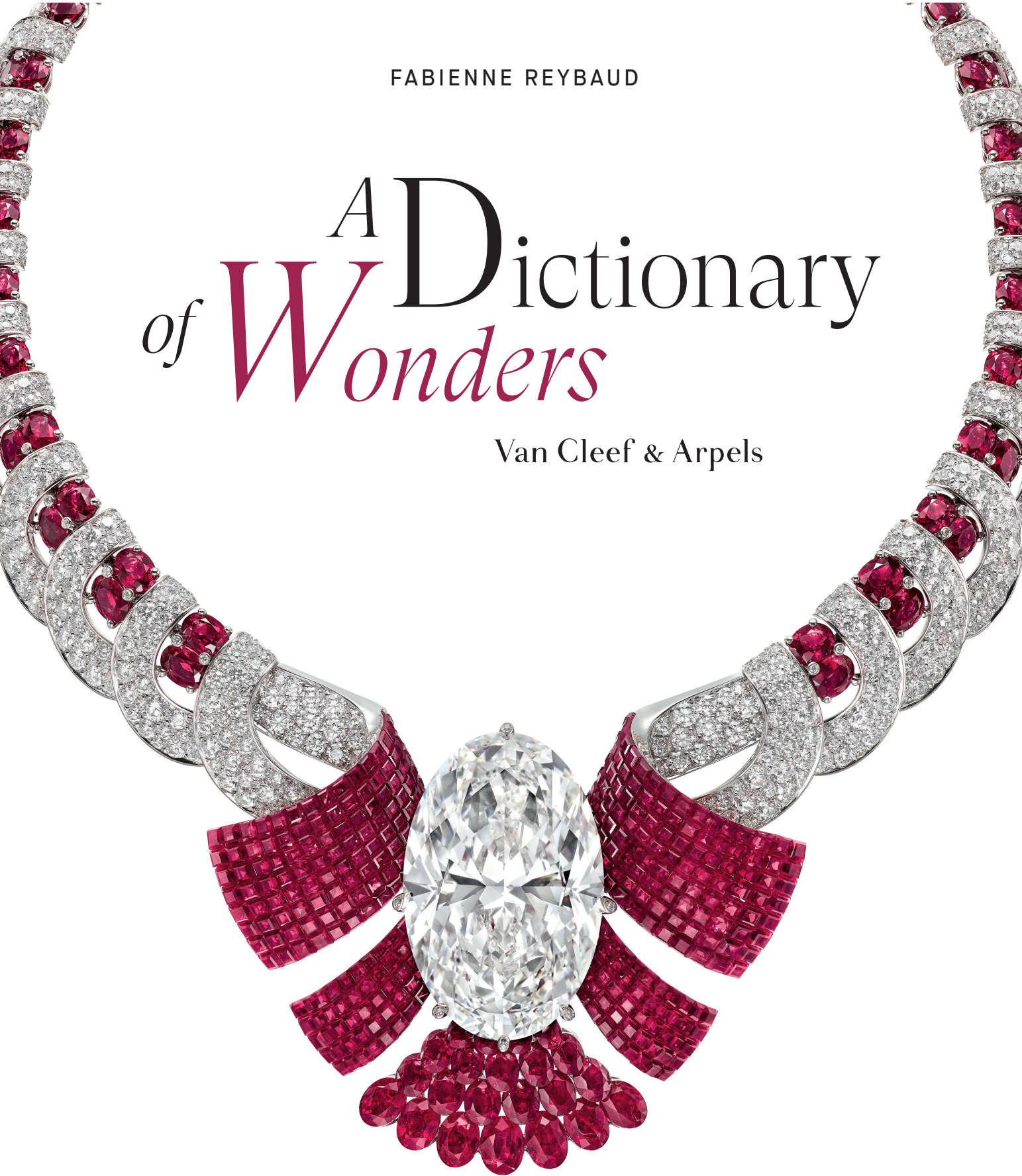


FABIENNE REYBAUD

# A Dictionary *of Wonders*

Van Cleef & Arpels



Flammarion

## FRONT COVER

Atours Mystérieux transformable necklace.  
White gold, rose gold, one oval-cut  
DFL Type 2A diamond of 79.35 carats,  
Individual Mystery Set rubies, Traditional  
Mystery Set rubies, rubies, diamonds.  
Legend of diamonds by Van Cleef & Arpels  
High Jewelry collection.  
Private collection.

