



This vintage Cartier looks like it should cost much more than £2,000

If you want a beautiful vintage Cartier that pushes all the right buttons, the 1980s Santos Galbée really is hard to beat...

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2 January 2021



It often strikes me that in the watchmaking world Cartier is much like a benevolent grandparent, watching the youngsters showing off, confident in the knowledge that they did it first and they did it right. So right, in fact, that some of their designs haven't changed much in over a century and have been copied interminably.



An early gold Cartier Santos from 1912

The most venerable wristwatch design in Cartier's catalogue is, of course, the Santos, still a mainstay of the contemporary collection after its 2018 fettling. The most audacious change to the model came in 1978, when it became the first Cartier watch to be made in – whisper it – stainless steel. All of the maison's previous watches had been precious metal. Even this radical departure kept gold for the bezel and bracelet screws. The Santos Galbée was the first real design refresh, in 1987. And it was here that Cartier achieved perfection. The straight lines of the original became wrist-hugging curves, whether the crystal, the links or the case back (if you chose quartz, that is –but this was the 1980s so of course you did).



The 1987 Santos Galbée

The late 1980s was when the mainstream woke up to luxury, in all its designer-branded, super-modelled glory. Thus when Oliver Stone wanted to portray wealth and power on the wrist of Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street*, there was only one option. He had had him wear a Santos Galbée – in 18-carat gold because in 1987, more was more. The original bicolour configuration was subtle, sporty and, for the time, oh, so sophisticated.

The Santos' centenary update in 2004 made it seem like a big watch, although the width of the Santos 100 XL time-only piece never actually went over 38mm. The most recent iteration comes in at a modest 35mm, but don't be put off by the dimensions of the original Galbée. At 29mm, it might not sound big, but for a rectangular case it is ample and the seamless bracelet integration makes it wear larger than you'd think.



2020 Cartier Santos-Dumont XL, £5,400. [cartier.com](https://www.cartier.com)

If you are looking to track down a Galbée, be choosy. They were produced for a long time in both quartz and automatic movements, so don't accept a battered one. There are plenty around. Staining or discolouration of the dial, chips to the glass or stretch to the bracelet are all reasons to pass. You want one that has been babied, serviced and preferably with box and papers. Expect to pay a little over £2,000 to a dealer for an automatic and a little under that for a quartz.

With the 2018 Santos receiving rave reviews, why should you an older piece? Well, if the Santos still counts as a symbol of taste and refinement, what's wrong with pretending that you have embodied these qualities for a long time – or, indeed, if you are young, that they run in the family?