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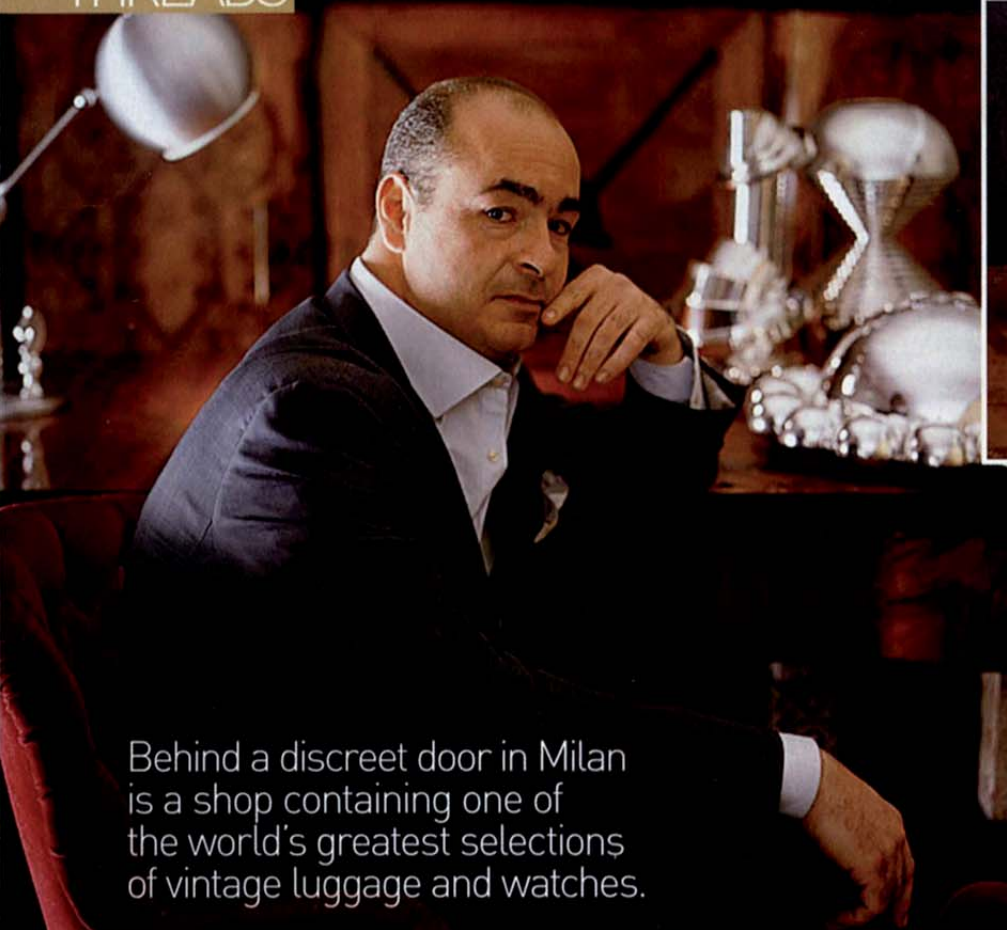


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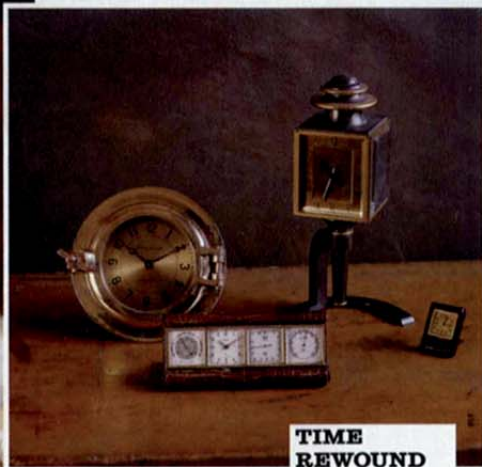
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PROSTATE CANCER: THE BEST CURE YET ■ INDESTRUCTIBLE WATCHES ■ FOIE GRAS DIET



Behind a discreet door in Milan is a shop containing one of the world's greatest selections of vintage luggage and watches.



TIME REWOUND

Max Bernardini at his desk; RIGHT: Some of the Hermès clocks in his bailiwick.

into a pair of otherwise innocent Cokes on ice. "Would you consider this rude?" he asks, in his slightly gruff, slightly bemused, slightly conspiratorial voice that suggests a good-natured and extremely polite bear snapping out of a long hibernation. "You don't mind if I smoke, do you?"

At the corner of Via Caradosso and Corso Magenta, a stone's toss from Bramante's cinquecento Santa Maria delle Grazie and its refectory, which houses the *Last Supper*, Bernardini's *negozio* is

a welcome throwback to an era before sensitivity training and surgeons general's warnings: It's an oasis of high-end testosterone, a veritable museum of gentlemanly accoutrements—mostly

CASE HISTORY

from the Edwardian and Deco periods—presented in an atmosphere that's more smoking club than Geneva bank vault. "We wanted to make a men's temple," Bernardini says, rattling the ice in his Cuba libre as he goes on to explain that his well-burnished Italian Deco desk, topped with crocodile-skin blotter, once sat in a fascist army recruiting office in the 1930s. (The extended Crocodylidae family is well represented at Bernardini, from nubbly cocktail sets to eye-popping Hermès vanity cases.) "Our philosophy is that the search for excellence in the 1920s and '30s was

much superior, much more precise than today. For one simple reason: A rich guy in the 1930s, that was his job—to be rich. Today a rich guy passes 90 percent of his time maintaining his richness." It's the mission of Bernardini—the man and his shop—to bring a little gentility back to the work of being a gentleman.

