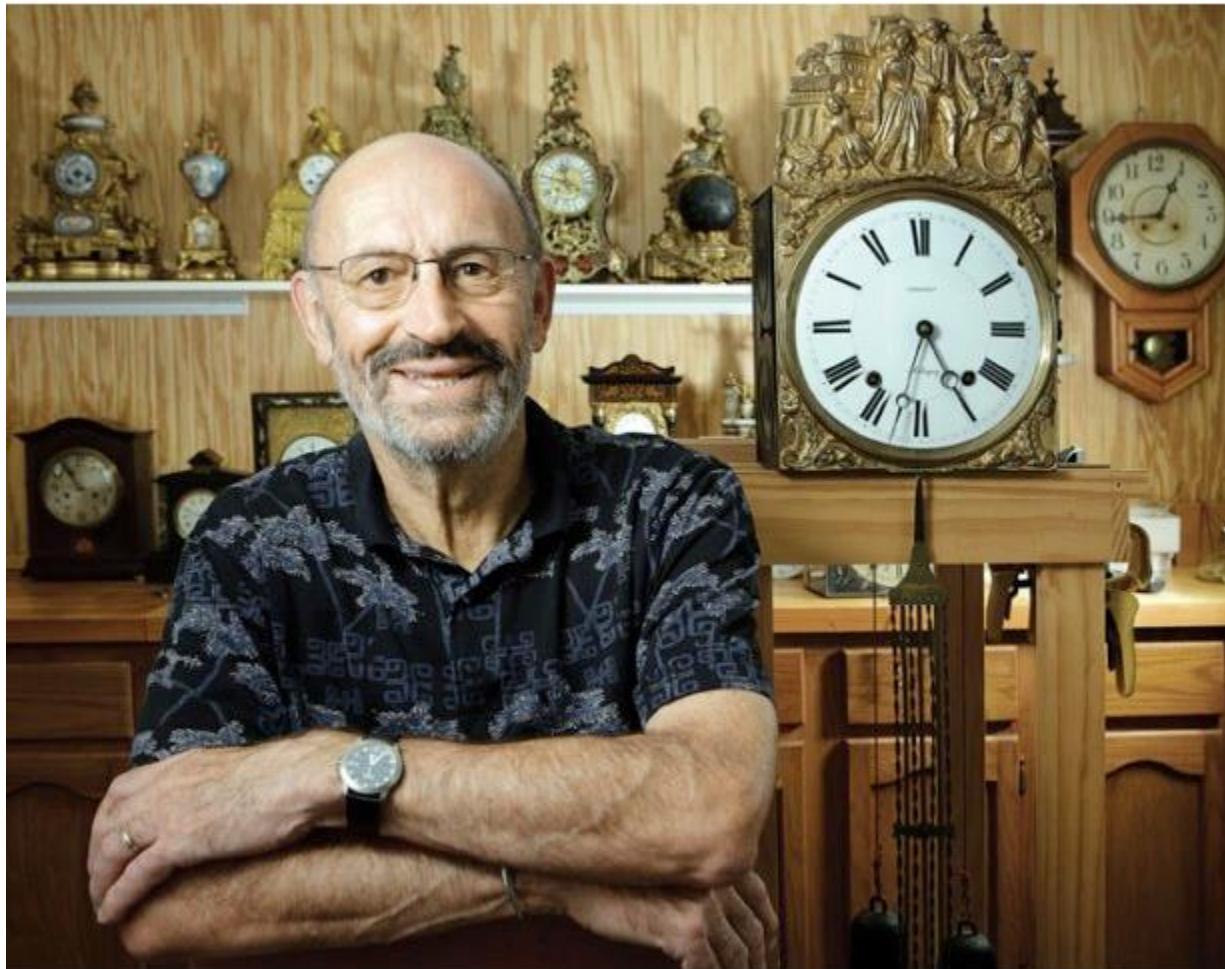


Magazine & Newspaper Articles

Georg Pilz Carolina Home & Garden Article



Sometime during 1977, Georg Pilz decided he wanted a grandfather clock. It might have had something to do with his childhood in Regensburg, the lovingly maintained medieval city in Bavaria graced with ancient clock towers; or it may have been Georg's well-ordered mind as a chemical engineer for BASF that drew him to the handcrafted shine of both clock and case. "I just always liked the style and shape of grandfather clocks," is all Georg could offer by way of explanation during a visit to his home east of downtown Asheville. "I'm a decisive person, so on a business trip to England I found a grandfather clock I really liked in Wales and had it shipped back home to Germany."

