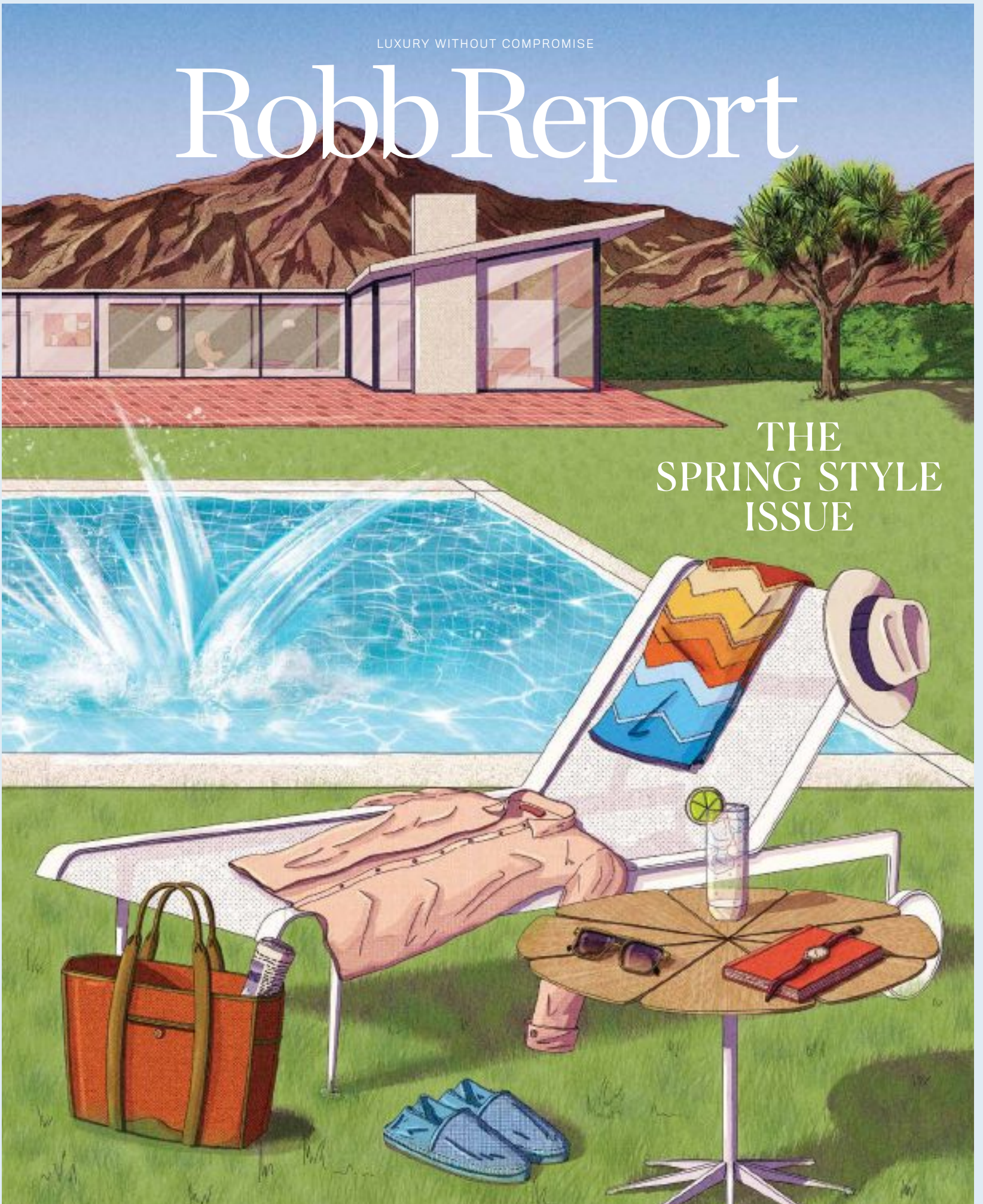


LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

# Robb Report

THE  
SPRING STYLE  
ISSUE



MARCH 2025



# Time Tellers

A New York City gallery focused on artisan-made jewelry will soon debut a collection of vintage watches with fascinating histories.



