A woman with dark hair, wearing a purple sari with a gold border, is the central figure. She is adorned with a multi-strand pearl necklace and a large, ornate necklace featuring red gemstones (likely rubies) set in gold with diamonds. Her hands are resting in her lap, and she is wearing a ring with a large pearl. The background is a plain, light color.

Vincent
Meylan

Treasures and legends
Van Cleef & Arpels

éditions
TÉLÉMAQUE

TREASURES
AND LEGENDS

Van Cleef & Arpels

Cover

Front: the Maharani of Baroda in the 1940s. Private collection.

Medallion necklace in cabochon rubies and diamonds,
Van Cleef & Arpels. Zandrini Collection.

Back: clip in Mystery Set rubies and diamonds, Van Cleef & Arpels,
Private collection.

Graphic design: WaDe

Translated from the French by Barbara Mellor

Copyediting: Helen Woodhall

Proofreading: JMS Books LLP

Production: Dorothée Xainte

Color separations: IGS-CP, l'Isle d'Espagnac (France)

© Éditions SW Télémaque, 2012

7, rue Pérignon, 75015 Paris

www.editionstelemaque.com

ISBN: 978-2-7533-0173-3

Dépôt légal: February 2013

Printed in Italy

Vincent Meylan

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Gold Gotha

Paris, avenue Foch, October 3, 1966

The invitation stipulated “black tie.” Gathered round the dinner table was the crème de la crème of Paris high society. Presiding over the company, seated opposite the hostess, was the Duke of Windsor. On the right of the host, one of the city’s most successful lawyers, sat the duchess, and on his left the Maharani of Baroda. For obscure reasons concerning matters of precedence and a longstanding falling-out over a piece of jewelry (because, it was said, a jeweler had bought it from one of them and sold it to the other), the two women detested each other. Aristotle Onassis, the Greek millionaire who lived in the top two floors of the building when he was in Paris, had come as a neighbor. Maria Callas, the celebrated diva, had made her excuses, on the other hand. Her romance with Onassis was flagging; he had been unfaithful to her for years and was very likely about to leave her—at least that was what everyone had been secretly saying for weeks now.

The menu, carefully noted down by the hostess in her guest book,* was worthy of a five-star restaurant: *consommé aux perles de la Volga, turbot braisé au champagne, riz créole, agneau de lait à la broche, bouquetière de légumes, chester cake, bavarois arlequin, fraises au sucre*. The wines were of a quality to match: Dom Pérignon 1949, Château Talbot Magnum 1945, Château Lafaurie-Peyragay 1937. The setting was refined and the company select. The guests all moved in the same

Preceding pages

Coronation, Tehran, 1967. Van Cleef & Arpels were responsible for making not just the jewels of the Empress Farah, but also those of the princesses.

From left to right: Ashraf and Shams, sisters of the shah, and Shahnaz, the eldest daughter of the shah. Wearing a white dress with a small crown of diamonds, Princess Farahnaz, aged 5 years.

Opposite

Diamond necklace, set with seven cushion-cut Kashmir sapphires, Van Cleef & Arpels Collection, 2012.

circles, and were consummately au fait with the manners and mores of this urbane world that they had inhabited since the end of the war.

Admittedly “society,” as it was still then known, was by now a more mixed affair than it had been. Gigolos who had made good, femmes fatales with colorful pedigrees, captains of industry of dubious principles—all were now granted an entrée. It was all much more fun and less stuffy. But the dress code was still strictly observed. No gentleman would think of sitting down to dinner in anything less than a dinner jacket. And ladies always, but always, wore long. The ladies around the table that evening also boasted impeccable coiffures. Every one of them had had her hair dressed by Alexandre de Paris, who had swept it up into one of his trademark bouffant chignons. This was not an era that could ever be accused of being afraid of luxury. It had to be discreet and in the best of taste, naturally, but luxury was nonetheless de rigueur. The Duchess of Windsor, the Maharani of Baroda, Lady Deterding, Mme. Patino, and Florence Gould were all decked out in sumptuous jewels. Can it have been coincidence that they all came from the same jeweler: Van Cleef & Arpels?

The Maison at 22 place Vendôme was one of the links connecting the members of this glittering society, of whom José Luis Vilallonga penned a dashing portrait in his book *Gold Gotha*. Within its portals, nouveaux riches could rub shoulders with some of the world’s most venerable titles, creating one of those tableaux of scintillating glamour of which Paris has always held the secret. Created at the beginning of the twentieth century, Van Cleef & Arpels was not merely a purveyor of jewels to these men and women who possessed—and who still possess—colossal fortunes, but also their confidant. Only they knew for whom Onassis bought that ruby and diamond clip; the origins of the magnificent stone set in the Duchess of Windsor’s bracelet or the Maharani of Baroda’s necklace; or the identity of the princess, impoverished by war or revolution, who had come to sell her imperial or royal jewels in secrecy.

These are some of the secrets that are revealed in this book. Through the fabled jewelry created in the Paris workshops of Van Cleef & Arpels, it tells the behind-the-scenes stories of—among many others—the marriages of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and of King Leopold III and Princess Lilian of Réthy; the passionate and sometimes doomed love affairs of Elizabeth Taylor, Maria Callas, and Marlene Dietrich; and the coronation of Empress Farah of Iran in 1967.

It also tells the sometimes troubled story of a dynasty of jewelers, of gifted men and women who for over a century have helped to shape that inimitably Parisian *art de vivre* that is the envy of the world. Today Van Cleef & Arpels is part of a multinational group, but the Maison has retained its identity, its spirit, and its taste, the legacy of the Van Cleefs, the Arpels, and all the remarkable skilled artisans known as “les mains d’or” who have worked, and who continue to work, in the workshops at 22 place Vendôme.

* This dinner, discovered by the author in the hostess’s guest book, is no figment of his imagination.

*For Stéphane Watelet,
because I'm very lucky to have such an editor.*

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CHAPTER I

THE
GODDESS

WITH A PASSION FOR DIAMONDS

Opposite

The Maharani of Baroda at home in Paris in 1961. The bird that she holds to her lips is

in fact a gold and enamel flask containing a precious elixir concocted from deer's blood and crushed pearls.





39, BOULEVARD COMMANDANT CHARCOT,
NEUILLY
PARIS

Sita Devi

MAHARANI OF BARODA

Baroda, one evening in June 1949

The motorcars had drawn to a halt on the tarmac, beside the Dakota that had been waiting discreetly for two days at the far end of Baroda airport's only runway. From them, turbaned servants had extracted a succession of heavy trunks and suitcases, before stowing them one by one in the cabin of the aircraft. The American pilot was fully aware of the nature of the mission with which he was being entrusted. Two years earlier, he had bought this aircraft from British army surplus. A few modifications had sufficed to allow him to carry either passengers or merchandise, with no questions asked. It was the cardinal rule of the job.

Two years after the declaration of Indian Independence, on August 15, 1947, the maharajas were starting to take precautionary measures. The solemn procession through the streets of Delhi on that day; the cheers for Lord and Lady Mountbatten, the last Viceroy and Vicereine who had given freedom to 300 million Indians; the atmosphere of celebration and jubilation—it had all left them with few illusions. Europe was emerging from the war in tatters. The empire of Victoria, Empress of India, had had its day. Liberated from British rule, India was about to free itself from its past, which in some regions meant casting off the shackles of poverty, famine, and living conditions that were positively medieval.

Opposite

The Maharani of Baroda in the late 1940s, wearing her magnificent three-strand pearl necklace.

Above

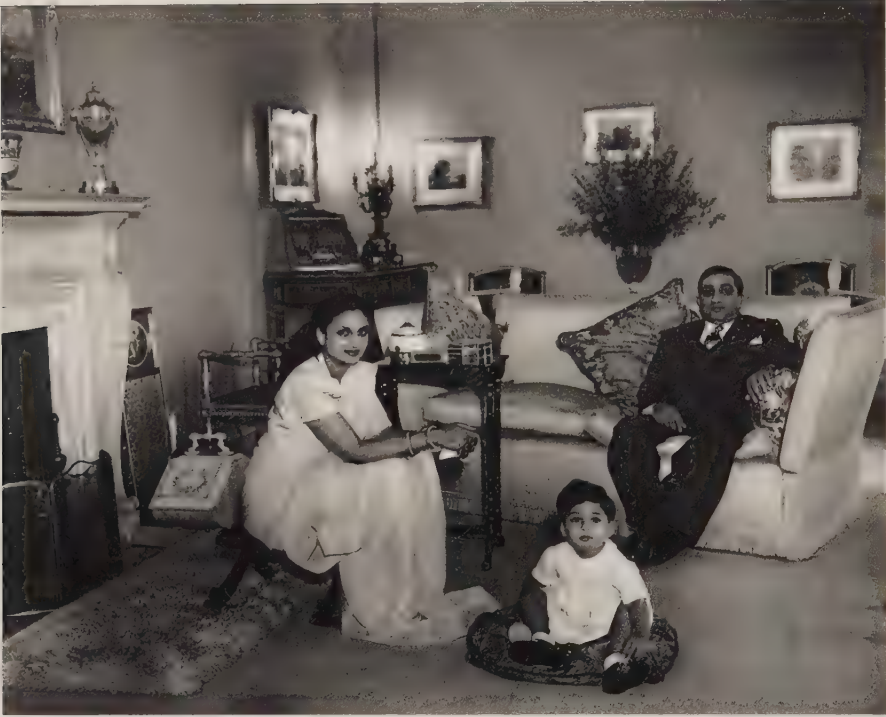
The Maharani of Baroda's letterhead, bearing her Neuilly address.

**Above**

The ruby and diamond necklace
the maharani brought to Van Cleef
& Arpels in September 1952
The two central rubies weigh
10 and 25 carats

**Above**

The new ruby and diamond necklace created by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1952. It was sold at auction by the Crédit Municipal de Monte-Carlo in 1974

**Above**

The Maharaja and Maharani of Baroda with their son Prince in the late 1940s.

Opposite

Lakshmi Vilas Palace in Baroda, still the residence of the Maharajas of Baroda.

Independence spelled the end of the Raj, and above all the end of its privileges. And first and foremost among these were the privileges of its former princes. It counted for little that the states over which they ruled, making up a good third of India, were among the most modern in the whole country, or that some of the princes were adored by their subjects. Their reputation as fabulously rich and extravagant spendthrifts was legendary. They were therefore the perfect scapegoats for the great change for which Indian society was poised.

For the vast majority of the 550 maharajas, rajahs, and nawabs who made up the rulers of these princely states, daily life would not be radically altered. Some of these “kingdoms” covered barely a hundred hectares, and their princes lived no more extravagantly than their farmers. But for the wealthiest among them—some fifty princes including the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Maharajas of Baroda, Kashmir, Gwalior, and Jaipur, several of whom ruled over millions of subjects—the Twilight of the Gods was looming perilously close.





During the months leading up to Independence, Lord Mountbatten had lavished all his skills of diplomacy and duplicity upon them, in order to persuade them to allow the peaceful merging of their states within one of the two new nations created by the British withdrawal. Their last act as sovereign rulers had been to choose between India or Pakistan.

The young republic had granted them a few baubles: the right to keep their titles, the privilege of flying a heraldic pennant on their cars, and a civil list equivalent to barely a tenth of their former income. But as the period of transition for the transfer of power drew to a close, relations between the former princes and the officialdom of the new republic began to show the strain.