That clock — a Fearnley-Wigan longcase made in the late 19th century, familiarly called a “penny moon” from its facing design — now graces the living room, having traveled with him as far afield as Singapore and Hong Kong during his peripatetic 32 years with BASF, from which he is now retired. And it’s the Fearnley -Wigan that’s responsible for Georg’s exquisite collection of some 60 timepieces because, while he loved having his new clock, Georg noticed it wasn’t keeping proper time. “So one night, after the rest of the family had gone to bed around ten o’clock, I took the clock apart,” Georg recalls. “By four o’clock the next morning, it was back together and keeping perfect time.”

While some of the clocks in Georg’s collection arrived in running order, many of them did not, like the 1740 French wall clock lying disassembled in a box in Georg’s basement workshop. It’s the oldest clock in his collection, with original gilded wood ornamentation on the case and porcelain facing for the clockworks, about to be resurrected in Georg’s care. On a shelf nearby were extravagantly baroque clocks from France and Germany lined up like feathered chorines and kept in order by a plain American Seth Thomas wall clock at the far end. The workshop’s drawers were full of cogs, regulators, escapements and other paraphernalia mysterious to the uninitiated, while a workbench sheltered a bewildering array of jeweler’s tools.

Georg is self-taught and has restored all his clocks himself. “If you’re going to collect timepieces, you’d best learn how they work and be able to restore them,” Georg says. “Otherwise it gets to be a very expensive hobby if you pay someone else to do it.” While his successful first surgery on the grandfather clock may indicate a natural talent for such work, Georg has studied with the dean of clockmakers, England’s Laurie Penman, and with Gene Volk, a respected horologist and a fellow member of the Western North Carolina Chapter 126 of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors. “Four of us restored a 600-pound 1920 church tower clock in Valhalla,” Georg says. “We disassembled it with Gene’s guidance and each worked on our portions.”

One clock in Georg’s collection, though, has no moving parts. It’s an incense clock Georg found at a market in China, a long, thin, sinuous metal object whose cover conceals a fretted brass plate, which holds a burning incense stick at one end. “By watching how much of the ash has fallen onto the metal markings, you can estimate how much time has passed,” Georg explains. Three other, more traditional, clocks are also from Asia — one a square Japanese piece framed in filigreed metal, and two Chinese clocks in dark wooden cases whose back panels slide up to reveal the works inside. “Those are relatively new,” Georg points out, noting that the Chinese relied on sundials, incense clocks or water-driven timekeepers until modern times. “Mechanical clocks weren’t widely known in China until the country opened to the West in the 1880s.”

But Georg’s favorite clock is a Morbier, a type of pendulum clock produced in the Franche-Comté region of France until the early part of the last century. “I like them for their durability,” Georg says, evident in the fact that he displays only the inner workings of the clock, enclosed in a glass box he constructed with a rear-wall mirror, so a viewer can appreciate the meticulous and silently whirring craftsmanship. Morbiers, sometimes called Comtoise clocks after their region of origin, were assembled from parts fashioned by farmers during the winter months and sold to clockmakers in town. The clock strikes the hour with a deep gong. Georg is so fond of Morbiers that he’s given the display in his living room a special brass plaque that reads, “The Essence of Time by G. Pilz,” along with the date of its rebirth, January 2005. Two more Morbiers in his workshop downstairs are undergoing a similar resurrection.