## BACK COVER

Daphnis Ballerina clip.  
White gold, rose gold,  
Mystery Set rubies, diamonds.  
Signature collection.  
—  
Seagull brooch, 1926.  
Platinum, quartz, diamonds.  
Van Cleef & Arpels Collection.





A Dictionary  
*of Wonders*

Van Cleef & Arpels

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# *Contents*

7 Introduction

A

11 Affinities in Art  
19 Alhambra  
27 Amorous Encounters  
37 Art Deco

E

115 Elsewhere  
125 Exhibitions

F

133 Fairy Tales  
141 Flowers

B

49 Balancing Act  
53 Ballerinas  
65 Bestiary

H

151 History

C

77 The Collection  
85 Couture

L

159 “la boutique”  
167 L’ÉCOLE, School of Jewelry Arts

D

95 Dance  
105 Diamonds

M

173 Minaudière  
181 Modernism

# N

- 189 Narratives
- 201 Nature
- 211 New York

# O

- 221 Extraordinary Objects

# P

- 229 Peau d'Âne
- 237 Pierres de Caractère
- 247 Protective Pieces

# Q

- 255 Quintessence of the 1980s and 1990s



# S

- 265 Savoir-faire
- 273 Secret
- 281 Mystery Set
- 291 The Seventies
- 299 Sous les étoiles
- 309 Style

# T

- 317 Time in Poetry
- 327 Transformation
- 339 Treasure of rubies

# Z

- 349 Zip







RIGHT

Fairy clip, 1943.

Platinum, emeralds, rubies, diamonds.

Van Cleef & Arpels collection.

# Introduction

FABIENNE REYBAUD

A few years ago, when I suggested to Van Cleef & Arpels that I write a book about the Maison, there was already a good deal of literature on the subject. Aside from the many exhibition catalogs, presenting the collections of jewelry, watches, and precious objects, and various historical and thematic tomes, none appeared to embrace Van Cleef & Arpels in its entirety, particularly in its contemporaneity.

Yet in the twenty years since Richemont added this brand to its portfolio, a silent revolution has taken place. Without any fuss or drumrolls, this Maison, founded in 1906, has succeeded, in the space of barely a century, in expressing the quintessence of the French style. It has done so by anchoring its designs in a universe of its own, in which references to couture, nature, fairies, and ballerinas adorned jewelry designs of the highest quality, yet without being known to the wider public.

In the early 2000s, the jeweler's renown, among connoisseurs, was inversely proportional to its potential for development. Richemont's acquisition of Van Cleef & Arpels in 2000 would give the Maison wings, wings that took it into the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, these past two decades, pivotal in the Maison's affirmation of its contemporary identity, hardly featured in publications devoted to it. Yet in this period, a short one in the life of a luxury house, Van Cleef & Arpels has proved

to be a precursor in more ways than one. From 2003 onward, the inventor of the Minaudière introduced the notion of narrative in high jewelry, before the concept of storytelling became commonplace in the luxury sector. By placing its designs within a narrative, the jeweler gave them a poetic dimension, which continues to suffuse the universe of Van Cleef & Arpels today. The narrative conceptualization of this magical world of gold and precious stones extended to the jeweler's timepieces, in 2006, when Van Cleef & Arpels unveiled its first Complications Poétiques watch, which showed the time while telling a story.

The work produced by Van Cleef & Arpels also has an aesthetic coherence, rare in contemporary jewelry, resulting from its extremely sophisticated technical and gemological expertise. It became apparent that, rather than tracing a linear history, an alphabetical inventory would offer the possibility of capturing the singular spirit of this jeweler and revealing its multiple facets.

And so, the Van Cleef & Arpels *Dictionary of Wonders* was born, bringing together thirty-eight tableaux of the past, present, and future of this extraordinary jeweler. This volume invites us to contemplate the Sous les étoiles collection; to catch a glimpse of the Mystery Set; to admire its Savoir-faire; to learn about Modernism and the Quintessence of the 1980s and 1990s; to be transported by Fairy Tales and Pierres de Caractère; and to succumb to the Elsewhere.

