In Baroda, for instance, officials from the Ministry of Finance had examined the treasury accounts. One of their first decisions had been to order the maharaja to return advances paid to him a year earlier, for a trip to America during which he had spent over \$10 million. With all due respect, they had indicated to His Highness that the income of Baroda was no longer at his disposal, as it formerly had been. Under duress, he was forced to pay up. It was at this point that it dawned fully on Pratap Singh Gaekwad, Maharaja of Baroda, that the golden age was well and truly over.

Since the beginning of the year the country had been rife with rumors of the wildest kind—especially in the airports, where aircraft were taking off for secret destinations. The pilots passed on the scraps of information, true or false, that they picked up on their missions. At Hyderabad, the Nizam—believed to be the richest man in the world—was rumored to have sent abroad eighty barrels of gold and jewels, which had been loaded onto an old Russian air force Tupolev under cover of darkness. In Kerala, the royal family of Travancore was said to have hidden its fabulous treasure in the sealed-off cellars of a temple.¹

In Jaipur, it was said, the maharaja had emptied the strong rooms of Jaigarh Fort, which dominated the Pink City. It was here that the spoils of war amassed by his ancestors had been kept for centuries, guarded by a ferocious tribe of Rajputi warriors. Through underground tunnels bored through the mountains, solid gold bars, coins, jewels, and unmounted stones had been transported to the ancient royal city of Amber. There, as though in a fairytale, the treasure had simply vanished. Preparations were now under way to send the jewels of the Maharaja of Baroda, the second wealthiest prince in India, in the same mysterious direction.

Opposite

The fabulous three-strand pearl necklace of the Maharani of Baroda. The clasp was refashioned several times

by Van Cleef & Arpels. Here it is composed of a large oval diamond of some 20 carats, baguette-cut diamonds, and six oval rubies.

In any case, who could now wear these jewels from another age? These turban ornaments, diamond belts, and heavy necklaces weighed down with precious stones? The age of warfare, of bloody combats between elephants caparisoned in gold, of sumptuous receptions and Durbars, of all the traditional ceremonial occasions, was over. In Baroda, the last such event had taken place just a year earlier, at the Lakshmi Vilas Palace, in celebration of the maharaja's fortieth birthday.

Seated on his gilded throne, or *gadh*, under a scarlet velvet canopy fringed with gold, decked out in his necklace of seven rows of enormous pearls and with his eldest son festooned with diamonds to his right, Pratap Singh Gekwad, eleventh Maharaja of Baroda, had received the homage and tributes of his vassals. He had listened as his prime minister read out the list of decorations to be bestowed upon his most deserving subjects. He had admired the dances performed in his honor. He had savored the intoxicating perfume of the adoration of his people. All for the last time.

All that was now in the past. The palaces, far too large, would one day disappear—a fate that was not to include Lakshmi Vilas, as large as Buckingham Palace. The civil lists might be abolished. Only the jewels were left, the sole chink of light in a future of otherwise unrelieved darkness. And in the face of the increasingly obvious avidity of government officials, they had to be concealed with all speed.

Standing a little distance from the aircraft, the pilot observed the scene with a keen interest that contained a hint of covetousness. There was no doubt in his mind that the chests were filled with gold, jewels, and precious stones. He had been a little surprised as he watched the servants stowing on board what appeared to be heavy carpets wrapped in unbleached cotton covers. But the whims of an oriental potentate were hardly his concern. And how could he possibly have imagined that those carpets were made up of million upon million of pearls and gemstones?

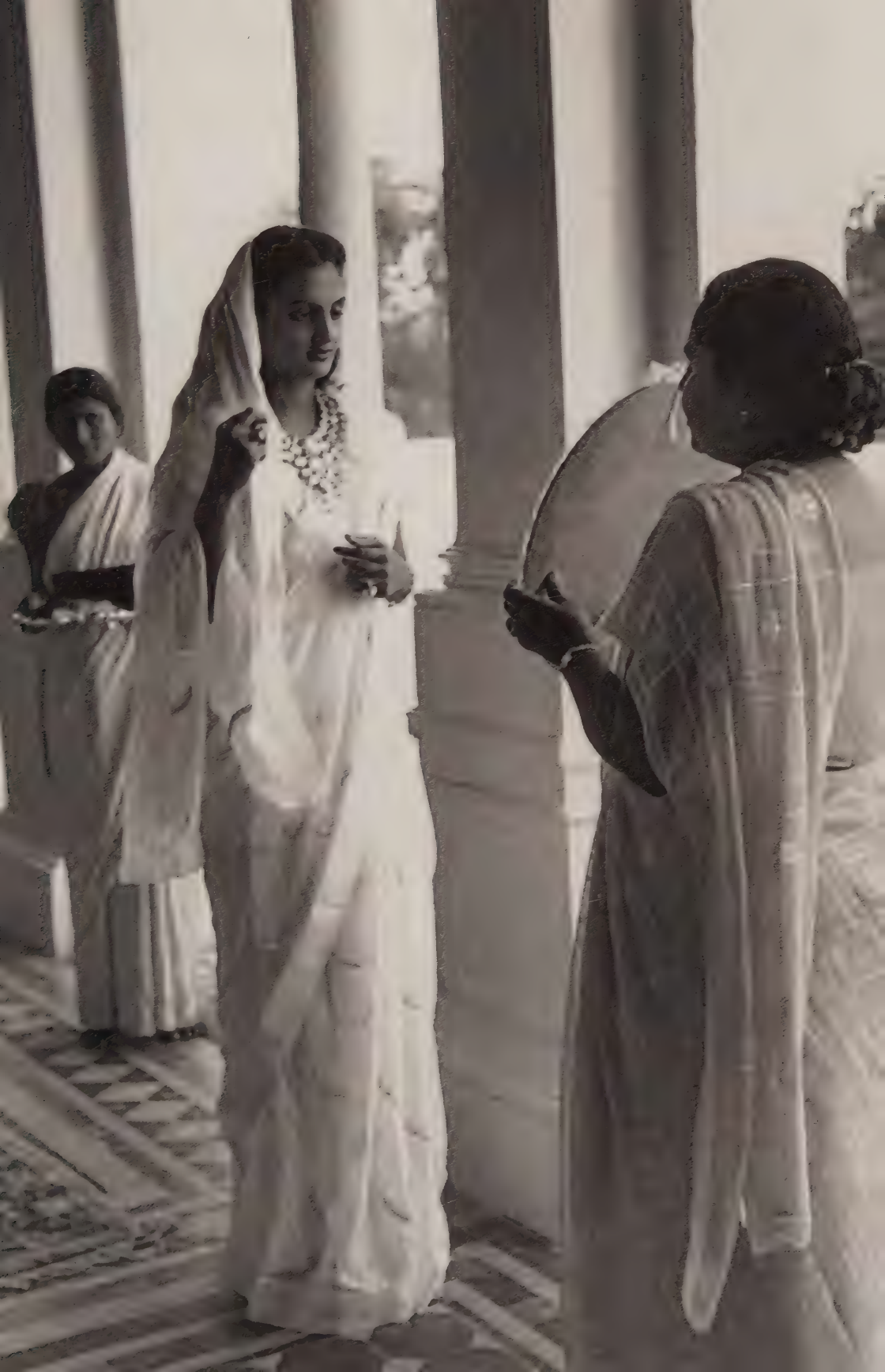
Perhaps this surprising mission was a sign that the luck that had so far eluded him all his life was tipping him the wink at last. Perhaps this was his opportunity to secure his future for the rest of his days. He had accepted the comfortable sum that had been offered to him, but once they were in the air, what was there to stop him from renegotiating his terms? Given the value of the cargo and the interest it could hardly fail to attract from the Indian authorities if he should happen to land in Delhi rather than going on to Europe, he held all the cards in his hand.

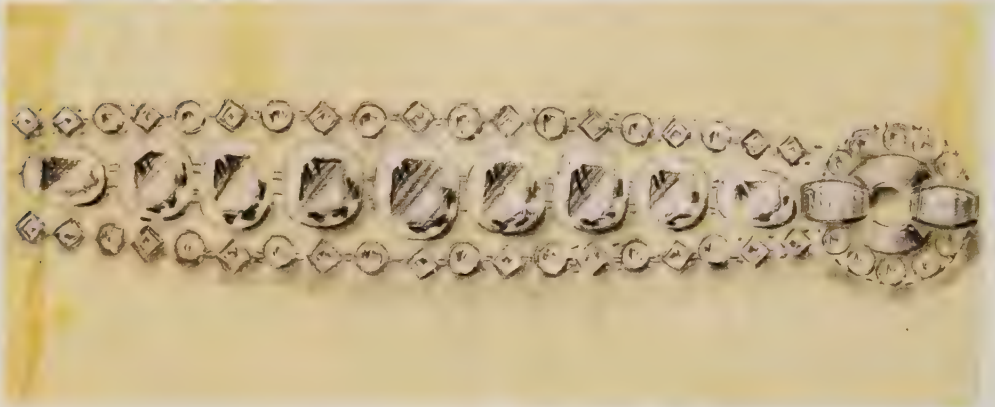
Opposite

The Maharaja's Palace, Baroda
 (Opposite page 100)

Baroda. The central section
 of the Maharaja's Palace, Baroda
 (Opposite page 100)

Dresden. In 1858, the
 Maharaja's Palace, Baroda
 (Opposite page 100)





Above
 Drawings for the two remarkable diamond bracelets created by Van Cleef & Arpels for the Maharani of Baroda, using her own stones

Each of the nine diamonds forming the central row weighs between 18 and 4 carats. Other commissions carried out for the maharani using her own gems included

this clover-leaf clip set with large diamonds and a pair of emerald and diamond earrings.

The maharaja hardly seemed to be taking the matter very seriously, moreover, since he had entrusted the surveillance of this clandestine operation not to one of his ministers, or even to an aide-de-camp, but to a woman. Admittedly this woman was his wife, or rather his second wife, Maharani Sita Devi. When she emerged from the Rolls Royce in her sari, she had barely so much as glanced at him. Not for a second had she taken her eyes off the trunks that were being piled up, one after another, in the aircraft cabin.

The pilot, on the other hand, had taken a good long look at her. With her coffee-colored complexion and her black eyes and hair, she was exotic looking without being exactly beautiful—at least not by conventional Western standards. If he had been called on to pick one word to describe her, it would probably have been “sensual.” It was something to do with the way she moved, her leisurely gestures, the graceful way in which she glided across the ground without appearing to walk. The temperature was at least 95 degrees and the late-afternoon air was still heavy with the monsoon rains, and yet the heat seemed not to affect her one whit.

And then there was something else. She was a young woman of barely thirty, and yet she commanded an unusual degree of respect. As the servants passed her, they lowered their gaze. The two ayahs who accompanied her watched her every gesture closely, as though anxious to anticipate all her wishes.

Once the cargo was fully loaded, she merely confirmed his instructions to fly to Europe via Cairo before taking her seat at the front of the cabin, just behind the cockpit. The two ayahs, nervously anticipating the long flight, sat on the floor at the back, beside their mistress’s personal trunks. Once the door of the Dakota was shut, the motorcars drove off from the runway. Now that he was the sole master on board with his three female passengers, the pilot decided to open negotiations: “Your Highness, I know what’s in those trunks. I think it’s time we discussed the terms of our agreement. The transport costs are going to be slightly higher than anticipated.”

