

Business Profile

Linton Winder – Watchmaker New Zealand

After many globetrotting years, Linton Winder has finally decided to put down roots in New Zealand and will be opening his first shop in Oamaru on the South Island, later in the year.

Linton was born in 1963, in what he describes as a picture postcard cottage in Chideock, West Dorset – and one of the coldest winters on record, according to his mum.

His dad was an art teacher and he went to Beaminster School in Dorset, one of the country's first purpose-built comprehensive schools. During this time, he says he was interested in all sorts of things but ended up studying environmental science at Southampton University.

'It was the first degree of its kind at the time and looking back I realise that it was way ahead of its time given the environmental crisis the world now faces,' he said.

'When I finished my degree in the mid-1980s my first job was working for British Gas in the 'Office Automation' Department. The objective of the department was to create the paperless office; I think that they must still be working on it!'

However, despite his career path, his underlying love of watches continued to grow. He explained: 'I have always had an interest in watches and proudly own my grandfather's Revue 31 hunter which I remember looking at as a child.

'With my first wages I bought an old Omega watch that I had my eye on for a long time from a junk shop in St Mary's Road. It turned out to be a 15 jewel, manual wind Omega 23.4SC which I still wear to this day. It cost £8 and I took it to a watch repair shop in Bevois Valley, which I am sure disappeared long ago. It was run by two watchmakers (brothers I think) who fixed it for me. They also showed me the watch in a catalogue and their love of horology has always stayed with me.'

It was this experience that inspired Linton to sign up for the BHI Distance Learning Course many years later. He did so at the same time as his friend George Thomas, who pursued the clock pathway; they are now both professional horologists.

Linton adds: 'It took me ten years to complete the course – young children, full time work and moves around the world slowing down progress. I completed some of the course whilst living in Fiji and did my technical drawing exam in the New Zealand High Commissioner's residence. I think I might be the



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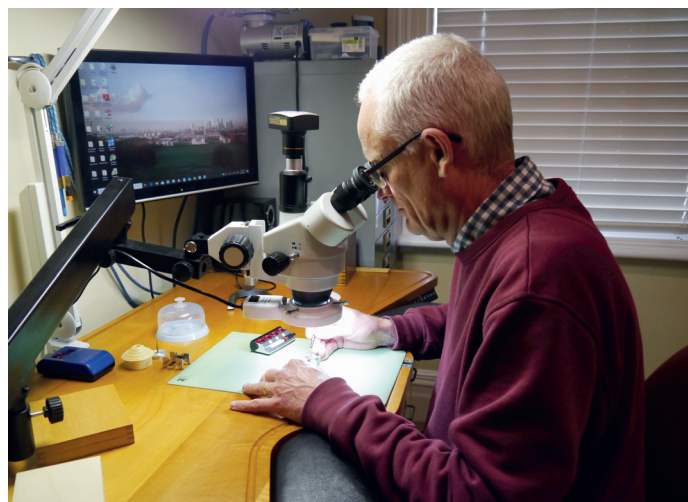
Linton has settled in New Zealand and enjoys the stunning scenery and wildlife.

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Linton says perseverance is essential to complete the course. It's really challenging as it spans theory, history and practical work. I did really well in some parts of the course and not so well in others, mainly due to a busy family life which made finding study time really hard. But I managed to gain a Pass with Merit at the end of the day.'

He added: 'The course was fantastic and I learnt a lot but it would have been impossible to complete without my mentor Rob Reeves. Rob is a Cornwall-based Rolex-accredited watchmaker and has huge knowledge accumulated over a lifetime at the bench. I have learnt all sorts of things from him, especially relating to fault diagnosis, but the most important thing has been his support over the years.'

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Linton will be moving his business into shop premises in Oamaru, on the South Island of New Zealand, later in the year.

Linton has now lived in New Zealand for ten years but says he still regularly Skype's Rob for advice when he gets stuck or has a problem, and he urges anybody who is studying horology to find a mentor.

'It was a game-changer for me,' he said. 'I also got great support from the members of the South West BHI, and especially from Phil Gale.'

Although Linton did some repair work in the UK, he says it is only in the last couple of years that he has finally managed to become a full time watchmaker.

'I am home based at the moment but later this year will be moving into shop premises. My business is based in Oamaru on the South Island of New Zealand.'

Linton describes Oamaru is an 'amazing little town' with some of the finest colonial stone buildings in New Zealand (including an Opera House). It was the centre of production for New Zealand's shipments of frozen meat to Britain which started in 1882. It's also New Zealand's Steampunk capital and was the first landing point of the Terra Nova in 1913 following Scott's

ill-fated expedition to the South Pole. It was from the Oamaru Post Office on 10 February 1913 that a secret coded telegram was sent so sponsors of the Scott Antarctic Expedition would be the first to learn of the deaths of Captain Scott, Dr Edward Wilson, Captain Lawrence Oates, Lieutenant Henry Bowers and Petty Officer Edgar Evans.

Linton adds: 'New Zealand still has a vibrant watchmaking community and the New Zealand Horological Institute is at its core. The NZHI has an annual conference, auction and provides tremendous support for apprentices. Watch repair is changing rapidly in New Zealand – there are lots of professionals retiring and parts restrictions have quite recently been introduced; it is only a year or so now since Swatch restricted access to Omega and ETA material.'

'This is obviously going to be a real challenge for me; Oamaru has a small population of about 13,000 and is an hour or so away from other towns, so investing in the equipment needed to be Swatch accredited is not really economically viable as I will not generate enough business. So I am focusing on vintage work.'

'Paradoxically it is easier for me to find parts for watches from the 1950s than those produced yesterday. The internet is a godsend; I can contact suppliers from around the world and also find material on eBay as well. The fantastic recent articles in TimePiece by Frank and Christian on CNC milling opens up another avenue for sourcing parts.'

Linton says the majority of his work is repairing pocket watches – almost all being family pieces and he receives watches both by mail and by owners visiting his workshop.

'It is a great feeling to give a watch, that has been sitting in a drawer for 50 years, back to a customer. I just wish that I had thought of being a watchmaker when I left school.'

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The 15 jewel, manual wind, Omega 23.4SC, which Linton found in a junk shop for £8, and which he still wears to this day.

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