# Affinities in Art



## FACING PAGE

Claude Monet (1840–1926),  
*Massif de Chrysanthèmes*  
(detail), 1897.  
Oil on canvas.  
Private collection.

## ABOVE

Rosing Park clip.  
White gold, pink sapphires,  
tsavorite garnets, diamonds.  
Les Jardins High Jewelry collection.

“Quite apart from its social representation and financial worth, jewelry is truly the stuff of dreams, and for me, it’s an unknown world because I’d never worked with a jeweler before,” said the Argentine playwright Alfredo Arias, who created two scenic designs for Van Cleef & Arpels’ high jewelry collections at the Biennale des Antiquaires in Paris: *Les Voyages Extraordinaires* in 2010 and *Palais de la chance* in 2012. “I like to mix disciplines: art with craft, literature and theater with fine jewels. Jewelry reflects the most intimate and mysterious aspects of a person’s character and sensibility. It mirrors the essence of the soul.”



#### FACING PAGE

Sept Étoiles necklace.  
Platinum, seven cushion-cut  
sapphires totaling  
33.73 carats, diamonds.  
Palais de la chance  
High Jewelry collection.

#### RIGHT

Zodiac Set Aquarius clip.  
White gold, rose gold,  
five-star sapphires totaling  
18.28 carats, Mystery Set  
sapphires, sapphires, black  
lacquer, diamonds.  
Palais de la chance  
High Jewelry collection.

The soul captured by Van Cleef & Arpels since 2000 is deeply infused by the jeweler's collaborations, through the intersection of worlds spanning different forms of artistic expression. "Our work is always open to the world," says Nicolas Bos, president and CEO of the Maison. "It is alert to different lifestyles and to social change, and also to changes in the way clothes and jewelry are worn. Van Cleef & Arpels has always been interested in what is going on in the art world and in artistic creativity in the broad sense of the term."

Dance, literature, art, theater, design, and photography offer a wellspring of inspiration. Disciplines such as these form a community of taste specific to this Maison, which, since 2013, has been headed by a man who began his career at the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain and who makes no secret of his love of the world of culture and the arts. Among many examples, the great stage director Robert Wilson, who designed the presentation of the high jewelry collection Noah's Ark as told by Van Cleef & Arpels in 2016 (*see Bestiary, page 65*); the Japanese artist Mika Ninagawa, whose flower photographs resonated with the jeweled garden created by Van Cleef & Arpels in 2021 in the exhibition *Florae*; and Johanna Grawunder's light installations at the Palazzo Reale in Milan in 2019 for the exhibition *Van Cleef & Arpels: Time, Nature, Love*. Photographers including Valérie Belin have been given carte blanche to express their vision of Alhambra, the Maison's emblematic design.

While the references may not always be direct or even perceptible, they enrich the substance of the Maison. By way of illustration, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, or *Dream of Poliphilus*, a book written by an anonymous author in 1467, which was highly influential in Italy and France in architecture and garden design:



Van Cleef & Arpels drew inspiration from this work to create one of its most memorable high jewelry collections, Les Jardins, in 2008. Similarly, the collection Les Voyages Extraordinaires was inspired by the novels of Jules Verne. The connection between the very feminine world of Van Cleef & Arpels jewelry and the masculine world of Verne's stories may not be an immediately obvious one, yet the universalism of Alfredo Arias's dreamy scenography brought them together. Like Shakespeare or Homer, Verne belongs to a family of storytellers who speak to both men and to women in the same way: even if they have never read the books, they are familiar with the stories. The magical, fantastical aspect of these works resonates with the world of jewelry in general, and with that of this jeweler in particular.

The collaboration between Van Cleef & Arpels and Italian author and jewelry specialist Alba Cappellieri not only led to that renowned exhibition *Time, Nature, Love* at the Palazzo Reale, but also brought a fresh look at the Maison's jewelry designs. Cappellieri envisaged the world of Van Cleef & Arpels through the five values defined by the Italian writer Italo Calvino in his

RIGHT

Pélican clip.

White gold, yellow gold, two cushion-cut purple sapphires of 4.59 carats and 2.67 carats, sapphire cabochons, yellow sapphires, spessartite garnets, diamonds.

Les Voyages Extraordinaires High Jewelry collection.



BELOW

Pavillon d'Or earrings.

