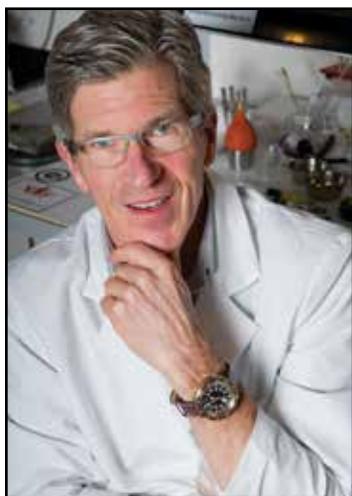


### BERKBINDER & BROWN

By Donna Hardy



**T**ed Brown, founder of the watch brand Berkbinder & Brown, was inspired to name his company after his grandfather's hardware store, Berkbinder & Brown, which opened around the turn of the 20th century in South Dakota. The store

sold farm implements, tractors, bikes, and stoves to ranchers and farmers. "They were the Walmart of their day—they sold everything," says Brown. Brown wanted to build an American watch of rugged, functional beauty that had its roots in the Great Plains spirit. "That is why the name of my grandfather's hardware and implement company resonated so strongly with me for the brand," says Brown.

Brown owned an architecture and construction firm for 22 years, but in 2004 he sold it. He'd always liked making things, so he got into painting, jewelry-making, and welding for awhile. He also liked watches and had his eye on a Panerai. A friend of his would go to Asia and bring back Asian-made

knock-off watches that would run for about a week. So Brown decided to take one apart and reverse engineer it to see how it was made and to learn from this exercise how he could assemble his own watch. It took him 18 months to figure out and make his first watch. With the time it took to make his own watch, he could have bought the Panerai he originally wanted (time is money, after all). When he started wearing the watch he'd made, people would ask him where he got it, and he'd say, "I made it." They'd ask, "Will you make me one?" The answer was always no because of the incredible amount of time he'd spent making it—it was unaffordable.

Brown started thinking that if he could produce 10 of these watches, he could then have the cases machined and the dials printed. So he launched a Kickstarter campaign with a goal to raise \$10,000. He raised about \$52,000 and rewarded each of his 82 Kickstarter supporters with a watch pretty much at wholesale price. By the time he launched the Kickstarter campaign, he had all his resources in place. He knew where he was going to source the cases, the movements, and so on. The reward for Brown was seeing it actually happen—"Taking this idea you have for a watch, getting it modeled in clay,

# merican Spirit

pieces Again

getting a mechanical drawing for it, and figuring out how it would actually all go together on your wrist.”

The biggest challenge was sourcing. Brown says, “Sourcing is very difficult for a small producer. If you’re making 10,000 cases, you’re going to have people lining up to do your work, but when you’re running 60 to 80 at a time, you’re just a pain in the rear end to these manufacturers.” Brown says you have to be persistent and make lots of calls; try to get people on board with your goal.

He visited Baselworld and found there were hundreds of companies that could take his watch design and completely produce it in Asia. “But that kind of defeats the purpose of making a watch, figuring it out, and building it here in the US. It was a hard road to take, but it was the authentic road,” he says.

Brown also found people at Baselworld who were instrumental in his learning and development. Watchmaker Daniel Nebel of Nord Zeitmaschine made him-

self available to Brown for technical advice, answering countless questions. Andreas Boesch, who was with Montblanc, introduced Brown to all kinds of people, including Beat Weinmann and Ludwig Oechslin. “It was a community that was very open and accepting of

the fact that I was an American. They thought, ‘What can he do?’ They felt pretty safe to introduce me to anybody.”

The first watch Brown designed and produced for the Kickstarter campaign was the T46. His most popular watch now is the T46 V2 (variant 2), which includes

many improvements to the original T46, such as the movement holder, the gasketing, the crown, and the strap pocket. “There are just a lot of little things that you improve as you go on,” Brown says. This watch is offered in bronze, stainless, and titanium. Bronze is the most popular and the alloy that Brown used when he first designed the T46 watch.

The 1919 Tool Watch is Berkbinder & Brown’s other offering. Brown describes it as an interpretation of



The T46 V2

a pocket watch for your wrist because it is very round and has a big crown. It's available in bronze, stainless, and titanium as well. It's also available in polished titanium and polished bronze. The dial of the Tool Watch bears the date 1919. Since Brown does not have a definite date for when his watch company was founded, he uses 1919, the year of his father's birth.

The style of Berkbinder & Brown's watches is down-to-earth, not blingy. The website, [www.berkbinderandbrown.com](http://www.berkbinderandbrown.com), states, "The ethos of Berkbinder & Brown products is rugged, functional beauty." Prices range from \$1,495 to \$3,495.