The maharani had not looked greatly surprised. Calmly, she opened the handbag that sat on her lap and from it she drew out a revolver, which she aimed at him with a steady hand: “There is nothing to discuss,” she replied. “You will carry out the instructions you have been given.” This time she looked him straight in the eye. Suddenly, he understood the nature of the strange aura that enveloped her, and that had hit him just a few seconds earlier: this woman inspired fear.²

Page 27

The Maharani of Baroda in her Neuilly apartment in 1961. On the secretaire in front of her is a pile of envelopes containing precious stones.

**Paris, Van Cleef & Arpels Boutique,
22, place Vendôme, August 1, 1950**

Ever since the Maharani of Baroda had made her home in the French capital, “le Tout-Paris” had relished this story. Several of Jacques Arpels’ clients (and not the least illustrious among them) had already told it to him—in strictest confidence, of course, and with entreaties not to repeat it. Was it a myth, or was it true? The jeweler—who had not the slightest difficulty in imagining the maharani brandishing a revolver—would have found it hard to say. This was a woman who could kill a tiger. What undoubtedly was absolutely real, on the other hand, was the treasure. He had seen only a tiny fraction of it, but it had been enough to dazzle him. Fifty-six emblazoned boxes had been set out on the Morocco-leather top of his Louis XVI desk. The maharani had asked him to value her private jewelry collection, for insurance purposes.⁴ For over an hour, loupe screwed into his right eye socket, he had striven to penetrate the secrets of each gem, to assess its purity, color, weight, and value.

The pearls were outstanding. One of the necklaces boasted three strands of 34, 36, and 40 natural pearls. There could be no possible doubt: these were “Basra pearls,” fished from the shark-infested depths of the Red Sea, and the finest in the world. Each one was the size of a marble and must have weighed an average of 30 grains. He had before him the finest necklace ever seen since the 1904 sale in Paris of the three-strand pearl necklace of Princess Mathilde, cousin of Napoleon III. He had valued the maharani’s necklace at \$599,200 (€3.8 million),⁴ which made it by far the most precious piece in the entire collection. The two other necklaces, made up of four and six strands of smaller pearls, he valued at \$140,000 (€887,000) and \$196,000 (€1.24 million) respectively. There were also several pairs of earrings, including one pair set with pear-shaped pearls that he valued at \$50,400 (€317,000), and another composed of two round black pearls surrounded by diamonds, for which he would happily have given \$42,000 (€264,000). The rarest piece was perhaps a ring set with a single white pearl, perfectly round and weighing 160 grains. That alone was worth at least \$33,600 (€211,000).

Facing him across the desk, meanwhile, sat the maharani, chain-smoking small cigars, scrutinizing his every gesture, watching intently for indications that he admired a stone’s beauty or quality. The sight of her jewels always had a hypnotic, calming effect on her. In the contemplation of her rubies, diamonds, and pearls, this woman—who, as everyone agreed, could be haughty and aloof—softened. She greeted each of his valuations with a delight that was almost childlike.

Wild rumors swirled around the maharani. Some of her new Parisian “friends” swore that a score of slaves danced attendance on her in her Neuilly apartment, sleeping on the bare floor at night. Others claimed to have discovered the secret of her disturbing beauty. Every day she would drink long draughts of the Indian liqueur known as Asha, a rare and precious concoction of the blood of peacocks and deer,





Above
The Maharani of Baroda's
four-strand pearl necklace.

Opposite
The maharani's six-strand
pearl necklace



**Above and opposite**

The original design for the emerald and diamond necklace created by Jacques Arpels

for the Maharani of Baroda, and the necklace itself, photographed in the 1950s.



mixed with powdered gold and pearls, saffron, and honey, and all left to ferment for years on a riverbed. This divine potion was kept in gold flasks shaped like birds, chased and encrusted with precious stones. What was more, several of these curious receptacles stood on display in one of the vitrines in her salon.

In a Paris that had barely recovered from wartime occupation and years of rationing, and on which the tensions of the early years of the Cold War lay heavy, this exotic princess, this extravagant and seductive woman, became a symbol of gorgeous insouciance. In no time at all she had become the most sought-after guest for every party, to be spotted at Baron de Redé's receptions at the Hôtel Lambert, at the Rothschilds', and at embassy functions alike; she was also unrivaled as a hostess, stage-managing her own parties with consummate skill.

"Her dinner parties were spectacular," recalls Florence Grinda, daughter of the maharani's Paris lawyer, Maître Michard-Pelissier.⁵ "I was very young, but I well remember the spectacle of her dining room. Every inch of the table was covered in gold dishes and platters, and there was at least one servant for every guest. The food was Indian, a novelty at the time, as fewer people traveled long haul. Her jewels were enormous, and fabulous objects were arranged all round the apartment. Hanging on a salon wall was one of her legendary carpets of pearls and precious stones. It was at least 8 feet (2.5 meters) long. The background was entirely of pearls, while the patterns were in rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and diamonds."

**Above**

The Maharani of Baroda at home in Neuilly. Hanging on the wall behind her is the Pearl Carpet of Baroda

Opposite

The Pearl Carpet of Baroda, sold at Sotheby's Doha in 2009

Equally redolent of the *Thousand and One Nights* was the maharani's jewelry collection. Of the three Arpels brothers who had taken over the family jewelry business after World War II, Jacques was the specialist in precious stones. It was his job to buy the gems required to create the parures that the Maison sold to its clients. He was now thirty-six, and quantities of diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds had passed under his discerning loupe. Never before had he had the chance to feast his eyes on a collection of such quality.

The necklace of rubies and diamonds mounted in platinum he valued at \$504,000 (€3.193 million). It was a rivi re composed of a graduated line of brilliant-cut diamonds of a sizeable weight, from which were suspended eight round motifs of navette-cut diamonds. Six of these pendants were set at their center with oval rubies, each of around 8 carats. The central pendant, loosely resembling a peacock's tail, was composed of diamonds arranged to form nests for two enormous rubies, one round, of 10 carats, and the other oval, of 25 carats. From these garlands of rubies and diamonds hung nine briolette-cut diamonds, the largest weighing over 25 carats.

This one piece contained enough large stones to make some thirty rings of the finest quality, not counting its hundreds of smaller diamonds. Its only flaw lay



in its sheer scale, which made it difficult for a woman to wear. According to the criteria of the maharajas, this was a jewel to be worn by men. In a land where everything was imbued with religious or magical significance, the wearing of jewels was charged with symbolic power. The *Ratnapariksa*, a Sanskrit text from the early Christian era on the “estimation and valuation of precious stones,” laid down rules for judging the beauty and value of gemstones, as well as how they should be used.⁶ It advised that the wearing of the most voluminous pieces, resembling veritable breastplates, should be reserved for warriors, to whom the jewels offered protection from their enemies in wartime and from evil in peacetime.

After the pearls and rubies, Jacques Arpels had lingered over two rings, both set with solitaire diamonds. The first, emerald-cut and weighing something approaching 38 carats, he valued at \$196,000 (€1.24 million). The second, brilliant-cut and a little less large, weighing at most 20 carats, he estimated at \$64,000 (€405,000). Then he moved on to the sapphires—notably to a necklace of diamonds mounted in platinum, from which were suspended eleven rectangular sapphires, of a total weight of 200 carats and a value of up to \$160,000 (€1 million). So large were they that to mount one in a ring you would have had to cut it in half. The piece was spectacular, but once again it was more masculine than feminine in character.

Doubtless this was the reason why the maharani had asked him to remount some of her jewels. At her request a few months earlier, he had used all the stones from a bulky antique necklace to create an elegant garland of lotus leaves, articulated throughout. Unfurling from the central bloom, the garland was designed gracefully to encircle a feminine throat. Each leaf was set at its center with a round cabochon emerald, and from the garland there hung thirteen magnificent polished pear-shaped emeralds. It was a highly feminine piece, and the maharani adored it.

Since then she had adopted the Maison. Following Indian custom, her new jeweler was closely involved in her daily life. When she was in Paris, she would visit several times every week—to purchase five or six pairs of earrings, to choose an elegant Minaudière clutch bag in gold set with precious stones, to have a ring altered, or simply to admire one or other of the firm’s latest creations.

It was rare for her to buy new gems: she had her own in profusion, which she would regularly have dismantled and remounted. Sometimes she would bring with her a series of envelopes, their flaps stamped with the arms of Baroda, featuring a pair of elephants. In them, Jacques Arpels would always find dozens of loose stones that she would ask him to set in a new necklace, brooch, or earrings. Her stocks appeared inexhaustible.

Opposite

The sapphire and diamond necklace from the Baroda jewels





Above
The Maharani of Baroda's
pear-shaped emerald

and diamond necklace,
possibly the one later sold
to the Duchess of Windsor

In a city that had raised frivolity to an art form and a way of life, the enigmatic maharani caused quite a stir. Everything about her seemed to be contradictory. In the press she was described breathlessly as a “*femme fatale*” or a “diamond-digger,” but there was much more to her than that. Behind the elegant and rather frivolous society figure lay a powerful character and a fierce desire for independence that had led her to forsake her own country for Europe. Sita Devi, Maharani of Baroda, had never accepted the destiny that had been the submissive lot of Indian women for millennia. All women, whether untouchables or princesses, had to show the same submissiveness to the life of slavery reserved for them in a world ruled by men. In her own sophisticated, capricious, and sometimes whimsical manner, she was a rebel who lived life in her own way and using her own weapons: her beauty, courage, intelligence—and toughness.

It had all begun in Madras, where she was born on May 12, 1917, the fourth child and first daughter of a minor prince of southeast India, the Maharaja of Pithapuram. Contrary to the claims made by many, her origins were illustrious—indeed, far more so than those of her husband. In contrast to the mere two or three centuries of history of the princes of Baroda, whose name, “Gackwad,”

meant “herdsman” in the Marathi language, she could boast a lineage going back almost a thousand years. The princes of Pithapuram belonged to the Velamas caste, a warrior tribe established in Andhra Pradesh from the eleventh century. Throughout her childhood, she had listened to the tales of their glorious deeds told to her by her father, a man of letters who had devoted part of his fortune to the preservation of the ancient Telugu dialect spoken by the Velamas.

But the passing centuries had not been kind to the dynasty, and her father had been the last prince to be born in the rather dilapidated fort of Pithapuram. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he moved his family to Madras. Of their former domains, there remained 168 villages housing a population of 280,000, scattered over a little more than 380 square miles (1,000 square kilometers). The annual revenue of this modest kingdom was only a few hundred thousand rupees. With her brothers and sisters, the maharaja’s eldest daughter had grown up in a setting that was more than comfortable, certainly, but still far removed from the life of opulence that she had dreamed of since her youth. Her marriage to the Zamindar of Vuyyuru, a local Madras aristocrat with whom she had had three children, had proved dull and monotonous. But one spring afternoon in 1942, at the Madras races, this monochrome existence was shattered forever. The day she met the Maharaja of Baroda, her destiny was set ablaze with color. There to encourage his own racehorses, the maharaja noticed her immediately, as had all the men present. The mere fact that she had chosen to sit in one of the stands to watch the races was already a major break with tradition. As an Indian woman of high caste and wife of a Zamindar, she was expected to observe the rules of purdah (meaning “curtain” in Persian) that had been imported into India by the conquering Mughal empire in the early sixteenth century. Still rigidly respected in some regions of the country, especially the Rajput kingdoms, this rule separating men and women was less firmly adhered to in the large cities that had come under European influence. The Maharaja of Pithapuram had never really applied it within his family. For him it was a custom quite foreign to the Indian tradition of which his ancestors had been part for far longer than the sultans of Delhi. In Baroda, the laws of purdah had been officially repealed over twenty years earlier.

