



KING OF JEWELLERS

From the Emperor Napoleon to Madonna, the House of Cartier has been adorning the great and celebrated since 1847. Frances Chan delves into a treasure trove of exquisite jewellery.

Francesco Escobar © Cartier 2011



The mark of a successful company must be its longevity, and few have equalled the legacy of Cartier – 164 years young and still blazing trails. In the school of luxury goods, Cartier is a multiple high achiever in the upper percentile, not only in jewellery and watches, but also in leather goods, sunglasses, handbags and other accessories.

From King Edward VII and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor to the Maharajah of Patiala, from Grace Kelly to Madonna and Monica Bellucci, Cartier continues to garner celebrity and royal endorsements around the world; a testament to the incomparable quality of the goods it produces.

It all began in 1847, when goldsmith and jeweller Louis-François Cartier took over his master's business in Paris and began making simplified versions of the ornate jewellery of the time. His designs proved to be popular in Parisian society. His first royal patron was Princess

Mathilde, niece of Napoleon I and cousin of Emperor Napoleon III, who made her first purchase from Cartier in 1856. Napoleon III's wife, Empress Eugénie, was also a fan.

In 1888, the House of Cartier created the first-ever jewellery bracelet watch for women and a year later the company moved to the prestigious address of 13 Rue de la Paix in the heart of Paris' luxury retail district, where it remains today. By this stage Louis-François' son, Alfred, was in charge and his sons, Louis, Pierre and Jacques, became a formidable trio in progressing the brand in the new century.

Pierre opened the first Cartier boutique in London in 1902, coinciding with an extraordinary commission from the soon-to-be Queen Alexandra – 27 tiaras for the coronation of Edward VII. Obviously, Cartier didn't disappoint and was rewarded in 1904 with its first royal warrant as official purveyor of jewellery to King Edward VII. When the king proclaimed Cartier as the "Jeweller

Opposite page: Italian actress and model Monica Bellucci for Cartier wears earrings, ring and bracelet in white gold with pink and purple sapphires and brilliant-cut diamonds, from the *Sortilège de Cartier* collection.

Above: Exquisite platinum necklace with one 41.29-carat cabochon-cut carved emerald, one natural pear pearl weighing 9.40 carats, a 4.02-carat rose-cut diamond, six briolette-cut diamonds, onyx, emerald melon-cut beads and brilliants.

Vincent Wulveryck © Cartier 2010



to Kings, King of Jewellers”, it sparked a worldwide trend. A string of royal commissions followed throughout the decade from Spain, Portugal, Russia, Siam, Greece, Serbia, Belgium, Romania, Egypt, Albania, the House of Orleans and Monaco.

Meanwhile, Louis made a breakthrough in watch design when his friend, Brazilian aviator Alberto Santos-Dumont, asked him for a timepiece he could wear while flying and consult without having to take his hands off the controls. Pocket watches were too cumbersome for his liking. Louis created an innovative square-bezel timepiece with leather straps to be worn around the wrist – and in the process changed the face of modern watches forever. The Santos de Cartier watch had rounded corners on its square case, which extended into the curve of the fully incorporated lugs. There was no longer a structural break between the case and attachments; all it needed was a strap.

Cartier’s wristwatch was suddenly a desirable object for men from all walks of life. By 1909 the company had patented the folding buckle for wristwatches. Inspired by the armoured body and caterpillar treads of the first tanks, Cartier introduced the Tank wristwatch in 1917 during World War I to honour the Allied forces. No doubt by then a wristwatch was indispensable for army officers in order to “synchronise watches” for battle. More than a hundred years later, the Santos de Cartier is still an aesthetically modern design and is now available in many variations for men and women.

Another masterful invention during this time was Cartier’s Mystery Clock Model A, said to have been inspired by famous French magician Robert-Houdin. Mystery clocks were also called “impossible” clocks because there was no apparent connection between the mechanism and the hands; the dial was transparent. Mystery clocks were ingeniously carved from one flawless piece of clear rock crystal, which was then halved and hollowed out, and two crystal discs placed inside. The hands were attached to the discs, which were then encased in the rock crystal halves. From the outside the hands appeared to float and move freely around the dial. Mystery clocks were a popular conversation piece up until World War II, when production stopped due to war rationing.

