Chapter 1

Chapter 1: The Drawer Full of Expensive Doubts

Pull out the drawer. Not the one with socks. The one with the watches.

There are probably three, four, maybe five of them. Each cost more than a good suit. Each was chosen with care, after reading, comparing and asking around. And yet, when you pick one up on a weekday morning, a small doubt comes with it. *Did I pay too much for this? Does it look right on me? Would a man who really knows watches respect it?*

That doubt is the subject of this book. It does not mean you lack taste. You have taste, and a good jacket to prove it. What you lack is a **criterion**, a way of judging the object in your hand that holds up at any counter, at any price. This chapter shows why that gap exists and what closing it feels like.

Why Men with Good Taste Still Buy the Wrong Watch

Taste and judgment are different skills. Taste tells you what you like. Judgment tells you whether the thing you like is well made, fairly priced and right for your body. Most men over forty have plenty of the first and very little training in the second.

On the WatchUSeek forum, one buyer had set his heart on a used Rolex Explorer II "Polar." He had dismissed Tudor, Rolex's sister brand, as a lesser name. Then he handled a range of new Tudors in person. He found the quality and workmanship on par with Rolex and admitted, in a thread titled "How did I get it so wrong on Tudor?!?!?", that he had misjudged the brand. His taste had not failed him. His information had. He was judging a logo from a distance instead of a watch at arm's length.

I know this pattern from my own drawer. At forty I bought a 44mm chronograph because it looked commanding in the case. At home it slid off my wrist bone every time I reached for a coffee cup. My wife called it "the hubcap," and she was right. It went back in the drawer and stayed there.

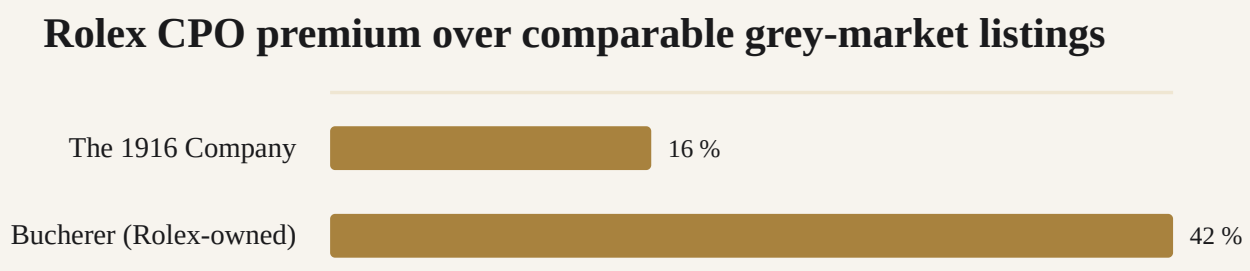
The Three Regrets Every Drawer Holds: Overpaid, Mis-sized, Mis-read

When I go through a man's watches with him, the doubts almost always sort into three piles.

Overpaid

This is the most common regret and the hardest to see, because the receipt looks normal. List prices at the top of the market move every year. On January 1, 2026, Rolex raised its prices worldwide for the seventh year in a row. US increases ran from about 4% to 9% over December 2025 pricing[7]. Gold models then took a second rise on June 1, 2026, of about 5%. Steel, platinum and titanium models were left alone that time[13].

Those are published list prices. The quieter overpayment happens in the channel you choose. Premiums on Rolex Certified Pre-Owned watches, compared with similar grey-market listings, vary enormously by dealer[32].



Rolex CPO premium over comparable grey-market listings

The same certificate, on a comparable watch, can cost you a modest premium or a very large one. That depends on which door you walk through. Chapter 21 takes those doors apart one by one.

Mis-sized

The second pile holds watches that fit the catalog but not the wrist. The number on the spec sheet, case diameter, tells you surprisingly little. Lug-to-lug length (the distance from the tip of the top lugs to the tip of the bottom ones), lug shape and bezel thickness decide how a watch actually wears. A 42mm watch can reach about 54mm lug to lug and overhang a smaller wrist[12].

