

Transcending time

Patek Philippe crafted timepieces to celebrate Singapore's heritage and support a worthy cause

BY GENEVIEVE CUA

HERITAGE and culture are vital aspects of a nation's identity. Supporting their preservation and enhancement is arguably a worthy cause, particularly when viewed through a multi-generational lens.

The National Heritage Board (NHB), which manages national museums and heritage institutions, has enjoyed steady support through the years from individuals and organisations.

Last year, for instance, 32 individuals and 37 organisations were singled out in the NHB's "Patrons of Heritage Awards", raising S\$8.5 million. The latter includes cash donations, artefact and in-kind donations. The value of donations and number of donors have been consistent in the last five years.

Heritage is typically thought of as something of antiquity. This year, however, NHB was the beneficiary of an initiative that was an artful blend of old and new.

To commemorate Singapore's 50th year of independence, Patek Philippe commissioned the creation of three dome table clocks that were themselves a showcase of Singapore's past and present. Crafted in cloisonne enamel, the clocks were auctioned at an event attended by a select audience of wealthy individuals and corporates.

The three clocks were distinctly Singapore in unique respects:

- "Farquhar Collection" was inspired by the celebrated *William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings*, a treasure trove of 477 watercolours depicting plants and animals of the Malay Peninsula and Singapore.
- "Peranakan Culture" pays tribute to the Peranakans, drawing on traditional motifs and vibrant colours that can be typically seen in tiles or windows.
- "The Esplanade-Singapore" presents a panoramic view of modern Singapore, with a depiction of the river and the Esplanade theatre.

With bids starting at between S\$250,000 and S\$300,000, the event raised a total of S\$2.4 million. Proceeds were matched dollar for dollar through the Cultural Matching Fund, set up by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth to encourage giving to the arts.

Deepa Chatrath, general manager of Patek Philippe for South-east Asia, says work on the concept for the event began more than two years ago. Patek is also commemorating its collaboration with Singapore which began in 1965 when Philippe Stern, honorary president of the firm, travelled to Singapore to begin to build a sales network. His son Thierry Stern is currently president of Patek Philippe SA.

Ms Chatrath says the firm wanted to celebrate with Singapore. "There is no history of another country making such an economic progress in such a short time, in a rising tide taking everyone to this level of wealth and well being... Thierry Stern felt it did not have to be something commercial, but something that is our highest that we must give to the nation."

Patek Philippe crafts only 12 dome clocks a year. This is the first time it has done such an event in Asia. "We have crafted pieces to benefit charities, but we're very conscious and selective. We don't do this very often."

The "Farquhar Collection" clock fetched the highest bid of S\$1 million from The Hour Glass. Proceeds from the auction were donated to the National Museum of Singapore. The clock was also given to the National Museum, where the William Farquhar collection of drawings reside.

"The Esplanade-Singapore" clock fetched the second-highest bid of S\$750,000 from Cortina Watch. Chief executive Anthony Lim says the clock is a "very special" work of art representing Singapore. The charity element of the proceeds was also a big draw. The clock is on display at Patek Philippe boutiques on a rotational basis.

Mr Lim regularly supports a number of groups and schools. This year alone, he donated



PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

S\$500,000 for various groups including the Ren Ci Hospital, Hainan Business Club, Singapore Hainan Society and Pei Chun Public School.

His purchase price of S\$750,000 will go towards the NHB's Heritage Cares initiative. The latter has programmes to share heritage offerings with the less privileged segments of society such as children, at-risk youths and the elderly.

The "Peranakan Culture" clock was successfully bid by a private individual, Michael Koh, an enthusiastic collector of Peranakan wares of more than 30 years. "When I was given the opportunity to attend the Patek Philippe function and viewed the dome table clock, I was very impressed and attracted by the unique work of the Peranakan piece. I believed that if I can acquire the piece with the dual objective of acquiring a prize and making a charitable contribution, it would be wonderful.

"I love Peranakan wares because of their rich and powerful colours, and creative shapes which offer both a practical function and as household displays. In the early days Peranakan ware was not easy to duplicate and thus I could comfortably build up my interest.

"I sincerely wish my children will continue to support my idea and passion – first, to love it, and to maintain and share the heritage value."

His collection also includes more than 200 oil and water colour paintings from first and second generation South-east Asian artists. **W**

CULTURAL ARTEFACT

(Left to right) "Farquhar Collection", "Peranakan Culture" and "The Esplanade-Singapore" (Top) Goh Seng Choo Gallery



PHOTOS: PATEK PHILIPPE