

**Suburb
Style editor
Deborah
Warland,
talks to
residents
about some
of their
favourite
things**



**Deborah
Warland**

SUBURB

Time Lord featuring Michael Clerizo



Suburb author, Michael Clerizo with his book, Masters of Contemporary Watchmaking

Michael was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut (about 50 miles from New York City) which, as he says, “does have a few claims to glory being the place that gave the world P T Barnum, the frisbee and Robert Mitchum.” He met his British wife, Sandra in New York in 1983 where they lived for a while before moving to North London over twenty years ago and have lived in Brim Hill since 1999.

In 2001 Michael contracted a particularly virulent virus and it took him around six months to recover. “During that time I read constantly – newspapers, magazines and lots of non-fiction books. I thought that maybe I could write better than many of the people I was reading. So when I was well

enough I started submitting articles to magazines and newspapers. It worked. Enough editors said yes and I decided I could make a go of it. Before then I had lots of jobs but no career as such”.

Michael is now a contributing editor at the Wall Street Journal Magazine which comes out quarterly in the US, Europe and Asia. He also writes for *International Watch*, a specialist magazine in the US. His lavishly illustrated and highly informative book, *Masters of Contemporary Watchmaking* was published in the UK by Thames and Hudson in 2009. Indeed, the book is a work of art. Before I went to see Michael I cannot say that the subject of horology (watchmaking to you and me) was one that I found riveting but by the time I left – excuse the pun – I was hooked.

I asked Michael how he came to write the book. “It was about seven years ago. An editor asked me if I would write an article on watches. While I knew nothing about the subject, ignorance never stops freelance writers so I said yes. When I began researching I was struck by the beauty of many watches made by famous companies like Patek Philippe and Vacheron Constantin. Eventually I learned that a few watchmakers, such as the 83 year old Dr George Daniels (an Englishman who is recognised as one of the world’s greatest living watchmakers and who has just been awarded the CBE) still work on their own making watches mostly by hand – sometimes producing only one or two a year. Most of these experts are unknown outside a tiny circle of collectors and aficionados, so I made it my mission to bring them to the attention of a wider audience.

The book is full of stories about watchmakers who did 10 to 14 hour days, 7 days a week for years without a break just to master their craft. This is beyond devotion or dedication – it is obsession. A great watchmaker also needs faith in himself. It is not enough just to master the craft. He wants his own name on the watches he makes. A great watchmaker needs faith in himself because he is a rebel and a gambler. They rebel against the idea of working for someone else and they gamble that their own skill will produce a superb watch that others will want to buy.”

I asked Michael if writing about the subject made him obsessed with time. “No, but I am interested in the history of timekeeping and how watches and clocks changed society. The first mechanical clock was made in China about a thousand years ago, but they never went on to develop the technology. In my researches I came across many other interesting facts. For instance, monks developed clocks because they needed to know when to pray, when to eat, when to go to mass and when to study. In the 17th Century England became one of the primary centres of horological development and manufacture and this continued for about 200 years during which period even the Swiss marked their watches ‘Made in London’ which made them easier to sell.

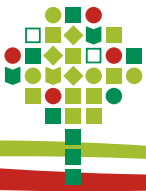
My last question regarding time was, would Michael like to be a Time Traveller? His reply was, “Definitely yes”. For example, I would love to be in the Spaniard’s Inn on the night during the anti-Catholic riots when a mob stopped in on the way to burn down Kenwood House which was owned by a Catholic. The landlord, who used to work at Kenwood, got the mob so drunk that they were unable to walk down the hill. That Kenwood survived is something we should all be grateful for and I’d love to see exactly how the landlord pulled it off.”

We then discussed life on the Suburb and it’s attraction for Michael and his wife. He says, “The Suburb is one of the most amazing urban neighbourhoods in the world. You don’t feel overwhelmed by the size of the buildings, the crush of crowds or the rush of traffic. This is a place designed for people to live in and enjoy. There’s space and that’s wonderful. I love to walk up to Central Square, varying the route and deriving pleasure in finding some higgeldy-piggeldy little street or pathway that you never knew existed. Because of all the green space on the Suburb, the walk is different depending on the season. My favourite time of the year is winter, especially in the morning around sunrise. If the weather is cold enough Central Square will have a light frost and maybe some mist with just a few rays of sun breaking through – just perfect.”



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