White gold, yellow gold, colored sapphires, diamonds.

Les Jardins High Jewelry collection.



*Six Memos for the Next Millennium*: lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, multiplicity. “With over a century of history, Van Cleef & Arpels has learnt to achieve beauty, whether working from the starting point of material, shape, or theme. In particular, by crossing paths with other arts—dance, fashion, or architecture, for example—it has succeeded in creating major works such as its famous Zip necklace, ballerina clips, and modernist bracelets,” notes Cappellieri.

Dance remains the principal discipline that has inspired the jeweler’s designs since the early 1940s (*see* *Ballerinas*, *page 53* and *Dance*, *page 95*), as the choreographer Benjamin Millepied observes: “When I started to develop a relationship with Van Cleef & Arpels, I discovered that the Maison and its history had much in common with my own profession. In jewelry, as in dance, a mastery of movement, a quest for perfection in the physical craft, the notion of special knowledge and skills and their transmission, are fundamental.”

One of the main purposes of these artistic affinities is to link the history of Van Cleef & Arpels with the greater history of the world. “It might seem ambitious but a characteristic of our collections is that they touch each person, whatever their origins,” explains Nicolas Bos. “We want our designs to sit within a broader artistic history from which we can draw inspiration on a deep level. Beyond the framework this gives us, it reflects the identity of the Maison. These collaborations and interdisciplinary encounters are always a rich source of inspiration. They stimulate our creativity and create bridges between different art forms.”





**ABOVE**

Splendeur Africaine necklace.  
White gold, one briolette-cut yellow  
sapphire of 82.68 carats, two  
cabochon-cut star sapphires  
of 7.35 carats and 2.97 carats,

one cabochon-cut pink star  
sapphire of 4.18 carats, colored  
sapphires, emeralds, chrysoprase,  
turquoise, diamonds.  
Les Voyages Extraordinaires  
High Jewelry collection.

Pansy earrings.  
White gold, two oval-cut yellow  
sapphires of 6.71 and 6.08 carats,  
colored sapphires, diamonds.  
Bals de Légende High Jewelry collection.  
Photo by Audrey Corregan.





#### FACING PAGE

Marlins clip.  
White gold, yellow and  
blue sapphires, diamonds.  
Les Voyages Extraordinaires  
High Jewelry collection.  
Van Cleef & Arpels collection.

#### ABOVE

Thenaria necklace.  
White gold, one cushion-cut  
aquamarine of 76 carats,  
aquamarines, pink  
spinel, diamonds.  
Les Voyages Extraordinaires  
High Jewelry collection.