> **Case:** In the comments on a Substack essay about watch size, a reader with a 6.6-inch wrist worried that a watch measuring 47mm lug to lug would be too big. It fit well. Other readers described returning watches whose lug design made them wear bulkier than the case diameter suggested[18]. Diameter misled both groups, in opposite directions.

Mis-read

The third pile is the most uncomfortable one. It holds watches you misjudged: a fashion brand you took for a watchmaker, a "heritage" name with no living maker behind it, or a pre-owned piece you never had checked. The Tudor buyer above mis-read in the cautious direction. Plenty of men mis-read in the costly one.

> **34%** of all watches submitted to US resale platform Bezel in 2025 were reportedly rejected over counterfeit and authenticity problems, and about **38%** of Rolex submissions[10].

Those were watches that people believed were worth selling. A good share of them were not what their owners thought they were.

Why More Information Has Not Produced Better Judgment

You have never had more access to watch information than you do now. Every reference has a forum thread, every release has a hundred reviews, and every price is one search away. So why do the three piles keep growing?

Because information arrives as a **catalog**, and judgment requires a **criterion**. A catalog lists features: diameter, water resistance, movement name, the story behind the brand. A criterion tells you which of those features matter for *this* watch on *your* wrist at *this* price. It also tells you which ones are decoration.

The industry knows that more choice brings more confusion. Oliver R. Müller, founder of LuxeConsult and advisor to Morgan Stanley's Swiss watch reports, put it plainly:

> *"Brands are a lot more creative than they used to be both in design and mechanical conceptions."*[20]

More creativity is good news for the watch world. For the buyer, it means more variables to weigh and more stories competing for your attention. Reading more reviews rarely resolves that. It usually adds another opinion to the pile.

The forums show the same pattern. On WatchUSeek, a newcomer who owned a fashion-brand Armani and a Casio G-Shock asked what his first "serious" watch should be. The replies were generous and knowledgeable, and they pointed in a dozen directions. Each answer came from someone else's criterion. Without his own, the man asking had no way to choose between them.

That is the trap for a man with money and taste. You can afford almost anything, so the list never narrows. The only thing that narrows it is a standard you carry yourself.

What Changes When You Learn to Judge the Object Instead of the Ad

Here is the single idea this book is built on. I call it the **Object-First Rule**.

> Before the logo, the story or the price tag gets a vote, the watch itself must pass inspection in your hand. A watch that fails the object test is a bad buy at any price. One that passes it deserves consideration at any price.

The ad sells you a feeling, a history, an ambassador and a lifestyle. The object can only show you what is actually there: how the edges were finished, whether the dial and hands agree in proportion, what the case and bracelet are made of, and whether a watchmaker could open it and keep it running for decades. Those four questions become the four checks of Chapter 3. They take about sixty seconds at a counter once you know them.

When you judge the object first, three things change.

