



COLLECTING CLOCKS WITH *Henry Franz*

Early retirement allowed this Durban businessman to pursue his passion for collecting unique time keepers

“We always loved clocks ever since I inherited my late father’s Ansonia clock. By the time my close friend, Cecile Tilley, gave me her beautiful, walnut grandmother clock, I was captivated,” says Durbanite Henry Franz. “Then in 2005, when I retired from my business, I started to really concentrate on collecting them.”

Through the servicing of a simple grandfather clock, Henry met well-known Durban antiquarian horologist Rudi Berkhout who became his mentor. It was the impeccable attention

to detail that Rudi paid to repairing clocks, coupled with his in-depth knowledge that persuaded Henry to start his own collection.

“Starting a clock collection from scratch in a complicated global market was daunting yet extremely exciting,” says Henry. “There are reproductions that are so good an inexperienced buyer can quite easily mistake them for the real thing. Then there are the marriages and modifications; the former is when a mechanism isn’t in the original case or vice versa.”

THE HISTORY OF...

The grandfather clock

During the late 17th century, clockmakers experimented to produce a clock that kept good time and invented the anchor escapement. It was found to be very accurate and a wooden case was added to cover the longer pendulum.

The first designs were very basic and not decorative in any way. The cases were very slender and mainly made of oak or pine and then veneered in fruitwood which was then ebonised to create a black, polished finish. Many of these early clocks were of 30-hour duration and had to be wound after 30 hours, but eight-day and month-long duration longcase clocks followed soon after. There were even some made that were of a year’s duration. These clocks are very rare and were made by the famous makers of the time such as Thomas Tompion.

Antique regulator wall clocks

Collectors use the terminology ‘Viennese regulator’ when describing regulator wall clocks falling within the Empire and Biedermeier Period, and ‘Vienna regulator’ for the more ornate regulators produced from the mid 19th century to the early 20th century.

Englishmen Benjamin Vulliamy and James Harrison invented two of the earliest regulators between 1760 and 1780. Despite this British lineage, regulator clocks were not well received in England, but were in Vienna, where the form flourished. Indeed, Vienna regulator wall clocks gained such a reputation for accuracy that they were routinely used in public places such as railway stations and post offices.

Henry spent his first two years as a collector researching renowned clock makers like Thomas Tompion (1639–1713), who is still regarded as the father of English clockmaking, and Ahasuerus Fromanteel (1607–1693), the first maker of pendulum clocks in Britain. “The range of different clocks available was so vast, that I decided to specialise in collecting British, Scottish and Irish longcase clocks, Viennese wall clocks and English, French and German mantle clocks. But if something else that’s rare comes up for sale, I diversify and add to my collection,” he says.

After starting with one longcase clock in 2005 Henry now has over 70. “I find the London longcases to be highly collectable because of the makers, style, wood variety and the extra pillar they have between the back and front plate of the mechanism; they have five pillars as opposed to the standard four,” he explains. Pride of place in his collection is a longcase by John Clifton of Liverpool in a flame mahogany case with twin reeded pillars and *verre églomisé* panels below the swan necks pediments on the hood (pictured below right). “This is a very special clock; I had the case restored in SA and the mechanism and dial restored by Robert Loomes, a renowned watchmaker and restorer in the UK.”

When it comes to restoration, Henry believes in the expertise of independent horologists and antique restorers. “Commitment and attention to detail ensures these professionals will enhance the intrinsic beauty of the whole clock, without detracting from its value, age and history,” he says. “Many people are realising the lasting value of antiques: the pieces you buy will hold their value or even increase in value and clocks are an important part of this investment,” he maintains. **GH**

TIPS FOR BUYERS AND NEW CLOCK COLLECTORS

- “Study the various styles, construction and movements of the different clocks,” says clock dealer Tim Curtis of Tim Curtis Antiques. “The construction of a longcase clock is quite different from that of a Vienna regulator. Read as much as possible on the subject, handle the pieces, go to auctions and visit shops.”
- “Read up on some history as this is a good way to judge the age of a clock,” says Tim. “For example, many woods used to make the cases didn’t come from European countries, but from their colonies. A clock could never be made out of mahogany pre-1730 because Europe hadn’t yet discovered the commercial value of this wood.”
- “The price of a clock is dictated by its rarity, the maker and the style. Something a little out of the ordinary will fetch a much higher price,” says Henry.
- “Always buy from a reputable dealer or collector, preferably someone who belongs to a professional organisation and insist on an authenticity certificate issued and signed by an horologist; if buying from a private individual, get a professional to check the clock over first,” advises Henry.
- “Clocks can be expensive to repair and service. If buying on auction or privately, you will most likely be buying the piece ‘voets toets’. To avoid nasty surprises, have an idea of the costs of repairs and servicing. A reputable dealer should be able to guarantee the clock is in good working condition,” says Henry.



HENRY'S TIPS FOR CARING FOR YOUR ANTIQUE CLOCKS

- Keep them in running order and service them once every 10 years for a longcase clock and once every five years for a regulator wall clock.
- Keep the case dust free as dust can easily creep into cracks in the wooden casing.
- Don't put them against a damp wall.
- Place them in low traffic areas. A knock can damage the casing and put out the mechanism.
- Longcase clocks should be positioned on a stable, level surface and always secured to the wall. Beware of suspended wood floors where there's a lot of movement of the timbers.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: ● ‘Gothic’ Biedermeier, c 1800–1814. ● Longcase with five-pillar chinoiserie, c 1790–1880. ● Biedermeier 30-day duration clock, c 1845. ● Longcase by John Clifton, Liverpool c 1777–1794.

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