75,000. “We may have bidding auctions, so bring your checkbooks! Camera phones aren’t allowed.” Clients in India include Jagdish Mehta, ex-Dragon’s Table, and Arjun Sayal, manufacturer of auto parts, and with business in the pharma industry. “Our clients are very discreet and secretive,” says Rahul. As are the richest people in the world. ☉