

West Country Watch - Daphne du Maurier



For a brief moment in Alfred Hitchcock's film of the Daphne du Maurier book, *Rebecca*, a young Laurence Olivier is seen wearing a watch. It is a fleeting glimpse, but one that helps to set his character apart from those that still delved into their pockets to tell the time. Maximilian (Maxim) de Winter, a widower with a mansion in the West Country, may not have been depicted as the world's most lovable character, but none the less has enough charm and mystery to sweep a young Joan Fontaine off her feet and make her the second Mrs de Winter.

In the book she is never given a name prior to her introduction as Mrs de Winter, a fact that helps to increase the presence of her deceased predecessor, Mrs Rebecca de Winter. However, despite the naive charm and beauty of his new wife, it is Maxim and Rebecca that are the powerful and haunting characters in

the book—which is why a new range of watches designed in Dorset has launched with the first models named after these two characters, Maxim and Rebecca.

Du Maurier Watches is the brainchild of West Dorset resident Ned Browning and his wife Marianna. They have set about creating a range of Swiss made, yet quintessentially English watches, rising from an era when the timepiece was moving from inside a waistcoat pocket, to become a dashing and very visible accessory.

The collection is born out of a heritage that most marketing departments could only dream of. Designer, Ned, is not only Daphne du Maurier's grandson but his family also includes actors, artists and decorated officers. His father was a film maker and photographer and his mother the one-time beauty queen Olive White. Sir Frederick Arthur Montague Browning, his grandfather, was head of the 1st Airborne, whilst earlier generations included George du Maurier, famous Punch cartoonist, and celebrated actor Gerald du Maurier.

The soul of the watch design, however, lies deep within the West Country and takes its initial inspiration from the writing of his grandmother, Daphne du Maurier. As a child Ned spent all of his summer holidays with his grandmother at her home in Cornwall and remembers the idyllic days on the beach with warmth. Speaking to me at his home in Holditch he said: "I have very fond memories of my Grandmother. Endless summer holidays down at her house in Cornwall—sand, sea, cornfields, cricket and rather vicious sword-fights with my brothers, using the never ending supply of bamboo sticks and fake blood from squashed mulberries! I can still feel the whack of a bamboo stick on the knuckles from a stray parry, which always used to bring the game to an abrupt end, with one of us running off in tears to tell my Grandmother."

Ned remembers walks along Par beach with his grandmother and her dogs as very special. "During the holidays, the days were divided up between me and my brothers—my sister being a little too young at the time—as to who would accompany her each morning on the daily dog walk. These were really lovely times, where we would talk about school, drawing and tell each other stories. Mostly though we'd discuss my birthday, as I was lucky enough that it always coincided with the Summer holiday in Cornwall and resulted in a trip down to the toy shop in Par with my Grandmother, where I got to choose a present...an Action Man or cricket bat usually! The trip to the beach was about a mile and she often let us lean over and steer the car...not something I would encourage with my children, but great fun all the same!"

The photograph above, never before published, show a grandmother at ease and enjoying precious time with her grandchildren. "I remember the day the picture was taken" he says. "It was the day before my seventh birthday, and I had just taken a rather large tumble whilst rock climbing at the beach. Not much sympathy was forthcoming from my parents who had specifically told me not to go on my own, but my grandmother took me aside and helped get me dressed and we discussed what I might want for my birthday. That particular year I was lucky enough to get a purple scooter—looking at the picture, perhaps I should have asked for a more stylish pair of swimming trunks!"

One of the things that many of us enjoy about the West Country, especially in a good summer, is the feeling of time standing still. This part of the world has its own special pace. Social media and the race to adopt a new technological world may slowly nudge their way in but most who live here hope to enjoy an easier pace and spend time making precious memories for their own children. For Ned Browning time became a bit of an obsession. He developed a fascination with watches and began to collect them. "My love of watches started when I was about 17 years old" he said. "Having two older brothers and a Dad that were also watch crazy, it was always a hot topic of conversation around the house, from what model James Bond was currently wearing to what celebrities and friends had on, and what we could lay our hands on for not much money. Since then I've become increasingly more obsessed and often change my watch twice a day depending on what I'm doing. Designing the collection has been a dream come true and I am loving every minute."

The first watches have been released in limited editions, each with its own unique number. They are sleek and sophisticated with subtle hints of du Maurier reflected in the design. "The designs that we have created are very much in keeping with the characters and period that my Grandmother's books represent" says Ned. He has focused on a very classic, clean style that echoes the art nouveau period. This is particularly evident with the launch collection: the 'Maxim' and 'Rebecca'. However, he also wanted the watches to feel contemporary and not dated. "It's very important that we create something unique so that the look and style of the watches become familiar and recognizable, and to present ourselves as a quintessentially English brand. There are a huge amount of competitive watch brands out there and we need to be different. I do think my Grandmother would have loved what

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by [Marshwood](#) about 2 hours ago

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we have created, especially as they are very true to the style and fashion of the time, as well as embodying the characters themselves."

Du Maurier Watches are launching at a time when many of us have taken to relying on our mobile phone as a timepiece. Whole generations have now reverted to the old fashioned method of reaching into their pockets and purses to check the time; to see whether they are late for school, whether it's time to leave for their next appointment or whether it's opening time down at the Dog & Parrot. But there was always a solidity about wearing a watch, and perhaps the du Maurier line might help remind us that some of the old ways had a little something special about them.

The whole venture is now very much a family affair with Ned's wife and business partner Marianna playing key roles from admin to PR and marketing. Even their young children are keen to be involved. Ned says: "My two little girls May and Daisy are beginning to bombard me with watch designs they want made immediately... mostly with lots of love-hearts and flowers and very expensive diamonds. I'm not sure how long I can hold them off!"

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