

Mondaine **Helvetica** - Just my type.

Helvetica may be the name of the most ubiquitous font around, but now it is also the name of the latest watch collection from Mondaine.

In his book on fonts, “Just My Type”, Simon Garfield says that Helvetica “is a font of such practicality – and, its adherents would suggest, such beauty – that it is both ubiquitous and something of a cult.” It is a font that pervades our daily life like no other typeface. From American Apparel to BMW, on restaurant menus, on your phone – its slightly skinnier Helvetica Neue is your iPhone’s default font – you cannot escape it.



And now you’ll be able to tell the time with it, thanks to Mondaine’s new family of precision timepieces. It is fitting that the brand that brought the world the iconic Swiss Railways SBB Watch, should plunder Swiss design history again because Helvetica, the font, is so entwined in Switzerland’s identity, it even named itself after the country.

Originally known as Haas Grotesk, Helvetica – the Latin for “Swiss” – was created in 1957 at the Haas Type

Foundry near Basel by Swiss graphic artist Max Miedinger and Haas business manager Eduard Hoffman. It was a font that suited, and in many ways helped shape, this burgeoning age of modernity. Ironically, considering it has been the subject of books and even a film, Helvetica was designed to be discreet, unshowy, neutral. And the perfect foil for a watch design. The Bernheim brothers, who head up the family-run Mondaine Watch Ltd, had wanted to launch a new and timeless family for a while, but, in creating another Swiss icon with its original watches, they had a hard act to follow.

They organized a brainstorming session with a group of dyed-in-the-wool Swiss professionals from a range of professions, including an engineer, a historian, a TV host and a composer. They were given a very specific brief – to uncover a design that was quintessentially Swiss in value and a look that would stand the test of time but was not necessarily typical of watches. No pressure there, then. The discussion took in everything from traditional string music from Appenzell to artificial medial joints before alighting on Helvetica.



It was then down to the skills of designer Martin Drechsel to translate this into a watch design. The result is something that is incredibly simple at first glance, but which has little quirks that are only noticed when you really study the watch. It feels somehow familiar, thanks to the use of Helvetica, but, because of the details, you also know that you've not seen anything like this before – a trait that is essential both for retailers and customers. The date aperture is slightly off its traditional central axis position to fit in with the typography of the dial. The Helvetica number “1” with its famous curved crossbar has been used as a model for the lugs.



Speaking about the collection Andre Bernheim, CEO, says: “The watch collection is brand new, yet will appear familiar to most people around the world. The key to being an icon lies in immediate recognition. The Mondaine Helvetica goes beyond mere visual identification; it is instinctive.” In a knowing reference to the collection’s namesake, the watches, which were first unveiled at BaselWorld this year, are available in three case weights

– Light (Ø26 and 38mm, crafted with a flat strap and slim stitching), Regular (Ø33 and 40mm, featuring slightly padded leather straps, with regular stitching) and Bold (Ø43mm, designed with a heavily padded strap, and thick twine stitching).

For initial launch there will be 15 models, a choice of brushed, polished or PDV gold or black plated steel cases and you can choose between leather, nylon and Milanese mesh.

It is a restrained, sophisticated slice of Swiss design that might just end up being as ubiquitous as the font after which is named.