# A *lhambra*



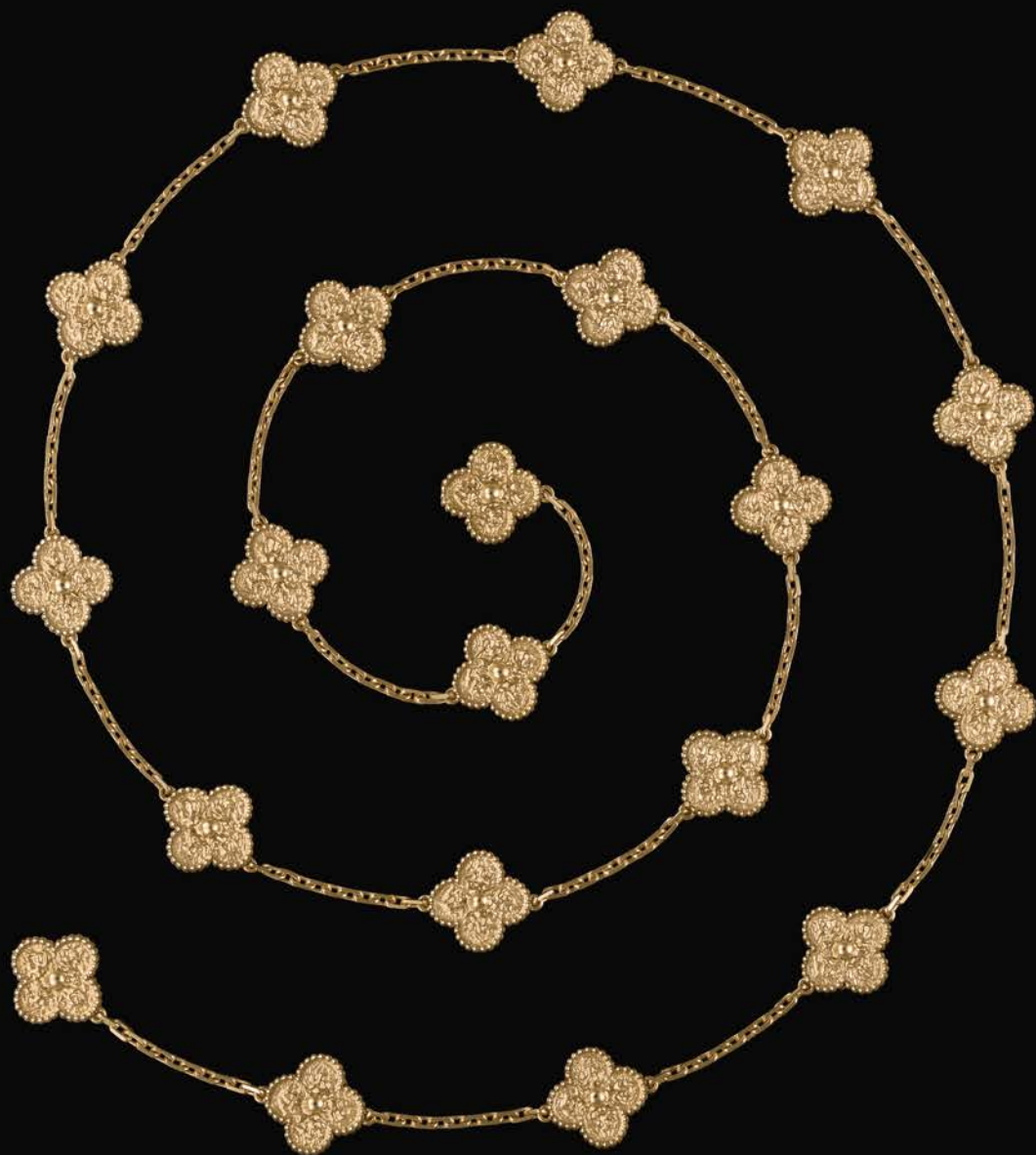
This must be one of the most famous motifs in the history of modern jewelry: it references at once the four-leaf clover and its stylized representation, in the form of a quatrefoil pattern repeated to the point of abstraction. Worn loosely, the sautoir carrying the motif accompanies the movements of the body.

## FACING PAGE

Alhambra long necklace,  
twenty motifs.  
Yellow gold, onyx.  
Alhambra collection.  
Van Cleef & Arpels collection.  
Photo by Valérie Belin, part  
of the *Double Twice* diptych.

## ABOVE

Magic Alhambra bracelet,  
five motifs.  
Yellow gold, white and gray  
mother-of-pearl, onyx.  
Alhambra collection.







FACING PAGE  
Vintage Alhambra  
long necklace, twenty motifs.  
Yellow gold.  
Alhambra collection.

ABOVE  
Vintage Alhambra  
long necklace, twenty motifs.  
Guilloché yellow gold, diamonds.  
Alhambra collection.

Beaded gold surrounds showcase the multicolored ornamental stones in the jeweler's memorable signature style. Above all else, it is a timeless design. Nobody could have predicted that this necklace would meet with such success. When it was created in 1968, this model, more affordable than the high jewelry pieces, resonated with the freedom-loving spirit of the times. Women were shaking off the fetters of social convention and wanted flexible jewelry that moved with them. In Europe, the sautoir with clover-themed motifs quickly became a bestseller. "It became a reference piece in contemporary jewelry," confirms Van Cleef & Arpels.

Yet the famous four-lobed motif could have been abandoned in the early 2000s when the Maison joined the Richemont group. "When we were reworking the Van Cleef & Arpels product offering, we thought about whether to keep the line or not,"

says a former employee. "But this piece had been so popular since its creation that it was unthinkable to stop making it."