# THE GOODS

THIS MONTH'S WHO, WHAT, AND WEAR



*These pages, from far left: Omega De Ville Emerald bracelet watch designed by Andrew Grima in sterling silver with a tropical dial; Patek Philippe Golden Ellipse in 18-karat gold; Jaeger-LeCoultre Mystery watch in 18-karat gold and diamonds; Cazzaniga watch in 18-karat gold, diamonds, and sapphires with movement by Piaget; Gilbert Albert watch in platinum, 18-karat gold, and diamonds with movement by Omega. The pieces, made between the 1950s and '70s, all have Swiss-made manual-wind movements.*

# T

There was a period when Mahnaz Ispahani Bartos found it hard to hold on to a watch. The prominent collector and dealer often would post pictures on social media of the uncommon, sculptural timepieces she purchased for herself. But every time, clients of her eponymous jewelry gallery—New York City’s Mahnaz Collection—would hound her into selling them.

“They found those photographs, and they are just diligent in bothering me,” she says with a laugh, adding that some would simply persist until she changed her mind about letting them go.

In response to that demand, this month her Madison Avenue space will begin offering its first formal collection of unique watches, curated with the same rigor and studious eye Ispahani Bartos has applied to sourcing rare jewelry. (Her specialty is the hard-to-find fare made by artists, designers, goldsmiths, and architects.) One coveted example is a gold-and-diamond pendant watch handmade by the late Italian-born avant-garde designer Andrew Grima, whose work was beloved by the British royal family. This example from his historic collaboration with Omega was made in the 1970s. Lesser known but no less noteworthy is the Spanish designer Augustin Julia-Plana, who created a gold-and-jadeite watch for his brand Schlegel & Plana, also in the ’70s. “He was a great jeweler and watch designer,” says Ispahani Bartos of Julia-Plana, who penned striking and visually creative work for everyone from Chopard to Tiffany. “He specialized in really unusual stones,” she adds, noting that he died far too young at age 41.

Ispahani Bartos knows something about legacy. Born in Bangladesh—when it was still called East Pakistan—she grew up in a culture steeped in traditions of wearing and appreciating jewelry. She recalls her grandmother giving her earrings made from yellow gold, turquoise, diamonds, and Burmese rubies at age 7. (Too young to wear them, she put them on her dolls’ ears for safekeeping. Both were lost when her family fled the violence of the country’s 1971 revolution; the ship carrying their belongings, she says, was sunk by an enemy carrier.)

An 18-karat gold and jadeite watch designed by Augustin Julia-Plana, circa 1970

When she was a teenager, her mother gifted her one of Omega’s Grima-designed watches, which she still owns. That early introduction to rare design influenced her own collecting journey, which turned into her full-time job when she opened her gallery in 2013. “I didn’t focus on watches then, but increasingly, where I have an important jewelry collection where the jeweler also made watches, I started to feel like, ‘How can I not have that person’s watches?’” she says.

That comprehensive approach befits Ispahani Bartos’s previous career and intellectual curiosity. After earning a Ph.D. in international relations, she served as a foreign- and security-policy expert for an array of global organizations, including the Ford Foundation and the Council on Foreign Relations.

She still employs the deep preparation she once used in the aid of diplomacy, researching every piece that comes into her hands, creating extensive and beautiful catalogs for the collections, and crafting museum-style exhibitions to present them to collectors. And this work, she says, takes ages. She’ll soon debut an Italian collection whose catalog she has been researching and preparing for nearly a decade, and her vault currently houses some Ettore Sottsass–designed watches she has been holding back for the right moment. “We tend to build collections all the time, collections we don’t show for years,” she says. Which means you never know what pieces might be hiding in the Mahnaz Collection—or the yet-to-be-told stories that may accompany them. **Paige Reddinger**







*From left:* Omega and Andrew Grima Winter Sunset pendant watch in 18-karat yellow gold, smokey quartz, and citrine crystal with Swiss manual-

wind movement, circa 1968; Piaget bracelet watch in 18-karat yellow gold and tiger's eye with Swiss manual-wind movement, circa 1970.