The first half of the 20th century was a golden era for

Cartier, as the company embraced the styles of the Belle Époque and art deco, and exotic influences from India, China and Russia. The three Cartier brothers were keen travellers, and made connections with the right nobility and socialites. Louis’ neo-classical garland style was so named after his delicate latticework and flowers seen in tiaras and brooches set with diamonds and platinum. Before art deco emerged in the 1920s, Cartier was producing deco-style geometric and colourful jewellery in the early 1900s. These bold polygon and lozenge-shaped designs still look modern today.

In 1914, Cartier created the dramatic “panther” pattern on a women’s round wristwatch using diamonds and onyx. The Trinity ring was released in 1924: three entwined bands of white gold, yellow gold and pink gold. When French poet Jean Cocteau wore not one but two on his finger, the ring became an iconic object and cemented its eternal appeal. Thirty years later, when Cocteau was elected to the Académie Française, he designed a surreal academician sword and Cartier produced the reality in gold, silver, emerald, rubies, diamonds, ivory, onyx, enamel and steel. The emerald was a gift from Coco Chanel.

In India the Cartiers were commissioned by royalty who supplied exquisite gems – Kashmiri sapphires, Burmese rubies, Moghul emeralds – to make extravagant pieces. The Maharajah of Patiala’s ceremonial necklace remains a stand-out, comprising five chains of diamonds with a cascade of seven large diamonds in the centre ranging from 18 to 73 carats, culminating with the De Beers diamond, a yellow stone of 234.69 carats. The entire necklace contained 2,930 diamonds. Cartier also made several timepieces for the Maharajah of Kapurthala, who had 250 in his collection.

During the 1930s and 40s, Cartier played a part in one of the world’s greatest love affairs, between Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson, who became the Duke and Duchess of Windsor after Edward’s abdication. Edward’s love affair with Cartier actually began in 1921, when, as Prince of Wales, he appointed the jewellery house as official purveyor. Even before they were married, Edward gave Mrs Simpson a Cartier gold signet ring paved with rubies and sapphires. At their wedding they exchanged Cartier platinum rings and over the



Photos: Nick Walsh, Cartier Collection © Cartier

Top: An artist’s impression of the original Cartier boutique at 13 Rue de la Paix, Paris. Clockwise, from bottom left: Tonneau wristwatch, 1907; enamelled pendant watch on chatelaine showing bucolic scenes and young woman; Santos Wristwatch, 1915; the ceremonial necklace of Maharajah Sir Bhupindar Singh of Patiala, 1874; Cartier wins the seal of approval from Buckingham Palace, 1904.





years Cartier created numerous bespoke pieces, including earrings, bracelets, brooches, cigarette cases, pillow boxes and even a gold lorgnette (eyeglasses) with a tiger handle. The famous WE brooch was designed by the Duke, a play on the word “we” but also signifying the letters of their first names. The Duchess particularly favoured jewels made in the shape of animals – birds, a pug, a duck, a panther – which were superbly designed by Cartier’s head of haute joaillerie, Jeanne Toussaint.

Toussaint was a true artist with an eccentric and extravagant style, who earned the nickname “the Panther” when she pioneered Cartier’s Panthère range of jewellery. The panther motif appeared luxuriously in diamonds, gold, onyx and enamel, embedded with gemstones. Animals, flora and the chimera were Toussaint’s signature work, so profoundly admired and influential that the French government awarded her the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour in 1955.

Of note, in a case of art imitating life imitating art, the 2011 film *W.E.*, about the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, written and directed by Madonna, features faithful reproductions of the Duchess’ jewellery, supplied by Cartier.

Embodying the poise of a princess and the glamour of a movie star, Grace Kelly also adopted Cartier jewels for everyday wear and special occasions, starting with a Cartier emerald-cut diamond and platinum ring from Prince Rainer III of Monaco to announce their engagement in 1956. Princess Grace owned different animal brooches, including a chicken and several birds, but her favourite was a poodle made from 270 diamonds set in platinum, which famously adorned her Mondrian dress by Yves Saint Laurent.

