

brands you never heard of. People had no interest in mechanical watches then.

JEWELRY BOX

DIAMOND-LADEN WATCH COMING HOME TO LONDON

LONDON The British watchmaker Backes & Strauss is bringing the Royal Ashoka Empress home — at least for awhile.

The diamond watch, which has been touring Asia most of the past year, will be displayed at its Mayfair headquarters during London Craft Week, May 3-7.

In addition to the 131-ideal cut diamonds surrounding its 21- by 16-millimeter case, the watch includes 92 Ashoka diamonds, a special cut patented by William Goldberg, a New York diamond cutter. He was inspired by the 41.37-carat Ashoka diamond that was mined in India centuries ago.

An Ashoka-cut stone is elongated with rounded corners, and its "length-to-width ratio is what makes it special," Mr. Goldberg said. Placed beside an emerald-cut stone, its closest equivalent, an Ashoka will look 25 to 30 percent larger, he continued, and feature 62 displayed facets compared to the emerald cut's typical 58. "It has a certain sex appeal," he added. (The Empress is not the first Ashoka watch; Mr. Goldberg teamed with Chopard in 2005.)

Vartkess Knadjian, Backes & Strauss's chief executive, said he and Mr. Goldberg crossed paths at the Baselworld trade fair a few years ago and, after discussing the Ashoka cut, the idea of a watch was born. "I always like a challenge," he said.

The biggest challenge was contouring the design to the wrist, Mr. Knadjian said, noting, "Paper and 3-D drawings can look beautiful and nice but at the end of the day it has to feel right."

The Empress, priced at 700,000 Swiss francs, or close to \$704,000, has a quartz movement, while a second, slightly larger piece with a mechanical movement is expected to be introduced by the end of the year. MING LIU