The current Bernardini emporium expanded from the long-running watch and jewelry business next door in November *threads* >134

It's noon on a Friday in Milan, and **Max Bernardini**, the formidable 37-year-old watch dealer and purveyor of what he calls *il vintage di lusso*, or luxury vintage, is entertaining a guest in his balcony office. The comfy perch overlooks an airy showroom teeming with old-school Hermès, Goyard, Gucci, and Vuitton steamer trunks, brawny leather Chesterfields, potted palms with cascading fronds, and glass display cases housing, like the storied *Wunderkammern* of yore, all manner of manly curios—from silver Dunhill Rollagas lighters to Rolex chronometers—all laid out by decade.

You'd think it might be a bit early for a sundowner, but Signor Bernardini has commandeered a bottle of amber rum—its label obscured by a meaty hand—from the shop's resident majordomo (there's a little bar setup down below) and is splashing the piratical elixir

DEPARTURE LOUNGE

Antique trunks and suitcases by Hermès, Vuitton, and Goyard, some of which have been retrofitted with Plexiglas drawers.



of 2005; it grows out of Max Bernardini's two decades as a dealer in some of the most sought-after antique wristwatches in the world: Patek Philippe, Rolex, Vacheron Constantin, Cartier, and Audemars Piguet. These watches—all with certification, provenance, and their own official photographic portraits, and mostly from the pre-Quartz era—are still the heart of the family business, which was originally started by

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racquet; an entire display full of nifty Movado Ermeto pocket watches (not for sale, alas); and Bernardini's pride and joy: The vintage trunks and cases that evoke the glory days of transatlantic steamship passage, or, say, Sebastian Flyte's escape to Venice in *Brideshead Revisited*. They come in every size and configuration imaginable, with an emphasis on saddle-leather Hermès; ochre-hued, pre-1930s Vuitton; and the much sought-after Goyard. But, like Bernardini himself, there's nothing fastidious about these outside, well-pedigreed specimens, which the shop's *artigiani*—artisans—can retool, restore, or repurpose to your liking. "Let's say you live in a minimalist, ultra-rational, technological loft," Bernardini says, pausing at a particular case that, nearly a century ago, belonged to a Russian nobleman. "You can just put a Louis Vuitton or Goyard trunk in the corner with all of your DVDs or your PlayStation inside. And it just matches—because it's cool."

Like the shop that bears his name, Bernardini lives at the nexus of vintage and modern. He favors bespoke suits, carries himself with elegant nonchalance, and likes to point out that a true gentleman "is not supposed to show off." He seems to live by the code of a time when being privileged and male meant you could say—and do—almost anything you pleased. As Bernardini tops up the Cuba libres, he notes that he has, at that very moment, two ex-girlfriends and one current girlfriend in the shop. "I'm a womanizer—so what? You can write that. American women hate me." He has spent very little time in America, but holds Ralph Lauren, a longtime customer, in high esteem: "The man's a genius."

There are a few other guys lighting Bernardini's way, including the Prince de Polignac (father of Rainier III of Monaco) and the legendary New York financier Henry Graves Jr., whose prized Patek Philippe pocket watch, known as the Henry Graves Supercomplication, holds the record for highest fetching price for any watch at auction—\$11 million. Whenever the assorted effects of these early-twentieth-century aesthetes go up on the block, Bernardini takes pride in hunting them down. The same goes for his watches, most of which are held at a discreet off-site location. As much as he's fired up by trunks, suitcases, and lighters, Bernardini still loves to talk moon phases, tourbillons, and drop lugs. "If you have a thousand bucks to spend, I'll help you spend it. If you have a million bucks to spend, I'll help you

in the same way—no matter if you want to put something in your house or on your wrist."

So what's on Bernardini's wrist, then? He pulls up a French cuff to reveal a small tattoo of a familiar-looking heraldic-cross insignia. "Patek Philippe. Anytime."

—MARK ROZZO

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GET CROC'D

A 1930s vanity case outfitted with boot pulls and silver bottles made to hold everything from shaving cream to cologne.

Max's father, Franco, who continues as CFO.

But what draws you in at Bernardini is the artful presentation of a bygone era.

"When you walk in here, it's like a time

machine," Bernardini notes with pride as he makes his way around the shop, pausing every now and again to grab at his cell phone ("Pronto!"). An informal inventory takes in such *objets* as a silver Cartier cigar holder from the 1930s; an Hermès horse brush monogrammed HAR; assorted silver requisites from Dior in the 1950s; a Vuitton sport bag with accompanying wooden tennis

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See more of Bernardini's inventory at www.mensvogue.com/bernardini