An advantage to being in a small shop is that Brown can do small customizations for his clients. On the T46 he can do a dome crystal or a flat crystal. Many people request special engravings. All the case backs are laser engraved, so Brown can do special laser engravings for birthdays, anniversaries, or weddings.

Brown uses the ETA 2824-2 movement for all his watches. When he exhibited at the American Showcase last year at AWCI's convention in Kansas City, he learned of Eterna Movement, who were

exhibiting at the Vendor Fair. Though he likes the Eterna movement, he'll be sticking with the ETA for awhile. Brown says that with Swatch Group cutting back their production and parts for their ETA movements, he decided to buy as many 2824-2s as he possibly could, and so he has quite an inventory he'll be working through for awhile. At some point, though, he will probably need to make a change, and he sees the Eterna movement as a strong substitute.

"I've had a number of requests for a chronograph, and the Eterna movement having the ability to make a chronograph configuration is really nice. And then in terms of decoration, the plate, and the rotor, they offer some really nice things," says Brown.

Brown says that when he exhibited his watches at the American Showcase at AWCI's convention last year, watchmakers at the convention were very generous with their advice and knowledge. They were also very encouraging when they looked at his watches. They'd say, "This is really good. What do you sell your watch for? Oh, you've got to sell it for a lot more. You're doing it right." Brown



The back of the T46 V2

The style of the 1919 Tool watch harkens back to the pocket watch with its spherical shape and big crown.



thinks the American Showcase is a good opportunity for small brands like his, but you have to be willing to network with people. They want to know what you're doing and how you're doing it, so take the time to engage with them.

Brown has some plans to bring more uniqueness to his watches in the near future—decorated metal dials. He's also working on another model for his line of watches, which he plans to introduce this fall.

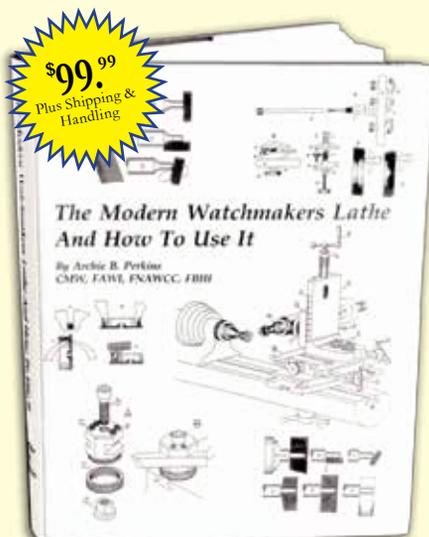


**Berkbinder & Brown participated in the American Showcase at AWCI's convention last year. Brown says he was very encouraged by the comments of the watchmakers he met there. In this photo, Brown talks with Ahmed Asif Ashraf, watchmaking instructor at OSUIT, about his watches.**

Brown says, "What I find so interesting and very reassuring is the number of watch brands that are popping up, which tells me that people are interested in watches. I think there's a resurgence and an interest in wristwatches despite the fact that everybody has a cell phone in their pocket and look at that for the time. They're looking for some kind of statement that they can wear on their wrist."

### ***Berkbinder & Brown sources 50% of its materials in the United States***

- \* Straps are made by Stone Creek Straps in Arizona with leather from the Horween Leather Company in Chicago, Illinois.
- \* Cases and crowns are made by Aztalan Engineering in Wisconsin.
- \* Movement holders are made by Griffin Manufacturing in Illinois.
- \* Most of the watches are assembled by Illinois watchmaker Wesley Grau, whom Brown says has been a tremendous resource.



## **Modern Watchmakers Lathe and How to Use It**

**By Archie Perkins, CMW, FAWI, FNAWCC, FBHI**

A course in watchmaking, clockmaking, and repairing would not be complete without adequate instruction and practice in using the watchmaker's lathe as well as instruction and practice in using saws and files. When restoring antique watches and clocks, the restorer must be skilled in the use of the lathe, saws and files to make and alter parts to fit the mechanisms. Parts are not always available, or available to fit, and must be altered or made from raw materials. This book is intended to teach these skills and to serve as a textbook for schools as well as for students of on-the-job training programs and hobbyists. This book has more than 400 pages with 548 illustrations. These illustrations include 267 photographs and 281 handmade line drawings. All of these illustrations were made by the author. The book also has eleven tables. There are 25 chapters in the book. Two of these chapters are on sawing and filing. Also, there are pages of safety instructions for the use of the lathe, sawing, and filing, as well as electrical safety. Each chapter has a summary, questions about material in the chapter, and a reference guide for further reading.



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