Sita Devi was twenty-five years old, with a perfect figure, honey-colored skin, magnificent hair caught up in a chignon, and above all glittering dark eyes that exerted a fascination over everyone she met. Pratap Singh Gackwad, Maharaja of Baroda, was thirty-four but looked ten years older. His melancholy eyes and heavy physique expressed all the ennui of the princely destiny for which he had been prepared from birth. His father, the Crown Prince of Baroda, had died when he was only a few weeks old.⁷ His entire life as crown prince had been organized so as to avoid any fresh catastrophes for the dynasty. In order to avoid any unpleasant surprises, his grandfather, Maharaja Sayajirao Gackwad, had planned the successive

stages of his life with care. A gilded childhood had been followed by a protected young manhood and an arranged marriage with a princess from Kolhapur, with whom he had had eight children.

In February 1939, he had succeeded his grandfather as the sovereign of a kingdom that was ten times larger, ten times more populous, and above all a thousand times richer than that of the Maharaja of Pithapuram. In stark contrast to the stretches of arid coastline and jungle over which the latter extended his symbolic rule, the Maharaja of Baroda could boast 4,600 square miles (12,000 square kilometers) of the most fertile agricultural land in the whole of India, immense palaces, vast estates, and—most important of all—jewels that were legendary throughout the entire world.

It was a *coup de foudre*, violent and all-consuming. For the Zimandar's young wife, this rather diffident man was prepared to take any risk. Very soon, he announced his intention to marry her. It was a union against which their families, their entourages, and even the British Raj were united in opposition. As her first husband refused to divorce her, Pratap Singh and his lawyers hit upon a ruse. Following their counsel, Sita Devi converted to Islam. Her first marriage, celebrated according to the Hindu religion, was automatically annulled. After a legal waiting period of a few months, she converted back to Hinduism in order to marry again. The entire Indian press was scandalized. Throughout the land, her name became a byword for duplicity and deceit.

The Dewan, or prime minister, of Baroda attempted to bring legal argument to bear in order to oppose the maharaja's desires. Although polygamy was common practice in India, it had been outlawed in Baroda for decades. Pratap Singh's response was unambiguous: while the law was binding on his subjects, for their sovereign it was irrelevant. Under duress and against his better judgment the Dewan complied, but now the Marquess of Linlithgow, all-powerful Viceroy of India, entered the fray. Summoning Pratap Singh to Delhi, he ordered him to renounce his marriage plans. But when persuaded by his legal advisors of the maharaja's rights in the matter, he too had no choice but to accept the union. In return, he imposed on the new maharani one of those exasperating matters of protocol at which the British displayed such inimitable prowess. The marriage would be lawful, but the maharani would not be allowed to use the title "Her Highness" (to which her husband's first wife was entitled), nor would her children have the right to inherit the throne.

Opposite

The Maharani of Baroda
with her son Prince
in the late 1940s





Above
One of the Indian necklaces
among the Maharani

of Baroda's jewels sold
at the Crédit Municipal
de Monte-Carlo in 1974

The ceremony was celebrated discreetly in Bombay on December 31, 1943. A few days later, the newlyweds arrived in Baroda. Abandoning the immense Lakshmi Vilas Palace to his first wife and their children, Pratap Singh made his marital residence at Makarpura Palace, to the south of the city of Vadodara, an equally vast edifice built in a style vaguely reminiscent of an Italian Renaissance palazzo. This was to be the backdrop for the glittering existence of the new Maharani of Baroda. Her apartments, which opened on to a veranda leading to the garden, consisted of a dozen rooms of immense proportions. On her dressing table stood a *nécessaire* in solid gold, with her monogram picked out in diamonds on the back of every brush and mirror. Her smallest gesture would set in train a silent ballet of ayahs and servants, all hastening to accede to her smallest whim. At twenty-six, she had finally succeeded in becoming the female incarnation of the divine principle symbolized by her second name, *Devi*.

A few days after their arrival, Pratap Singh took her to the palace of Nazar Bagh, in the center of Vadodara. This was where the crown jewels were kept. As her husband showed her this treasure, she began to grasp what it meant to have married one of the richest men in the world. The strong rooms of this fortress museum had been piled high over the decades with pounds of precious stones, tons of solid gold ingots and pieces worked in gold, and pearls by the million. Whenever the maharaja desired it, his stewards would put a few dozen pounds of gold or silver into store as a preliminary to sending it to London or Paris, whence it would return in the form of an elegant tea set or a new pair of candelabras. The building even contained two pairs of precious cannon, made the previous century on the orders of a great-uncle of Pratap Singh, Maharaja Malharrao (1831–1882). Aggravated by the punctiliousness with which British officials of the Raj insisted on protocol being respected on their visits to his states, he created his own twist on the famous cannon salute required for the sovereign and his distinguished guests. The Viceroy, as representative of the omnipotent British Crown, was entitled to a thirty-one-gun salute. Just below him, three Indian princes, including the Maharaja of Baroda, shared the honor of a twenty-one-gun salute. Malharrao had commanded his goldsmiths to make a pair of solid silver cannon to fire the Viceroy's salute, and a solid gold pair to fire his own.

The guardians of the crown jewels had also opened the cabinets containing the jewels worn by the maharajas for official ceremonies. The maharani caressed the pearls of the legendary seven-strand necklace, fascinated. She placed around her throat the most extraordinary diamond necklace in the world, three strands of diamonds as big as almonds, holding at their center a pendant composed of the largest stones she had ever seen: the Star of the South, weighing 128 carats; the 78-carat English Dresden; and the 54.12-carat Eugénie. An elderly chamberlain recounted the story of how these stones had arrived in Baroda one day in 1864, during the reign of Maharaja Khanderao (1828–1870). (see page 47)

DIAMONDS, PEARL CARPETS, AND GLADIATORS

Baroda, June 14, 1864

A hundred elephants caparisoned in silks embroidered with gold processed through the city streets, to the deafening din of drums, cymbals, and trumpets. Seated behind their huge heads, their legs firmly clamped around the great beasts' necks, the mahouts kept them moving at a slow and solemn pace. Each elephant carried on its back a solid silver howdah, in which sat a minister or official of the maharaja. Above each howdah a parasol, more or less ornate according to the occupant's rank, shielded these dignitaries from the sun. Despite the clouds of dust raised by this procession of giants, the whole population crowded onto the streets to watch the fabulous spectacle that Maharaja Khanderao, Gaekwad of Baroda, had orchestrated for his subjects.

"Never have I seen the Hindu people presenting so gay and handsome a picture as on that day," Louis Rousselet (1845-1929) later recalled in his travel journal, published in 1875.⁸ Installed on a balcony overlooking the street, this young French photographer, who had arrived

in Baroda a few days earlier, was a guest of the sovereign at this *sowari*, or ceremonial procession organized in honor of an illustrious guest.

"Our attention was skillfully held by this growing magnificence, until the culmination of the *sowari* with the appearance of the king," Rousselet went on. "Now he drew near, preceded by his family, his sons and daughters mounted on superb elephants. The elephant on which he sat was a gigantic beast. He wore a sumptuous red-velvet tunic, which set off a profusion of magnificent jewels. On his turban was a diamond aigrette, on which there sparkled the famous Star of the South." It was for the arrival in Baroda of a diamond that the maharaja had staged his *sowari*. The Star of the South was an oval stone of 128 carats that he had recently bought in France for the sum of several million francs. A cruel and extravagant ruler, Khanderao had a passion for precious stones that was more excessive than that of any of his forebears, just as he had an insatiable thirst for women and blood. It happened

Opposite

Maharaja Khanderao
of Baroda (1828-1870)





Above

Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda (1863-1939) was still a child when he came to the throne.

Here he wears the legendary diamond necklace created during the reign of his predecessor, Maharaja Malharrao (1831-1875).

that the American Civil War, by blocking exports of cotton from the southern states, had provided him with unlimited means to indulge his tastes. The price of cotton had multiplied by a factor of four, and no princely state in India was a bigger producer of cotton than Baroda.

Supplied with this colossal income, he was the last Indian prince to continue

the extravagant and occasionally barbarous customs of ancient India. His court preserved the tradition of staging elephant fights, and even "claw wrestling," a Mahratta-style gladiatorial combat. Admittedly he had reduced the violence of these bloody fights by replacing the steel claws fastened to the men's fists with blunter ivory ones.

And he had introduced the widespread use of the ritual drink *bhang*, a mixture of liquid opium and hemp, with which the wrestlers became inebriated to the point of becoming insensible to pain. But the spectacle remained one of a savagery that beggared belief. According to Louis Rousselet, the maharaja, "wild-eyed, his neck veins bulging," was such an impassioned spectator that he was unable to stop himself from leaping up and copying the wrestlers' moves. The ring where they fought would be awash with blood, and the loser would sometimes be carried off in his death throes. Whereupon "the victor, the skin of his forehead hanging in shreds, would prostrate himself before the king, who would fasten a pearl necklace around his neck and cover him with precious garments."

As well as being an aficionado of violent combat, Khanderao was also a fanatical collector. There was not an Indian jeweler from Jaipur to Bombay who was unaware of his passion for gemstones. It was during his reign that the extraordinary seven-strand pearl necklace was created. When some dealers alerted him to the presence in Europe of an extraordinary diamond, weighing 128 carats and as large as a matchbox, he sent emissaries to France with orders to buy it at any price. It cost him £80,000, a sum equivalent to a quarter of Queen Victoria's annual civil list. That same year, he bought the English Dresden, a pear-shaped diamond of 78 carats, from a Bombay dealer for £40,000. He had both stones set in a three-strand diamond necklace that became the most valuable jewel in the world.

None of this was enough to slake his thirst for diamonds. The Star of the South and the English Dresden had only one defect: they were both of Brazilian origin. The one thing still missing from

the Baroda collection was an Indian diamond from the Golconda mines, a historic stone to compare with the Koh-i-Noor diamond, which Queen Victoria had appropriated for herself. In 1867, Khanderao's jewelers informed him of the presence in Istanbul of a diamond weighing 116 carats, which according to their information was none other than the Akbar diamond.

This pear-shaped stone was engraved with two inscriptions in Persian declaring that it belonged to Shah Akbar (1542-1605), one of the earliest Mughal emperors of Delhi. It had been set, according to tradition, at the center of the eye of one of the peacocks that adorned Akbar's Peacock Throne. This monumental piece, made of wood sheathed in gold leaf and encrusted all over with precious stones, was one of the symbols of the Mughal dynasty's power. Destroyed by the armies of the Persian conqueror Nadir Shah as they pillaged Delhi in 1739, the throne entered the realm of legend, while the stones that had embellished it occasionally resurfaced. No one knew how the Akbar diamond came to be in Istanbul, but in buying it Khanderao exacted his symbolic revenge on the Mughal invaders for their centuries of occupation of India.

His dreams of grandeur also inspired the creation of another treasure: the Pearl Carpets of Baroda. A few months after the completion of the diamond necklace, he summoned his jewelers once more to the Nazar Bagh Palace. In no uncertain terms, Khanderao commanded them to amass millions of pearls and precious stones. Sorted according to weight and color, these gems were to be used to make four carpets and a canopy imitating the pattern of the carpet with which Akbar's grandson Shah Jahan had covered the body of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal in her vault at the Taj Mahal.

