



#### Technical Specs

**Model:** Ref. 5196 J

**Movement:** Calibre 215 PS; 130 components; 18 jewels; Geneva Seal

**Frequency:** 28,800 vph

**Power reserve:** 44 hours

**Case:** Yellow gold; 37 mm

**Water resistance:** 25m



#### Vacheron Constantin Patrimony

Arbitrary it is not: there is a triumvirate of legendary watchmakers and you cannot discuss Patek Philippe without including Vacheron Constantin and Audemars Piguet. Both are aristocratic, have longevity and offer discreet models like the Calatrava. In fact, numerous Vacherons over the years have been all but indistinguishable from the ref. 96. We recommend the manual winding Vacheron Constantin ref. 81106 (£5,800), with the calibre 1400 movement. Small seconds are still present and correct at 6 o'clock, and a middle ground has been struck between bâton indices and Roman numerals. Like the Calatrava, it beats at 28,800 vph and bears the Geneva Seal, but it has a power reserve of only 40 hours and measures but 35 mm across.

#### Audemars Piguet Jules Audemars

Although a spring chicken compared to Vacheron, Audemars Piguet celebrates its 130th anniversary this year, so heritage too plays a part with its definitive Calatrava rival. Like Patek and Vacheron, Audemars has always offered a classy dress watch - though for a generation, the Royal Oak has overshadowed everything else the company makes. Part of the Jules Audemars Collection, the rather tasteful ref. 15056OR.00.A067CR.02 (rather less catchy than 'ref. 96...') adheres to our requirement of manually wound, gold-cased, with small seconds at 6 o'clock (£5,500). AP's variations on the theme include Roman numerals, leaf hands and a sapphire back. You could say it's a bit more neoclassical than Bauhaus, but put it this way: wearing any of these three will mark you as a man of distinction.



# Modern Classics: Patek Philippe Calatrava



True story: when I first discovered watches, I made a vow that, should I not acquire a Patek Philippe Calatrava by the time I hit the big five-oh, I would give up watch collecting. I tell a lie: I actually vowed that I would top myself. With three months to go, I found myself able to purchase a 1956 Calatrava ref. 96 from a friend who owns a watch store in the USA. I could finally wear the watch of my dreams. I immediately sent off my Calatrava's numbers to get the 'extract' from the Patek Philippe Archives, which I actually framed. It had been worth the wait.

Ken Kessler

Another true story: when I was fortunate enough to meet Philippe Stern of Patek Philippe, he noticed my watch, looked at it for two seconds and murmured, "Hmm. Very nice. 1956 reference 96." Admittedly, Stern is about as definitive a Patek expert as one could get, but I was still dazzled that he could identify to the year a watch that has been in steady production since 1932. To you or me, it would be indistinguishable from one made 20 years either side. Which is why, of all the treasures in the Patek Philippe canon, the Calatrava has survived for so long.

The roots of the ref. 96 Calatrava are to be found in the Bauhaus movement, which dictated so much to the designers of that era: "Form must follow function." As simplicity and purity were paramount, the Calatrava was, like Goldilocks' porridge, just right.

The 'Calatrava' moniker - the name of Patek's ornate cross logo - has been applied to a whole family of watches, the majority of which look nothing like a ref. 96. Today, there are something like 30 models, all available with different case materials or gem-cladding: automatics, calendars, the officer's watch, ladies' or men's straps or bracelets, conventional or over-sized. But the *ur*-Calatrava is the manual-wind version with small seconds. In yellow gold. On a strap. You don't mess with a masterpiece.

Further information: [www.patekphilippe.com](http://www.patekphilippe.com)

A connoisseur once informed me: "The Calatrava is the only true dress watch that still looks apt when the wearer is dressed casually." Just look at the subtlety and discretion: no numbers, just bâton indices; dauphin hands that look classical, but as modern as any; small seconds at 6 o'clock; barely visible minute markings between the indices. There is nothing extraneous. If ever a watch oozed suavity it is the ref. 96. Should Cary Grant be reincarnated as a watch, Calatrava would be his name.

Should you want to wear the most debonair watch ever made, but do not wish to follow the vintage path, Patek Philippe can offer you the ref. 5196 J. Aside from an increase in diameter to a more contemporary 37 mm (my vintage Calatrava is a mere 31 mm in diameter; typical before IWC and Panerai made us love huge timepieces), you could be looking at a 1932 issue. And all of this elegance can be yours for £7,970. You could find a clean vintage model for £4,000-£5,000, but who wouldn't love to have their name in the Patek archives? I would buy new if I were you, then, in 100 years, an Antiquorum catalogue might feature the lot description, "Sold to Mr K Kessler, 2005." It does not get cooler than that.

As for my 1956 Calatrava? Well, I don't actually own it. I'm merely looking after it for my son. ◯