The love stories continued for Cartier into the 1970s, boosted by the sale of a 69.42 carat pear-shaped diamond to actor Richard Burton in 1969 for US\$1.1 million. He gave it to Elizabeth Taylor and she debuted the jewel on a necklace at Princess Grace’s 40th birthday party in Monaco. Thus, the Cartier Diamond was renamed the Taylor-Burton. In 1970 Cartier released the Love bracelet in yellow gold, worn close to the wrist and which could only be opened with a tiny gold screwdriver. Naturally, Burton and Taylor wore them, as well as Steve McQueen and Ali MacGraw, and Sophia Loren and Carlo Ponti. High-profile couples today also sport rings, necklaces, cufflinks and watches from the Love line, one of Cartier’s most successful collections to date. In 2006 the first Love Charity international fundraiser was held through the sale of the specially made Love Charity bracelet, featuring a coloured silk cord and rose gold ring bearing the word “LOVE”.

Cartier has donated millions of dollars to more than 20 global charities through this annual event.

After the death of Pierre Cartier in 1964 the family sold the business and a new era of post-family ownership began. A group of investors bought Cartier Paris in 1972 and president Robert Hocq and general director Alain Dominique Perrin created the concept of Les Must de Cartier to breathe new life into the brand. Its first burgundy leather range was introduced in 1973, followed by silver-gilt vermeil watches, an oval pen, scarves and fragrances. Cartier London and New York were bought back a few years later and all interests were consolidated under Cartier Monde in 1979.

The next decades saw Cartier both revitalised with modern New Jewellery collections, accessories and tableware and revered as a brand with an alluring history. Retrospective exhibitions were staged in Monte Carlo, New York, St Petersburg, Paris, Tokyo, Switzerland and Mexico City. Cartier’s 150th anniversary was celebrated with significant exhibitions at the British Museum in London and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In 1984 Alain Dominique Perrin founded the Cartier Foundation of Contemporary Art to form an association with and support for living artists. It now houses more than 1,000 international artworks in the breathtaking glass and steel building designed by architect Jean Nouvel in Boulevard Raspail.

The beginning of the 21st century has seen more Cartier exhibitions worldwide, more watch and jewellery collections and the creation of a bespoke perfume service. To further cement their influence in today’s culture, the intersection of Cartier’s New York store at 653 Fifth Ave and 52nd Street was officially named Place de Cartier in 2001. The same year Cartier displayed the ceremonial necklace made for the Maharajah of Patiala at the 21st Biennale des Antiquaires in Paris. The necklace had been found in London in 1998, but in very poor condition, and Cartier craftsmen had worked on the piece to restore it to its former glory. Unfortunately, most of the diamonds, including the De Beers and two Burmese rubies, are still to be recovered, so synthetic stones currently take their place.

Today Cartier operates more than 200 stores in 125 countries. It sounds like a cliché to say the Cartier designs are timeless, but they indeed hold a fascination and appeal to every successive generation, regardless of fleeting fashions or economic trends. Classic designs have been revisited and updated for this millennium – and Cartier can still claim to be the king of jewellers. 17

Right: From the Sortilège de Cartier collection, a necklace, earrings and bracelet in platinum with sapphires and brilliant-cut diamonds.

Opposite page from top: Fabulous cats – Panthère de Cartier earrings in platinum with emerald eyes, onyx nose, diamonds; necklace in white gold with emerald eye, diamonds; brooch in white gold with emerald drops, onyx ring, onyx spots and nose, emerald eyes, diamond-paved; wristwatch with panther spot motifs from Cartier Paris, 1914; two favourites of Princess Grace of Monaco – Chicken brooch in embossed gold and platinum with diamonds, mother-of-pearl, pearls, coral and emerald eye; Poodle brooch in platinum and white gold with diamonds, ruby eyes and onyx nose. The tail and one paw are movable.

