



What does British culture and art mean to you? Perhaps the painted portraits and landscapes of tradition, gold-framed in eminent museums or beautiful age-old mansions whose eccentric inhabitants are the descendants of the faces and views in the pictures, made confident in their quirkiness by their own long lineage. Or maybe it is the vibrant, multi-cultural life of modern artistic London, where creative sparks from across the globe meet, mix and flourish in an atmosphere of endless possibility, from which exciting new musicians, fashion designers, artists and industrial talents continually emerge.

Of course both are right, representing the two sides of a place whose extraordinarily long and rich heritage adds a special spice to the free-thinking ideas that make up the creative buzz of the city today. This unique combination attracts like-minded and innovative spirits, adding further to London's reputation as a powerhouse of cultural and artistic ideas.

So it is hardly surprising that an independent, innovative new watch brand should take London's indomitably cool arts world spirit as its inspiration. Fitzroy has a noble and ancient name yet its approach is thoroughly modern. Every model encloses a good Swiss automatic movement but its quirky, individual, modern and yet classic look is unmistakably British. It has all the heritage and hand-crafted care one would expect of the best-made watches yet this particular quality product transcends old-style age and social divisions and even the gender gap, reflecting a profound change in people's attitudes. Fitzroy is made for the man who dares to be different, who seeks a watch which has lasting and authentic value and which reflects his own personality and interests rather than the uniformity of generic products. It believes that this privilege should be available to anyone who appreciates an interesting watch and enjoys Fitzroy's striking design innovations.

Even the name has a slightly risqué panache that appeals to the brand's individualist clientele. Fitzroy comes originally from old Norman, meaning "son of the king". It was traditionally given to the natural sons of the English kings by their various mistresses and was first used for Henry VIII's son Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond. These sons could not inherit but they often became wealthy and influential and the name still has an aristocratic resonance today. For the Fitzroy brand it reflects the bravado and expansionist confidence of this most famous of English monarchs, who first used the term. The double F logo, in ancient and modern script, captures an appropriate blend of traditional heritage and adventurous modernism.

The Fitzroy range could only have grown out of this uniquely British mix of ancient tradition and adventurous spirit, creating a fascinating contrast between timeless elegance and freethinking modernity. All the watches are a classic round shape, in a slightly elongated, oval case. All are stainless steel, with silver and non-oxidising bronze to come. At 43 mm or 46 mm, they are a bold modern size and yet elegantly streamlined. There are two basic models - a chronograph and an automatic with small seconds dial - but over a hundred variants, so each owner feels his watch is individual to his own personality. And if that is not enough, special customisation will be possible in areas like hands, sub-dials and crowns. Under the brand name, the range will grow into a collection of accessories which will offer an accompaniment to a design-driven life with both style and substance. Already, each watch comes in a stylish black leather carrying case lined in purple Alcantara - a multifunctional item which reflects Fitzroy's commitment to making useful products of lasting value.

Fitzroy watches have a myriad personalities of their own. Some are elegantly traditional; others, with an off-centre double stripe down strap or bracelet, reminiscent of vintage racing car livery, have an effortlessly sporty appeal. A plain steel model with a white dial and black hands and numbers, on a bracelet or a black leather strap, is the most classic. But even here the brand's innovative approach shows through in the signature, modern geometric figures alternating with baton indices. And every model has a specially-invented strap-change mechanism for an easy swap over from leather to fabric or bracelet. Other materials are more innovative, and the colour which helps define the brand sneaks in - black steel as a case or a whole bracelet, Fitzroy's signature green anodised aluminium used on pushers or bracelet stripes.

Fitzroy's customer wears colour confidently. A regal purple and that soft moss green are the chosen shades, in various combinations of hands and logo on black or white dials, or on straps with contrast stitching or stripes. There are also more traditional crocodile-effect, wildlife-friendly leather straps (respecting the environment is an essential brand value), at first in black or brown but also leading this primarily masculine brand into a new area, with unquestionably feminine shades of white and denim blue. There are also delicious sprinklings of diamonds - as a subtle bezel ring, with a few more stones on the dial or the full pavé case works. If the Fitzroy man has confidence in his individuality and style, the woman who dares to wear the brand is at least his match. Fitzroy may have its roots in history and tradition but it looks set for a bright future in today's modern world.