The purpose for which these carpets were intended remains a mystery to this day. Some historians suggest that Khanderao, as a ruler of considerable religious tolerance, wanted to offer a gift to the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, and that the idea of the pearl carpets had been inspired by one of his Muslim concubines. Or he may simply have been driven by the desire to surround himself with precious objects, inspired by the depictions of carpets of pearls and precious stones that appear in numerous Mughal and Indian miniatures.

Jewelers and weavers worked together for years on the creation of these carpets, which we may assume were intended to surround the gold *gadi* of Baroda during ceremonial royal audiences, one beneath the maharaja's feet, one behind him, and one to each side. The circular canopy, meanwhile, was to be attached to a parasol framework and brandished above his head. Unhappily for him, but happily for his subjects, Khanderao died a matter of months before the completion of these masterpieces. The end of the American Civil War had reduced his cash revenues by three-quarters, and to compensate for this loss he had imposed tax rises of similar proportions. For taxpayers who refused to pay he devised a special punishment: he had them tied by one leg and one arm to an elephant's tail and dragged through the streets of the city,

as a prelude to forcing the elephant to crush their heads.

He was succeeded by his younger brother Malharrao, who thus became the first to use the carpets. Not for long, however. Charged with attempting to poison the British Resident with powdered diamonds, he was deposed by the Viceroy in 1875, when he had barely had time to add a new diamond to the crown jewels of Baroda. In Europe once again, he had bought a pear-shaped 54.12-carat stone known as the Eugénie diamond, which had formerly belonged to Catherine the Great and Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoleon III. This diamond was soon set in the fabulous necklace already adorned by the Star of the South and the English Dresden.

As Malharrao had no male issue, the British proposed that Khanderao's widow, the Dowager Maharani Jamnabai, should adopt a successor. In order to restore a degree of vigor to the dynasty, she chose a twelve-year-old boy who was a distant cousin of the last two sovereigns. At the Durbar mounted for his enthronement, he became the first to wear the sumptuous diamond necklace. Sayajirao (1863-1939), who was to be the grandfather of Pratap Singh, was given a Western education, and in less than half a century transformed Baroda into one of the most modern and flourishing of all the Indian princely states.

**Above**

The Maharani of Baroda making her choice of rings, India, late 1940s.

(continued from page 41) The sole drawback to Sita Devi's new and carefree existence was the loneliness of her life in Baroda. Even the birth of her son, named Sayajirao after Pratap Singh's grandfather, in 1945 did nothing to diminish the distant and slightly wary respect in which she was held. Her luxurious tastes, her tendency to deck herself out in the costliest jewels, and the hundreds of embroidered silk saris that she bought every year earned her a reputation—undoubtedly fully deserved—for reckless extravagance.

The first maharani, who had withdrawn with her eight children to the *zenana*, or women's quarters, of the Lakshmi Vilas Palace, was perfectly placed to play the part of the abandoned wife who could not fail to elicit sympathy and admiration. Rumors flew between the two palaces, and Sita Devi was well aware that she did not emerge from them with much credit. Very soon she began to realize that, despite her life of luxury, Baroda could only be a stepping stone for her. There she was of importance only because her husband wished it so. If he were to die, she would no longer count for anything. To become a sovereign in her own right, she would have to go elsewhere.

Once peace returned, she had little difficulty in persuading Pratap Singh to restore the tradition of long foreign holidays that had been interrupted by World War II.



Above
The diamond colarette created
by Van Cleef & Arpels for
the Maharani of Baroda in 1957

In 1946, they set off on a trip to England and France in particular. As soon she arrived in Paris, she knew that she had at last found the city of her dreams. The atmosphere on the banks of the Seine was so much less heavy than in India. In this world of sophistication and elegance she could at last live as she pleased, untroubled by what people thought or said, or by the tax inspectors and spies who surrounded her in Baroda. Nobody in Paris questioned her status as a maharani. On the contrary, far from being shocked by the scandal surrounding her marriage, café society—that exclusive club of wealthy international jet-setters who had adopted Paris as the holy city of frivolous indulgence—delighted in the whiff of sulfur that came with it, which only increased her fascination.

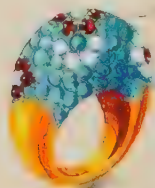
This languid city, in which appearances and subtle details mattered so much, seemed to have been created for her, and she in turn reveled in all its sophisticated codes. The sole exception was haute couture. “Many years ago,” she is supposed to have confided, “staying with some friends in Scotland during the shooting season, I tried on a Balenciaga suit. But I felt so uncomfortable in its stiff pleats. I must have looked completely out of place, as my friends were not particularly encouraging in their remarks.” This unhappy experience did not prevent her from placing orders for several fur coats and raincoats with a *grande maison* on avenue Montaigne—though these were for her white lapdog, Shiraz. Alexandre, Figaro to “le Tout-Paris,” became her appointed hairdresser, creating daring chignons and arranging sumptuous diamond and black pearl brooches in her coiffure with unrivaled skill. But most important of all she had discovered a virtuoso jeweler, whom everyone in Paris was talking about.

The first visit of the Maharani of Baroda to Van Cleef & Arpels took place on September 7, 1946. On that occasion she placed an order for a “gold motif, set with diamonds and rubies, depicting two sabers flanking a crown, to be attached to a cigarette lighter.” Six weeks later, on October 25, she came back and commissioned Jacques Arpels to create two mounts for a pair of earrings in black and white pearls and a brooch with an enormous engraved ruby as its central stone. In September 1952, she had alterations made to the famous ruby and diamond necklace described in the 1950 inventory and to a lighter necklace set in platinum. In July 1954, she commissioned an astonishing parure consisting of a necklace and bracelet set entirely with diamonds and large cabochon rubies and emeralds. In November 1957, it was a collarette in platinum and brilliants. But one of her most astonishing whims was a pair of bracelets dating from May and June 1950. Each was designed to display nine brilliants, old cut and weighing between 18 and 4 carats each. The results were sumptuous, almost barbaric in the opulence and size of their stones. Nearly a hundred commissions were received in her name up until 1967, including two remarkable solid-gold tongue-scrappers, in addition to the jewels she bought from stock in the boutique—everyday jewels such as two “Mystery Set” ruby and sapphire rings, or the animal jewels that were one of the Maison’s great successes in the 1950s.



K 68097 X FS

Bague Pelouse Bagatelle or, turquoise blts, rub



K 65175 X K1901

Bague

Maharani de Baroda
20.3-52



Top

This gold cigarette case by Van Cleef & Arpels is decorated with figures inspired by Winterhalter's famous painting, *The Empress Eugénie Surrounded*

by her Ladies-in-Waiting.

Formerly the property of the Maharani of Baroda, it is now in the Van Cleef & Arpels private collection.

Above

Two Van Cleef & Arpels rings, one set with turquoises, rubies, and diamonds, and the other with Mystery Set rubies, bought from stock by the Maharani of Baroda

N°	Designation		
4078	Faire 2 grattes-langues en or	Maharani de Baroda 39 Bd Cd+ Charcot neuilles	Paris le 25 juillet 55 6
	semblable au modèle confie par cliente (or fin)	1 ^{er} août 55 Fait 2 grattes-langues or jaune	4078
	Revoir le modèle demain M L	Péry fuson, métal les 2	14,000
	très urgent	Poids métal: or 46 g. 80 les 2	
	MS Péry	lire le modèle à cliente le 26-7-55	X H 3-8

Above

The original order for gold tongue-scrapers for the Maharani of Baroda.

Meanwhile, Prince Rainier had granted Monégasque nationality to the Maharaja and Maharani of Baroda, and thus exempted from paying any taxes, the couple settled permanently in Europe. It was just in the nick of time. The Indian government and the maharaja's family were starting to ask questions. On realizing that some of the family treasures had vanished—the pearl and diamond necklaces as well as the carpets, not to mention the transfer of large sums in cash—the authorities simply stripped Pratap Singh of his title, exactly as the Viceroy would have been entitled to do under the Raj. His eldest son thus succeeded him in his own lifetime.

Difficult negotiations now ensued between lawyers representing father and son, and were to drag on for years. The son's lawyers demanded the return of certain jewels that they claimed were inalienable. Following long-drawn-out proceedings, the four principal diamonds—the Star of the South, the English Dresden, the Eugénie, and the Akbar—and the four largest strands of the pearl necklace were returned to Baroda.⁹

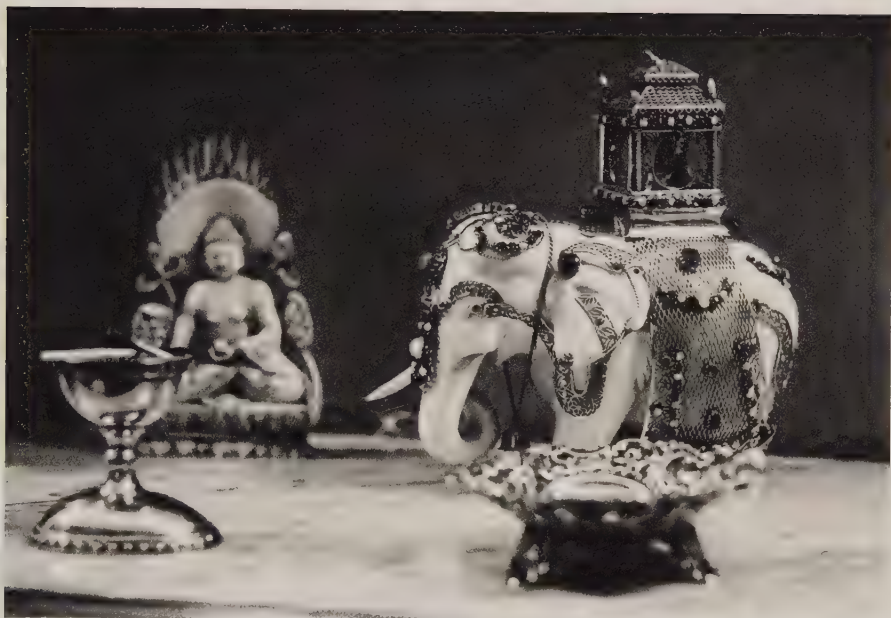
**Above**

Envelopes of precious stones—
one containing diamonds
from Van Cleef & Arpels—on

the Maharani of Baroda's
secretaire in her Neuilly
apartment

It was at this time too that a fresh rumor began to do the rounds of the Paris salons. With the aid of a curious Indian doctor, the maharani was supposed to have tried to cast a spell on her husband. Wisely, the maharaja had by now been living in London for some months. The wild passion of Sita Devi and Pratap Singh had run its course. Fanned in India by the scandal that surrounded it, in Europe—where nobody was the least bit shocked—the flame had flickered and died. In the end, they had nothing in common. She cared only for the social whirl, champagne, Paris, and Monaco, where she had at last found the independence she had always craved. He preferred English country life, tea, and racehorses, and would have been happy with a life of quiet retirement. Their divorce was granted in 1956. Sita Devi was to keep the Neuilly apartment, the Monaco residence, and all her jewels, including the fabulous three-strand pearl necklace, two of the pearl carpets, and dozens of other treasures.