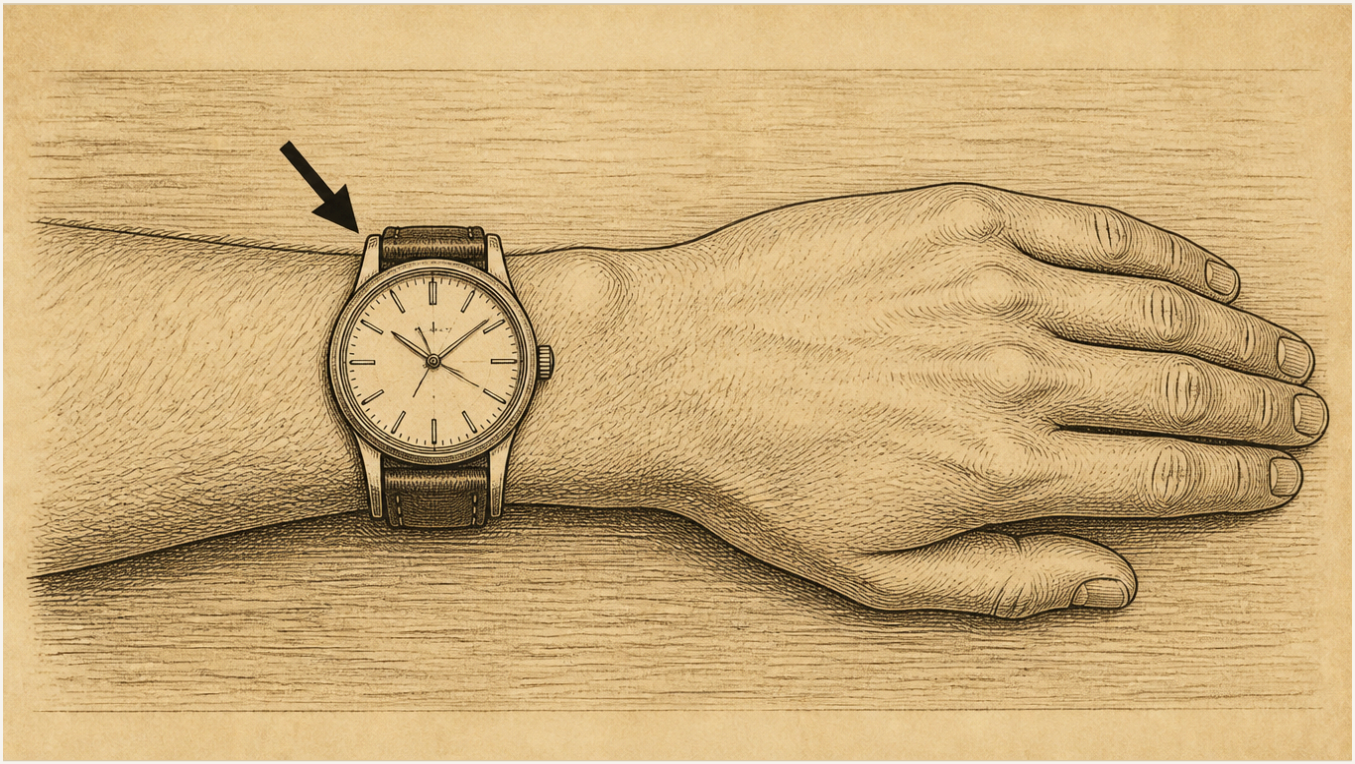
The overpaid pile stops growing. You can see what you are paying for, so you notice when the price carries more marketing than metal.

The mis-sized pile stops growing. You stop trusting the diameter on the tag and start trusting what the lugs do on your wrist.

The mis-read pile shrinks. Logos stop intimidating you. The Tudor buyer's surprise and the fashion-watch owner's confusion both come from judging at a distance. Up close, with a criterion, most watches tell you the truth about themselves.

You do not need to wait for the next purchase to start. The first audit can happen tonight.

- ✓ Lay every watch you own on a table, face up, in good light.
- ✓ Sort them into three piles: **overpaid**, **mis-sized**, **mis-read**. A watch can sit in more than one. Put watches you feel no doubt about in a fourth pile.
- ✓ For each watch in the mis-sized pile, measure lug to lug with a plain ruler, tip to tip across the top and bottom lugs. Write it down.
- ✓ Put each one on your wrist and look straight down. Note whether the lugs extend past the edges of your wrist.
- ✓ Keep the notes. We will return to them in Chapter 25.



Now ask yourself one question, and answer it honestly: *Which watch in that drawer would I buy again today, at today's price, knowing what I know now?* If the answer is "none of them" or "only the cheapest one," good. You now know exactly where your judgment needs to grow.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Sort your doubts before you buy again.** Every regret in your drawer fits one of three piles, overpaid, mis-sized or mis-read, and naming the pile shows you which skill to build.
- **Check the channel, not only the list price.** Premiums on the same kind of certified watch can run from about 16% to about 42% depending on the dealer.
- **Measure lug to lug, not just diameter.** Diameter alone cannot tell you whether a watch will overhang your wrist.
- **Apply the Object-First Rule.** Let the watch pass inspection in your hand before the brand, the story or the price gets a vote.
- **Build a criterion instead of a longer catalog.** Another review adds information. A standard you carry yourself is what improves your judgment.

The difficult part is this. At almost every counter you will visit, the person across the glass already has a criterion. He has opened thousands of cases. He knows which watches pass the object test and which ones only pass the advertisement. So why does so little of that knowledge reach you while you are deciding? And what is he trained to say instead?