Besides, the most striking symbolism of the Alhambra collection—that of a lucky four-leaf clover motif—lies at the heart of Van Cleef & Arpels. There are four-leaf-clover sketches dating back to 1906 in the jeweler's archives, but the first sautoir was created in the year 1968. The original piece was made entirely of crinkled and beaded yellow gold in twenty motifs, each with a small central gold bead. Ornamental stones such as malachite and lapis lazuli only appeared in 1971, onyx in 1972. And what is also beyond doubt is its ability to appeal to every woman: it was as popular with the traditional high jewelry customers as with their daughters. In the Middle East, the Van Cleef & Arpels high jewelry sales staff introduced their wealthy clientele to the Alhambra collection by offering it as a







#### FACING PAGE

Vintage Alhambra long necklace, twenty motifs.  
Yellow gold.

—  
Perlée sweet clovers bracelet.  
Yellow gold, diamonds.

—  
Perlée diamond bracelet,  
three rows.  
Yellow gold, diamonds.

—  
Perlée pearls of gold bracelet.  
Yellow gold.

—  
Perlée diamond ring,  
three rows.  
Yellow gold, diamonds.  
Photo by Erik Madigan Heck.

#### RIGHT

Sweet Alhambra watch.  
Yellow gold,  
malachite, diamonds.  
Alhambra collection.



gift to the young daughters of princesses. “The mother would buy a diamond parure and we would give the child a yellow-gold Alhambra necklace to bring her luck,” remembers a former sales assistant. “This piece also attracted a new clientele looking for more affordable pieces in tune with the times.” The Alhambra collection is, in this respect, the most memorable of the jeweler’s designs. The necklace’s flowing structure, the fact that it carries no visible logo, the way it lies perfectly on the skin or over a garment, make it extremely versatile as a daytime or evening piece. Flame-colored carnelian, bleu agate, turquoise, white mother-of-pearl, brown and gold tiger’s eye, fuchsia Sèvres porcelain, warm letterwood (*amourette*), lavender chalcedony, and more: endless variations on the theme were possible. Several necklaces or bracelets were sometimes worn in combination to set off the stones’ often colorful hues. Its tactile dimension also heightened the talismanic feel of the Alhambra necklace, which continued to win acclaim throughout the 1970s.

Thus, several years before the Place Vendôme jewelry houses began creating designs that broke away from their traditional forms, Van Cleef & Arpels managed to desacralize luxury

without debasing it. The great strength of the Alhambra collection, created the same year that countercultures were making their voices heard (such as May 1968 in France, Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, the hippy trail in Kathmandu in Nepal, and elsewhere), is precisely never to have yielded to these movements, to have stayed in sync with the times yet ever chic and precious, with a dash of cheerful nonchalance.

Through these new ways of wearing jewelry on an everyday basis, Van Cleef & Arpels created connections, if not shared tastes, between such different women as the lanky 1960s singer Françoise Hardy and the fairy-tale princess Grace of Monaco.

Apart from the various materials used, the motif changed little over the next half century. In the 1980s and 1990s a more voluminous, openwork version appeared, and a line of watches in 1998. It wasn’t until the 2000s that rings set in polished, not beaded, gold were launched. In 2006, on the occasion of its centenary, Van Cleef & Arpels brought out new collections, such as Magic Alhambra, with different-sized motifs within the same model, or Lucky Alhambra, which featured other good-luck symbols alongside the famous motif.



#### ABOVE

Magic Alhambra long necklace, sixteen motifs, and Magic Alhambra earrings, two motifs. Yellow gold, carnelian, tiger's eye. Alhambra collection.

#### FACING PAGE

Magic Alhambra long necklace, sixteen motifs, and Magic Alhambra earrings, three motifs. Yellow gold, malachite. Photo by Andrew Yee for "How to Spend It," *Financial Times*, October 14, 2011.







The first piece of jewelry entered in the Van Cleef & Arpels sales ledger, in 1906, was a diamond heart, yet the jeweler did not choose this as the symbol of the Maison, preferring instead the ampersand—“&.” This typographical symbol, invented by Cicero’s scribe, encapsulates the connection and harmony in this coordinating conjunction, transformed into a graceful arabesque. The ampersand links the name of Alfred Van Cleef with that of Estelle Arpels, and associates the jewelry house with the theme of union. The couple’s love led to their marriage, celebrated on June 25, 1895.

# A *morous* *Encounters*



#### FACING PAGE

Jewelry and watch from  
the Perlée collection.  
Rose gold, diamonds.  
Perlée collection.  
Photo by Olivia Bee.