The writer and prominent jet-setter José Luis de Vilallonga, one of the few journalists to be given access to Sita Devi at home,¹⁰ offered the fullest description of this seventeen-room apartment in which he “scrutinized the floor, wondering if I mightn’t find a stray diamond or ruby that no one had noticed.” Sita Devi was forty-four and dazzling: “Two things about her have always struck me: her eyes

**Above**

Some of the many precious objects scattered around the Maharani of Baroda's apartment in Neuilly.

and her smile. Her eyes are black and so deep as to be unfathomable. When she looks at you their expression is piercing, summing you up in a matter of seconds. And her smile ... ah, her smile! Few women in history can have had a smile as spontaneous and natural as hers. When Her Highness smiles, the pearls in her legendary necklace lose their brilliance."

In her salons, Vilallonga admired Louis XVI furniture, including a bureau by Saunier that was supposed to have belonged to Marie-Antoinette. Hanging on the walls were not one but two pearl carpets, one in the main salon, the other above the maharani's Tillard bed. A Degas ballerina and a Corot nude struck a more modern note. The contents of the vitrines seemed to have come from the treasures of the Mughal emperors: quantities of weapons and solid gold miniature elephants from the fourteenth century, bronzes dating back to the fifth century BC, medieval Indian diamond and ruby bracelets and toe rings, jade Buddhas, and miniature animal figures in solid gold set with precious stones.

Vilallonga's interview with the Maharani was surreal. She claimed to read nothing but Freud and Jung, to adore cooking, never to lose at the gaming table, and to be a world expert on precious stones. "There are jewelers who come to seek



Above
The Maharani of Baroda beside
one of the vitrines in her
Neuilly apartment

Opposite
The interior of the Maharani
of Baroda's apartment



my advice before buying a particular piece, even international experts who work in museums. In India it is perfectly natural for wealthy people to have a degree of expertise on the subject of jewelry. We love jewels as much as we love poetry, and after all a diamond is a poem too.”

As she talked, she allowed herself to be photographed in her kitchen wearing a dressing gown, and in her bathroom wearing a sari, her hair falling to her waist. Roger Thierry, her personal hairdresser at Alexandre, placed the last hairpin in her chignon. She changed her jewels four times, before in the end deciding on her black pearls. And finally she offered Vilallonga a lift home in her Rolls Royce Silver Cloud.

She was never to return to India. Why would she? There the press had dubbed her the “Indian Mrs. Simpson,” the woman who had made a maharaja abdicate, a reference to Edward VIII’s abdication in order to marry the twice-divorced Wallis Simpson. Nobody would receive her, in either Baroda or Delhi. In Paris, meanwhile, the cards piled up on her bedroom mantelpiece, inviting her on a cruise on board Aristotle Onassis’s yacht *Christina O*, or to a ball at the Neapolitan palace of the Duke and Duchess of Serra di Cassano in the presence of the Greek king and queen, the Swedish and Dutch princesses, the Count of Barcelona, Maria Callas, and all of European high society (that evening, she wore her fabulous rubies mounted by Van Cleef & Arpels), a gala soirée in Monaco, the Bal des Petits Lits Blancs. Alone or with her son, known by everyone as “Princie,” she brought a touch of exotic splendor to these events. Other women would cast envious glances at her jewels. She would sit a little apart, and everyone would come to pay court to her. She had become one of the queens of Paris.

One woman alone dared occasionally to vie for her for this title, and that was the real Mrs. Simpson. Relations between them had never been warm, and they had even squabbled over some jewels. In 1953, Sita Devi had sold a necklace of large Indian cut diamonds from which hung a series of pear-shaped cabochon emeralds. One evening four years later, she came across them again around the throat of the Duchess of Windsor, to whom the jeweler had sold them on. Irritated by the compliments that the duchess was being paid on this jewel that had formerly been hers, Sita Devi remarked bitchily: “Those emeralds were even lovelier when I used to wear them at my feet.” From which the assembled company understood that the magnificent necklace had been a pair of ordinary ankle bracelets—which was probably not true at all. The jewel was described and photographed as a necklace in

Opposite

The cabochon ruby, emerald,
and diamond necklace

created for the Maharani of
Baroda by Van Cleef & Arpels
in July 1954



Jacques Arpels' famous inventory of 1950, where its estimated value was \$37,800 (€238,000). The next day, the humiliated duchess returned it to the jeweler. After that, the two women gave each other a wide berth and never spoke again.

It was the Duke of Windsor who got his revenge on his wife's behalf, twelve years later, at the celebrated Oriental Ball given at the Hôtel Lambert by the Baron de Redé in December 1969. When the Maharani of Baroda received her invitation to this ball, possibly the most sumptuous event in postwar Paris, she sent word back by her secretary that she would consent to attend on one condition: the invitation must be sent again, this time addressed to "Her Royal Highness the Maharani of Baroda." "I wasn't convinced that she was a royal highness," recounted the Baron in his memoirs, "so I telephoned the Duke of Windsor to ask his opinion. 'She is certainly not a royal highness. She doesn't even have the right to call herself highness,' came the reply. So I stuck to my guns and the maharani did not come to my ball."¹¹

One of her final triumphs was perhaps the appearance she made in 1971 on an edition of the highly popular French television program *Dossiers de l'écran* devoted to the maharajas. The Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had decided to abolish all the privileges granted to the former sovereigns at Independence. As the writer Vitold de Golish, who also took part in the program, recalled, "Sita Devi defended the princely privileges with tremendous vehemence and panache. Her contributions in French and English made a great impression on me and all the other contributors, not to mention her magnificent emerald and diamond necklaces and bracelets, which emphasized her fatal beauty."¹²

Three years later, she was photographed once more at a grand ball given in Monaco in the summer of 1974. Accompanying her were her son Princie, wearing a gold-embroidered smock in the fashion of the time, and her hairdresser, the charming and celebrated Alexandre de Paris. That evening, the maharani had a slightly absent air. She was only fifty-seven, and yet the fatigue etched on her face made her look far older. The jewels she was wearing were curiously modest: earrings and a triple-strand necklace of very average-sized pearls. In fact, this was now no more than a smokescreen.

Three months later, at three o'clock in the afternoon on November 16, 1974, the truth was revealed at an auction organized by the Crédit Municipal de Monte-Carlo. All the finest jewels of the Maharani of Baroda were present in the catalog. Even if their provenance was not given, no one was fooled. The famous three-strand pearl necklace was there, as were the emerald and ruby necklace, the ruby and diamond necklace, and the fabulous emerald lotus flower necklace. A large number of the jewels created specially for her by Van Cleef & Arpels were sold at this sale. In all, forty-six jewels were auctioned off. The catalog ended with a fabulous unmounted ruby of a flawless red and weighing 25 carats, and several services in solid gold, one weighing 30 pounds (14 kilos).¹³

Sita Devi's reckless extravagance, her unwise investments and the effects of inflation had made gaping holes in her fortune. She had been unable to repay the advances she had been given against jewels she had pawned in Monaco. What was more, Paris society was giving her the cold shoulder. "Her dinners were no longer very popular," recalls Florence Grinda, who nevertheless remembers a woman who was fascinating and sometimes generous. "She gave me an Indian necklace in enameled gold and rubies which I still have. As the years passed, her legendary lateness became increasingly difficult to put up with."

In poor health and forgotten, Sita Devi, Maharani of Baroda, became gradually lost in the mists of a Paris that no longer exists and that few people still remember. Nobody dared to tell her of the death of her son Princie, murdered in mysterious circumstances in 1985. Charming and a little lost in a modern world for which his princely education had not prepared him, the prince had struggled to deal with many failures in his life. He had even tried to launch a singing career, releasing a single (one only) that might have summed up his existence: "*Que c'est triste un monde sans amour*" (How sad is a world without love). In his memoirs, the hairdresser Alexandre recalled that when, on the day of the young prince of Baroda's first concert, he asked him if were not nervous, it was his mother who replied on his behalf: "He is used to speaking to the people."¹⁴ She was to survive him by four years, dying in Paris on February 15, 1989.

Her name remains famous, however. Every time it features again in a sale catalog, it presages the appearance of a legendary jewel. In 2002, her lotus flower emerald necklace and a pair of emerald earrings, also by Van Cleef & Arpels, were sold by Christie's Geneva for over €2 million. In 2009, the pearl carpet was valued in Doha at nearly €5 million. The circular canopy in pearls and precious stones was one of the star items at a Sotheby's sale in New York in March 2011, when it was estimated at nearly €2 million. Today, it is to these diamonds and pearls, emeralds and rubies that she owes the divine gift that is offered to so few, that of immortality.



Above
Some of the Maharani
of Baroda's jewelry sold at
Monte-Carlo in 1974. Top left,
a black pearl and diamond set,

the two pairs of earrings
and ring by Van Cleef & Arpels.
Top right, an emerald and
diamond bracelet and earrings,
the earrings by Van Cleef & Arpels.

Bottom left, ruby and diamond
bracelets. Bottom right,
pearl and diamond earrings,
ear pendants, and ring,
all by Van Cleef & Arpels.



Above
Pearl and sapphire necklace
and sapphire and diamond
ring from the collection
of the Maharani of Baroda,

sold at Monte-Carlo in 1974.
The ring is by Van Cleef
& Arpels.

Following pages
The Maharani of Baroda at
home in Neuilly, with one of the
two Pearl Carpets of Baroda
behind her





— — —

ESTHER (“ESTELLE”) ARPELS, MME. ALFRED VAN CLEEF

JANUARY 2, 1877—DECEMBER 24, 1960

— — —

A photograph of her wedding to Alfred Van Cleef, on June 8, 1895, survives. In it, Esther Arpels, known as Estelle, is a vision of belle époque beauty, young and elegant in her white bridal dress with leg-of-mutton sleeves and an unbelievably tiny corseted waist. She is clearly in love. At her side, her handsome husband is a head taller than her, slim, bright-eyed and with a swaggering mustache. She is eighteen, he is twenty-three. He appears to be under the spell of this petite girl just 5 feet (1.59 meters tall) with her dark hair and eyes.

Both of them had been born into the bourgeoisie of the Paris Jewish community, fastidiously described at that time as “Israelite.” They were cousins, both from families of drapers, one of Dutch origin, the other Belgian. These were not easy times. A year earlier, one of the most tempestuous affairs in legal history had erupted: the Dreyfus Affair. Alfred Dreyfus, a young Jewish officer in the French army, was charged with espionage, stripped of his rank and sentenced to penal servitude, all without any real proof of culpability. The affair was to last for over a decade, until Dreyfus was rehabilitated in 1906. It was to poison French politics and unleash a wave of particularly virulent anti-Semitism.

Was it coincidental that in that same year, 1906, Alfred Van Cleef and his

brother-in-law Salomon, known as Charles, opened premises—initially occupying a single arcade—at 22 place Vendôme? The family firm established on the marriage of Alfred and Esther had grown. For the first ten years of its existence it had been housed in Esther’s parents’ house, at 34 rue Drouot. Few documents relating to these early years have survived. The two founders were Alfred and Salomon Léon Arpels, Esther’s husband and father. On her father’s death in 1903, his share in the business passed to his children, and notably to his eldest son, Salomon or Charles (1880-1951). His two other sons, Jules or “Julien” (1884-1964) and Louis (1886-1976), were to join the business before 1914.

What part did Esther play in this saga? According to some, she “looked after the books,” which is perfectly possible. Others maintain that she never had any direct association with the jewelry business. Traces of her life are hard to find, as though she had tried to cover up or confuse them. The few documents preserved by the Arpels family portray a woman of independence and courage, who would certainly not have been satisfied with the role of self-effacing wife. Two years after her marriage to Alfred Van Cleef she gave birth to their only child, a daughter named Renée (1897-1942).