Each hour, the chimes, bells and gongs of all his clocks announce their presence, although Georg has taken care that they don’t all sound at precisely the same moment. “That would be too much!” he says. “To me, the attraction of clocks is that they are all the same machine built for the same purpose, but they are all so different in appearance.” Still, there is one type of clock that Georg will never collect. “I don’t like cuckoo clocks,” he says. “They’re too simple.”

Playing With Time

BY [KATE O'CONNOR](#)



525,600 minutes... Is this — as the cast of the Broadway musical *Rent* wonders — how to measure a year? Or does one count his days, like J. Alfred Prufrock in T.S. Eliot's classic poem, in coffee spoons? More likely, we just check our watches.

Like it or not, the vast majority of us participate in the consensus reality of Chronos. We're motivated by airline schedules, doctor's appointments, lunch dates, school semesters, work weeks and, yes, deadlines.

I'm musing on this marvelous mathematical construct we call "Time" as I drive out to meet with the local chapter of the NAWCC, the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors. As someone who is perpetually running behind, I'm wondering if these timepiece aficionados will take me to task for being tardy.

Hardly. The assembled members actually have a bit of a chuckle at the notion when I present it. "No," laughs Gene Volk, a long-time member of Chapter 126 who sits on the Board of Directors of the National Association. "As a group,

we're not particularly punctual."

But precise? Now that's something else entirely.

This host of horologists (those who are intrigued by the science of measuring time) has gathered on a lovely summer afternoon to eat barbeque, swap stories and trade in the machinery of minutes: springs and gears, delicate clock hands and decorative clock faces, tiny screw drivers and heavy pendulums. They rifle through cigar boxes brimming with bits and pieces and carefully inspect disemboweled antique clock cases and naked workings — it's a treasure trove for this lot.



Dan McBride, the current president of Chapter 126, empties his pockets to display his loot: a motley collection of vintage pocket watches, all in less-than-ideal condition.

"The three things you look at for quality in a watch are the case, the dial and the movement," he explains as he points out the virtues of the aesthetic elements. But when he deftly flips open the back and introduces me to the minutiae of the clockworks it becomes clear that the movement—the beating heart of the watch—is his passion.

Dan sometimes acquires old watches simply for their parts, which can be modified for use in the repair and restoration of more valuable specimens. Today's purchases, however, will become training tools; Dan's students will be challenged to put them back in good working order. A chemical engineer in his professional life, Dan is a collector of wristwatches and pocket watches and a respected watchmaker (someone who makes or repairs watches), having developed his exacting skills by apprenticing with a master on weekends for eight years.

He now mentors others in the arcane craft, which, for a dedicated collector, is almost an imperative. "The first time I opened a pocket watch and saw how beautiful the movement was, I was hooked," admits Wayne Arcuri, a dealer in fine antique pocket watches and one of Dan's protégés. "Eventually, my collection became so big and I

was paying so much to have them serviced and cleaned that I learned how to do it myself."

Providing education in the fine points of maintenance, repair and restoration is a key element in the Association's agenda. "There are very few schools now that teach watch crafts," says Gene Volk. "But the NAWCC has an accredited program for clock repair and watch repair—there's a full one-year program for each discipline. We also have a very comprehensive museum in Pennsylvania and a wonderful library. There's a bi-monthly newsletter and online archives with articles going back to the 1960s. These are important resources."

The members' expertise is also a resource for the community at large. "Right now we're working on tower clocks," Gene says. "We've restored a number of those in this area: the clock in the First Citizen's Bank and the Historical Society in Hendersonville, one in Yanceyville and in Hillsboro and we're getting ready to do one at St. John's Lutheran Church in Walhalla, SC."

And to these collectors, it's a world unto itself.

For more information about the NAWCC Western Carolina Chapter 126 visit their website at www.clocks126.com, contact Dan McBride at 864-592-2418 or email Gene Volk at evolk@citcom.net.

Asheville watchmaker keeps 'dying trade' alive at repair shop From Asheville Citizen Times



ASHEVILLE — Justin Harrell is not a typical watchmaker. For starters, at age 29, he's young.