#### RIGHT

Two Birds clip, 1945.  
Yellow gold, rose gold,  
star sapphires, sapphires,  
rubies, diamonds.  
Van Cleef & Arpels collection.







#### FACING PAGE

Ceremony transformable necklace.  
White gold, platinum,  
fourteen emerald-cut emeralds  
totaling 42.02 carats, emeralds,  
mauve sapphires, tsavorite  
garnets, diamonds.  
Romeo & Juliet  
High Jewelry collection.

#### RIGHT

Earrings, 1952.  
Platinum, diamonds.  
From the former collection  
of Princess Fawzia of Egypt.  
Van Cleef & Arpels collection.



Love was the universal concept on which the Maison laid its foundations, the thread woven throughout, starting with the values of the jewelry house: for Van Cleef & Arpels, love stories have happy endings; they are constructive and positive. Jewelry regained one of its basic functions: proving to one's loved one that they are cherished, through the gift of these small precious objects. In materializing the language of love, these tokens of gold and precious stones bestow a sense of eternity to the emotional bond.

With love at its inception, the Maison's reputation grew in collections celebrating love (wedding rings, promise rings, and engagement rings). It was the powerful driving force that inspired Van Cleef & Arpels to create extraordinary jewelry for famous couples, in particular the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. Nicknamed "the Prince Charming of Rue de la Paix" because of his love of gems, the duke decked in jewelry the woman for whom he had given up the British throne, Wallis Simpson. From 1935 onward, the Duke of Windsor commissioned pieces from Van Cleef & Arpels, and had inscriptions engraved on the clasps: a 1936 ruby and diamond wave bracelet carried the inscription "*A boy loves a girl more and more and more. Hold Tight. 27.III.36.*" It came with a wonderful draped necklace in rubies and diamonds dedicated to "*My Wallis from her David,*" David being the duke's first name.

Van Cleef & Arpels was also witness to the love affairs of the shah of Iran. The shah presented his second wife, Soraya Esfandary-Bakhtiary, with earrings, a gold cord necklace, a bird

clip, and the Mimosa clip and earrings made by the French jeweler. But it was the Persian sovereign's third wife, Farah Diba, who wore one of the jeweler's most spectacular creations: the crown encrusted with diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, including two carved 60- and 150-carat specimens, and the amazing emerald necklace that the future shahbanu wore in 1967 when she became empress consort of Iran.

A decade earlier, Van Cleef & Arpels had received the great honor of being selected to make Princess Grace of Monaco's *corbeille de mariage* or "wedding basket" of gifts, including a diamond and pearl parure, a personal gift from Prince Rainier, and a five-row diamond bracelet from the Conseil National et Municipal of the principality. On numerous occasions the jeweler also supplied Richard Burton with jewelry to convey his passion for his wife, Elizabeth Taylor. The Hollywood star's jewelry box notably contained "the most beautiful ruby in the world," an 8.24-carat stone of a perfect red color, set in a ring that Burton purchased from Van Cleef & Arpels in 1968.



**T**his book in the form of an alphabetical lexicon explores the themes and codes of the celebrated jewelry house Van Cleef & Arpels: from the Maison's historic pieces to its iconic creations, from pioneering jewelry and watchmaking techniques to the singular craftsmanship behind the contemporary high jewelry collections, and from artistic collaborations to the Maison's influential patronage of the arts. Fabienne Reybaud's lively text ushers readers into a fairy-tale world whose poetry and magic continue to inspire, and whose capacity for invention is irrepressible. The beautiful photographs in this timeless volume reveal the dreamlike, miniature worlds conjured in gold and precious stones. These masterpieces have forged the identity and the global renown of Van Cleef & Arpels.

**Fabienne Reybaud** is a journalist and editor specialized in the luxury sector, notably in jewelry and watchmaking. She writes for the most prestigious French publications and has published more than ten books, including *Jewelry Guide: The Ultimate Compendium* (2022), *Louis Vuitton Tambour* (2022), *Effortless Style: Casa Lopez with Pierre Sauvage* (2018), *Rolex: The Impossible Collection* (2018), *Watches: The Ultimate Guide* (2006/2010), and *100 Montres de Légende* with Frédéric Ramade (1999).



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