FORCES FRANCAISES DE L'INTERIEUR
SECTEUR EMBRUN-QUEYRAS.

A T T E S T A T I O N

Le Capitaine RAMBAUD, Commandant le Secteur F.F.I. EMBRUN-QUEYRAS, certifie que Madame VAN CLEEF, née le 2 Janvier 1877 à Paris, habitant actuellement 1 Square Maurice Barrès, à Neuilly, a beaucoup aidé la Résistance pendant son séjour à EMBRUN.

Afin d'éviter les recherches de la Gestapo, cette personne a vécu à EMBRUN, sous une fausse carte d'identité, elle n'a pas pu faire établir, avant son départ pour Paris, une carte d'identité sous son vrai nom.

Cette nouvelle carte d'identité sera délivrée par les Autorités qualifiées dès son arrivée à PARIS.

EMBRUN, le 8 Novembre 1944

signé : le Capitaine RAMBAUD, Commandant
 les F.F.I. du Secteur EMBRUN-QUEYRAS.

Above
 Certificate presented to "Madame Van Cleef" in 1944.

Opposite
 Identity card of "Madame Van Cleef," issued in 1947.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, mother and daughter were staying on the Côte d'Azur, as was usual in the summer. For the first few months of the conflict they chose to remain there, and Esther immediately signed up as a nurse at Hospital No. 14 in Nice, serving from September 1914 to January 1915. The chief medic, Dr. Philip, paid tribute to "her devotion and competence in the care of the sick, the wounded and patients recovering from major operations," adding, "I am most happy to be able to give Madame Van Cleef, on her temporary departure occasioned by her husband's mobilization, this well-merited testimonial to her valuable work."

Alfred Van Cleef was on active service from 1915 to 1918.

In 1916, Esther enlisted at the Saint Nicolas hospital at Issy-les-Moulineaux, where she specialized in the care of major burns cases. Here once again, the chief doctor, Professor Lancien, laid stress on her remarkable devotion in caring for these very difficult cases, on her teaching skills in the training of 200 nurses, on the fact that she had herself been wounded on one of her missions, and above all on her "excellent spirit, which enabled her to enjoy good relations with all those who came into contact with her."

A second photograph, from Esther's passport in 1938, just before World War II,

presents another, very different image. The spirited young brunette of 1896 has become a woman of presence, sporting a double row of pearls. Her silver-gray hair is short and set in waves, in the manner of the actress Elvira Popescu, and her face, like her figure, has filled out. She is recently widowed. It seems that her marriage to Alfred was not without its rocky periods, owing to his affairs with other women. She is sixty-one years old, with an only daughter, herself a widow at forty-two, who will have no children. Perhaps Esther is a little lonely and sad.

She does not know that the most difficult moments of her life are yet to come. The outbreak of World War II, the invasion of France, and occupation by the Germans were to wreak havoc in the life of this woman who was already advanced in years. Escaping the anti-Semitic laws introduced in occupied France by taking refuge in the south, she appears to have had only distant relations with her daughter Renée, who had moved to Vichy, where the firm had a shop. Nevertheless, the death of this only daughter in 1942 must have been heartbreaking for her, though it is impossible to know when the news of this tragic episode—Renée took her own life—reached her.

A very moving document preserved in the Arpel family archives sheds some light on Esther's activities during this extremely difficult time. In a written statement, Captain Rambaud, commanding officer of the Free French forces in the Embrun-Queyras region, certifies that Madame Van Cleef has "greatly aided the Resistance during her stay in Embrun, where in order to escape the Gestapo she lived under a false identity...."

In the Arpels family history, "Tante Kiki," as she was universally known, is remembered as a remarkable woman.

A courageous nurse during World War I and Resistance worker in World War II, she was also the essential link uniting the families of Van Cleef and Arpels. Having inherited part of her husband Alfred's share of the business in 1938, she was also the sole beneficiary of her daughter Renée's estate in 1942, as clearly indicated in Renée's will of October 31, 1938. On her death in 1960, Esther bequeathed her shares to her three nephews, Claude, Jacques, and Pierre, dividing her estate between them.

REPUBLICQUE FRANÇAISE
LE MINISTRE DE POLICE

N° 2849825 Série B
CARTE D'IDENTITÉ

Nom : Van Cleef

Prénoms : Mad. vanheld
Suzanne

Né le 27 janvier 1896
à Paris

département de Paris

Nationalité : Française

Profession : Modiste

Domicile : 30 rue de Valenciennes

SIGNALEMENT

Taille : 1.50 m
Cheveux : ch.
Moustache : non
Yeux : br.
Signes particuliers : non

Empreinte digitale

Signature du titulaire : Van Cleef

Paris, le 19 MAI 1941

LE PRÉFET DE POLICE

Paris (11) — C.O.I. 21 3000 — 904-60



CHAPTER II

ROYAL

FAVORITES

Opposite

The Duke and Duchess
of Windsor in the 1940s.
The duchess wears a gold

brooch set with yellow and
blue sapphires bought by
the duke from Van Cleef
& Arpels in 1938



The Theft of the Duchess's Jewels

WALLIS WARFIELD SIMPSON, DUCHESS OF WINDSOR

**Ednam Lodge, Berkshire,
October 18, 1946**

For two days Scotland Yard had been in a state of high anxiety. Detective Inspector Capstick and Detective Sergeant Monk could barely conceal their exasperation. Heavens above, the last time this woman had come to England she had caused Edward VIII to abdicate the throne and provoked a constitutional crisis of unprecedented gravity. That was in 1936. Ten years later, the entire world was only just emerging from a terrible war. Britain had teetered on the brink of destruction, battered by the Blitz and Nazi aggression. The country had survived, but was in a bad way financially. The former king and his wife had been given permission to spend a few days on British territory, on condition of the utmost discretion on their part. They had only been here a few days, and already their names were plastered all over the front pages. And for the most mundane and vulgar of reasons: they had been burgled. The Duchess of Windsor's jewels had been stolen.

The break-in had taken place on the night of October 15. The duke and duchess, who were staying at Ednam Lodge in Berkshire, home of their friends the Earl and Countess of Dudley, had gone to a dinner in London and were away for the evening. On their return, they found the house in turmoil. One or more burglars

Opposite
Wallis Simpson at the time
of her marriage to the Duke

of Windsor. The clip in her
hair is undoubtedly from
Van Cleef & Arpels

had got into the duchess's bedroom and made off with the contents of her jewelry box. The crime had taken place between 5.35 and 6.35 that evening, during the brief absence of the duchess's maid, Joan Martin, who had gone to eat her supper in the servants' dining room. When she returned to her mistress's suite, she found an unpleasant surprise awaiting her: the duchess's trunk had been forced open and her jewelry case had vanished. Called to the scene, the local constabulary lost no time in requesting support from Scotland Yard. For this victim of crime, no ordinary police officers would do. Diplomacy and above all discretion were the order of the day. The following day, Detective Inspector Capstick and Detective Sergeant Monk arrived at the crime scene.

The press, mysteriously well informed as ever, had seized on the affair with glee, with all the dailies speculating cheerfully as to the value and provenance of the loot. A good burglary story, especially one involving the royals, could hardly fail to entertain readers more used to reading in their morning papers about the latest rationing restrictions to be imposed on the whole country. Who cared if now and again the journalists embroidered the facts of the story a little—or even, on occasion, a great deal? “Stolen jewels worth over £500,000,” ran the headlines, including, dubious sources claimed, “the fabulous emeralds of Queen Alexandra, daughter-in-law of Queen Victoria,” which they maintained were in the duchess's possession.

The rumor mill went wild. The royal family was implicated in barely veiled terms: “Who had an interest in recovering Queen Alexandra's emeralds?” was the leading question posed by the press, leaving it up to the reader to suggest the answer. It was obvious: King George VI, naturally, and his Queen consort Elizabeth, who detested the Duchess of Windsor.¹ No one else could have set up such a burglary with impunity, or count on the complicity of the police. Thanks to these “scoops,” the crime, which was essentially a fairly humdrum affair, was slowly but surely being inflated to become as momentous as the theft of the crown jewels from the Tower of London. Never had the contrast between George VI and his consort, with their safe and sensible lifestyle and their devotion to duty and the “done thing,” and his raffish brother and the elegant American divorcee he had married, appeared more glaringly conspicuous. It was all threatening to blow up into a national scandal, and the two Scotland Yard detectives were doing their level best to keep a lid on it.

According to information supplied by the duke himself, the gems in question were worth “only” £20,000. The list of stolen jewels drawn up for insurance

Opposite

Cecil Beaton's portrait of the Duchess of Windsor in the famous Schiaparelli lobster

Dress. The double-strand emerald and diamond necklace was bought by the Prince of Wales from Van Cleef & Arpels in 1935





Above and opposite

Two designs for the necklace bought for Mrs. Simpson by the Prince of Wales in 1935. The design on the right was

approved. Contrary to popular belief, no royal emeralds were set in this piece, for which the gems were supplied by Van Cleef & Arpels.



**Above**

Three designs for ruby and diamond jewelry presented to the Duchess of Windsor in 1939

purposes was made public, so that any clue that might lead to their recovery could be followed up. And for part of the haul this did indeed prove a fruitful strategy. The fields around Ednam Lodge soon proved to be scattered with empty jewel boxes, as well as one that had been thrown away complete with its contents: a string of enormous pearls that—the duke declared—had belonged to Queen Alexandra. The burglar must have realized that pearls of such a size would be hard to sell—or perhaps assumed that since they were so large they must be cheap imitations.

In reality, a total of eleven pieces had been stolen: a diamond clip in the shape of a bird; an aquamarine and diamond set comprising a brooch, a pair of bracelets, and a ring; two rings set with a golden sapphire and a 7-carat emerald; three pairs of earrings, one set with sapphires, the second with diamonds, and the third in the form of shells set with one yellow and one blue sapphire; and a necklace consisting of a double gold chain from which hung two sapphires, one blue and the other yellow. This last piece, by Van Cleef & Arpels, was described as a “necklace of two snake chains with two motifs set with two Ceylon sapphires. One yellow of 32.26 carats and one blue of 34.81 carats.” The duchess had bought it in 1941, on a trip to America with the duke. At this time the duke was the Governor of the Bahamas, a post to which his brother George VI had assigned him throughout the war in order to keep him well away from the arena of battle, where—so the gossip went—his pro-German sympathies made his presence undesirable.

The only emerald that appeared on the list was a relatively modest ring. True, the duchess had gone to London that evening sporting a necklace that was far more impressive, consisting of a double *rivière* of rectangular diamonds with a series of fourteen perfect emeralds.² This was one of the first great jewels that the then Prince of Wales had given to his mistress, Mrs. Simpson. This too was by Van Cleef & Arpels: the prince had bought it from their Paris boutique on September 3, 1935, for 275,000 francs (€200,000).

Few love stories, royal or otherwise, have featured gems so prominently. For the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, precious stones charted a map of their sentimental journey, with every jewel marking a different stage. From the start of his idyll with the still-married Mrs. Simpson, the Prince of Wales—who did not accede to the throne until the death of his father in 1936—had set out to create a fabulous jewelry collection for her, a treasure to match the one she would have inherited had she become queen. And his considerable annual income from the Duchy of Cornwall of £80,000 meant he was able to satisfy her every whim.