The median age for a watchmaker in the United States is 62, according to a survey by the American Watchmakers-Clockmakers Institute. Since the 1960s, Americans have not been widely trained in the art of watchmaking and repair, and the number of trained watchmakers has significantly declined.

Marthaler Jewelers owner Andy Marthaler has people come into his shop nearly every day and ask about watch repair.

"It's a huge service, and for qualified help, it's almost impossible to find," Marthaler said. "It's a dying trade."

Last month, Harrell opened the Watchmaker's Shop in the atrium of Haywood Hotel, and Marthaler was one of his first clients. The shop focuses on repairing mechanical and battery-powered watches but also sells new watches and accessories like batteries.

Setting up shop

Harrell and his wife relocated to Asheville in June. Harrell's wife works in the medical field and found a job. Harrell thought about contacting local jewelry stores and offering his services, but none of the situations seemed the right fit.

He soon learned the city had no watch repair shop. The city had four shops 10 years ago, but the owners were older and retired, Harrell said.

Harrell researched space and located a shop. He now has a work space downstairs and a retail and counter space upstairs. The shop sells a line of moderately priced watches.

"I don't want people to feel intimidated about coming in here," Harrell said. "I have watches for \$100."

Jim Lubic, American Watchmaker-Clockmaker Institute executive director, said Harrell is smart to venture out on his own. The demand is strong for the craft, and watchmaker schools are only replacing about half the number of the retiring watchmakers.

"It's a trade," Lubic said. "They are making more money than they ever have."

The shop was a challenge to open. Harrell had never run a business and said it involved much more than he originally anticipated. Besides the retail store, he has social networking pages to establish, like Twitter and Facebook. He is considering places to advertise and has to interact with other members of the business community.

You have got to do those things if you want to be successful," Harrell said.

He also, of course, has to interact with public.

"I love to educate people about what they have," Harrell said. "A lot of people don't know what grandpa gave them."

Training

Harrell's path to watchmaking was circuitous. He attained his associate degree in business administration in the mid-1990s. He was considering attending a university when he saw a magazine advertisement for a watchmaker school. Harrell's family was in the jewelry business, so he had been exposed to fine watches, but he never was mechanically inclined. "I got into it because I like to buy and sell watches," Harrell said.

He applied to the Lititz Watch Technicum, a school financed by Rolex. Located in Pennsylvania, the school only accepts 12 students a year.

"Unknown to me, I was applying to the Harvard of watchmaking schools," Harrell said.

The school tested his dexterity and vision, making sure he could perform the complex tasks involved in watch repair. He was accepted and spent two years learning the art of watchmaking and repair.

The experience was memorable. He attended classes 10-12 hours a day and wore "a suit and tie. No talking. Very European."

After graduating, he worked at A.H. Riise Co. in the U.S. Virgin Islands, a Rolex-associated service center. The retail shop services watches for people on vacation.

"I love my profession," Harrell said. "I would be at home tinkering if I didn't do this."

Men's jewelry

Watches have always been an important accessory. Before cell phones and inexpensive digital watches, mechanical watches kept time for millions of Americans. After World War II, battery-powered and digital watches replaced mechanical watches, one of the main reasons for the disappearance for the watchmaker.

Harrell said mechanical watches made a resurgence in the 1980s and 1990s, driven partially by the stock market boom. People purchased expensive items with discretionary income.

"It's the last true form of jewelry that a man has," Harrell said.

Those mechanical watches that were purchased 10 or 20 years ago need servicing, which is the basis for Harrell's business.

"It's almost like an engine on your wrist," Harrell said. "There are 200 moving parts. You need to change the oil, take out the old and put in the new."

He recommends people “protect their investment” and get a mechanical watch serviced every five-seven years.

But Harrell does not limit his work to mechanical watches. He also repairs battery-powered watches, which run on gears but are driven by a motor.

The reaction to his shop has been positive so far, Harrell, said.

“Everybody is happy that there is a real place to get a watch repaired,” Harrell said.