From the outset he avoided London jewelers, who were all more or less official suppliers to his parents George V and Queen Mary, his uncles and aunts, and his brothers. Furthermore, Wallis had little taste for the traditional and slightly heavy mounts favored by the British royal family since the time of Queen Victoria. Always at the cutting edge of fashion, she had recommended that he go to a Parisian jeweler:

41511

F. 13092

Brioles



Roi Edouard VIII

7/4 - 3 - 36

4480

F. 13724

Bracelet

Roi Edouard VIII

7/4 - 3 - 36



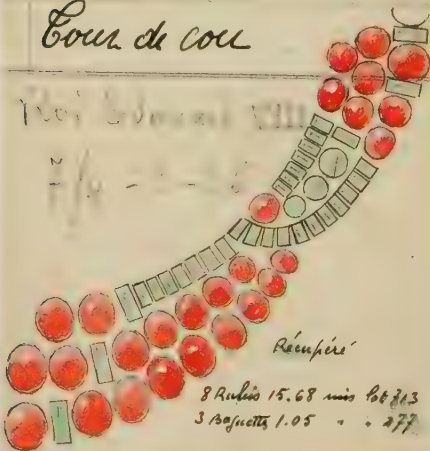
40246

F. 12808

Cou de cou

Roi Edouard VIII

7/4 - 3 - 36



Récupère

8 Rubis 15.68 mm 863
3 Baguettes 1.05 - . 277

45318

Bague

Vain H8496



Roi Edouard VIII

9 - 11 - 36

Above

The four pieces of the ruby and diamond set bought by King Edward VIII for Mrs. Simpson in 1936. He bought the earrings, bracelet, and necklace—in its first version—in March. The set was completed in November with a Mystery Set ring

Opposite

The Duchess of Windsor wearing the first version of her famous ruby and diamond necklace. She is also wearing her Feuille de houx ("Holly Leaf") brooch in Mystery Set rubies and diamonds.



**Above**

King Peter II of Yugoslavia and his wife, Queen Alexandra (left), with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor at a New York ball,

probably in the late 1940s. The duchess is wearing the second version of her ruby and diamond necklace.

Van Cleef & Arpels, at 22 place Vendôme. It was a name that was not entirely unknown to him. He had already been there once, in November 1926, when he had bought an elegant swallow brooch in rose-cut diamonds for the relatively modest price at the time of 2,475 francs (€1,230). Between this and the purchases he started to make for Mrs. Simpson in early 1935 there could be no comparison. The list began on February 6, with two diamond and emerald clips. These were followed on May 9, by a third clip set with sapphires. On October 3, he bought the double rivière of diamonds with fourteen emeralds that Mrs. Simpson was to wear for one of her most famous portraits by Cecil Beaton.

The following year, he started the habit of having the clasps of the jewels he gave Wallis engraved with mottoes. A bracelet of faceted rubies and diamonds, invoiced for 197,539 francs (€140,000) on March 7, 1936, bore the words "Hold tight."

**Above**

The Duchess of Windsor's necklace as sold at Sotheby's Geneva after her death, and a rejected design for the same necklace.

The magnificent necklace of 101 rubies that accompanied it, for which he paid 330,952 francs (€235,000), was inscribed "My Wallis from her David" (the name by which he was known within the family).³ These two pieces were of symbolic significance, as the first jewels given by the new king to the woman he loved.

At Sandringham six weeks earlier, on January 20, 1936, George V had died in his sleep. The Prince of Wales succeeded to the throne as Edward VIII. His meeting with Wallis Simpson in the early 1930s had already turned his life upside down. Before her there had been two love affairs that mattered to him. The first, with Freda Dudley Ward, whom he had met during World War I, had been gentle, tender, and prolonged. Their affair lasted from 1918 to 1923, and she remained his confidante thereafter. The second, with Thelma Furness, the American wife of a shipping magnate, was a more passionate romance. Both were utterly eclipsed,



Above

Mrs. Simpson on the terrace at Fort Belvedere, the Prince of Wales' residence in Windsor Great Park

however, when Wallis Simpson appeared on the scene. From the day she became his mistress, the prince—displaying the boorish side of his nature—commanded the telephone operators on the switchboards of his various residences to block all calls from Freda and Thelma.

Wallis Simpson was elegant, brilliant, and witty. Worlds away from the starchy dignity that reigned in the royal entourage, she was never afraid of offending protocol. Her repartee, including her mantra “A woman can never be too rich or too thin,” became legendary. She turned this eternal adolescent, irresponsible and rather weak man, into a man of decision, described by some as obstinate, who was capable of making extreme choices. When the British government opposed his marriage to her on the grounds that a monarch, as head of the Church of England, could not marry a twice-divorced woman, he displayed no hesitation in abdicating the throne. “Never can a man have given up so much for a woman,” observed Hugo Vickers in his biography of the Duchess.⁴

Was Wallis equally smitten? Perhaps. Did she want him to abdicate? It is difficult to say. If fate and his own stubbornness had not forced the king's hand, she would probably have been quite happy in the role of royal mistress, showered with jewels. According to Hugo Vickers, she was never the scheming, ambitious woman that she has been painted for decades: “It's interesting to compare the reactions

**Above**

Katherine Rogers, a friend of Mrs. Simpson (left), Wallis Simpson, and King Edward VIII, photographed ashore during

the scandalous cruise on the borrowed yacht *Nahlin* in 1936 when the king and his mistress were seen in public together.

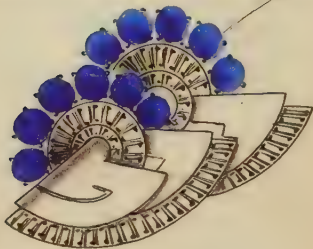
to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor at the time,” he observed at a talk he gave for the publication of his book. “He was adored by the public, who didn’t know him. Those close to him, by contrast, had serious reservations about him. She was hated by the same public, who knew her no better than they did her husband, but was adored by those close to her.”⁵

Whatever the case, she basked in the life of gilded luxury that David could give her. When they met she was approaching forty. She didn’t have much time left to grab the luck that had persistently eluded her since her childhood. Born into a middle-class family of modest means, she had lost her father when still quite young. Instead of providing her with the kind of dowry that would have given her the hope of making a good marriage, an uncle had left his fortune to a hospital. Her first marriage, to an American officer, Earl Winfield Spencer, lasted ten years. Apart from an army posting to China for a few years, this marriage bored her. According to the wife of a Chinese diplomat, Mrs. Spencer distinguished herself by her singular inability to learn a word of Mandarin, with the exception of the Chinese for “Waiter, bring some champagne.” This time in China was to inspire distasteful rumors that dogged her throughout her life. It was in China that she was supposed to have had an affair with Mussolini’s son-in-law Count Ciano, and to have picked up some exotic sexual practices from a denizen of a Chinese brothel.

42978

P13391

Clip



J. & P. Van Cleef

46923

P14216

Bracelet



*Duchess
de Windsor
31-5-37*

Above

The wedding jewels: the sapphire and diamond clip and the famous Jarretière ("Garter") bracelet, bought in 1936.

Opposite

An official wedding portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor at Candé, in Touraine, June 3, 1937.

That day, the duchess wore her sapphire and diamond jewelry by Van Cleef & Arpels.

Her second husband, Ernest Simpson, brought a little more spice to her life. Thanks to him she moved to London, was presented at court, and became part of a glittering set whose lives revolved around cocktails, country house parties, and first nights in London's West End. Unfortunately, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 was to cause financial headaches for Ernest Simpson, who did not have an immense fortune at his disposal. Perhaps it was the feelings of perpetual insecurity with which she had lived since childhood that propelled her into the arms of the Prince of Wales, the man who could give her the carefree life of luxury of which she had always dreamed, unhampered by any material worries.

The king's abdication on December 11, 1936 and the announcement of his marriage to a twice-divorced American hit the British public like a bolt of lightning. Carefully concealed for over a year by a media that was still highly deferential to the royal family, this affair had only been made public a few weeks earlier. On the day of the wedding, June 3, 1937, nearly a hundred journalists laid siege to the Château de Candé, outside Tours, where the ceremony was to take place. People all over the world were eager to know every detail of the most scandalous wedding of the century. To the duke's chagrin, not a single member of the British royal family was present, and even his favorite cousin Lord Mountbatten had refused to be his best man. And of course none of them had sent gifts, with the sole exception of his youngest brother the Duke of Kent.



**Above**

Design for the bracelet-brooch created for the Duchess of Windsor in 1937. The motif is set with emeralds, rubies, and diamonds, against a band of gold lacquered in black

None of this discouraged him from showering Wallis with jewels. And once again, these came from Van Cleef & Arpels. The jewels that formed his marriage gift were all carefully chosen for their symbolic value. First among them was a sapphire and diamond Jarretière bracelet resembling a stylized garter, bought in May 1937 for 224,209 francs (€165,000). The “ribbon,” set with circular diamonds, passed under an enormous buckle set with faceted and baguette-cut diamonds before emerging on the other side. The reference to the Order of the Garter, the most venerable chivalric order of the British monarchy, founded by Edward III in 1348, was inescapable. And all the more so as Edward III had instituted it as a tribute to his mistress, the lovely Countess of Salisbury. At a ball at Windsor Castle, the countess was supposed to have lost her garter. Retrieving it, the king kissed it and returned it to her with the words, “*Honi soit qui mal y pense*” (evil to him who evil thinks), which became the order’s motto. Six centuries later, at the Château de Candé, this phrase found a new interpretation. The second jewel was a hair ornament. Set exclusively

**Above**

The duchess wearing the motif as a brooch. The piece would be dismantled and the emeralds remounted on an emerald and diamond necklace, which appeared in the sale of the Duchess of Windsor's jewels.

Following pages

The Duke and Duchess of Windsor. The duchess's turban hat is embellished with two Hérissou ("Hedgehog") clips by Van Cleef & Arpels.

with diamonds, it was accompanied by a set of clips, large and small, that could be attached to the armature to make it more imposing, or could be worn separately. Shortly after the ceremony, the newlyweds posed in the chateau's salons for the society photographer Cecil Beaton. The duchess wore a blue silk crêpe ensemble by Mainbocher that showed off her boyish figure. Resplendent on her right wrist were the sapphires and diamonds of the sumptuous Jarrettière bracelet.

In the two years leading up to the outbreak of World War II, the Windsors' life in France was a glittering round of society events in Paris, Biarritz, and the Côte d'Azur. Three of the most beautiful of the jewels created for the duchess by Van Cleef & Arpels date from this period. The first, a brooch-bracelet, dates from December 17, 1937 and is perhaps the most original piece ever created by Van Cleef & Arpels for the Duchess of Windsor. Against a black-lacquered ribbon unfurled a flower composed of five large emerald petals surrounded by diamonds and rubies, which could be detached and worn as a brooch. The size of the emeralds, each weighing between





5.85 and 14 carats to make a total of 41.44 carats, ensured that this was also one of the most expensive pieces bought by the duke, billed at 585,000 francs (€290,000). Sadly this remarkable piece has not survived, as the duchess had it dismantled in the 1960s in order to reuse the stones in an emerald and diamond necklace.⁶ The second jewel, dating from November 11, 1938, is another brooch consisting of two holly leaves, one in diamonds, and the other in rubies, mounted following the revolutionary technique patented by the jeweler in 1933 and known as *le Serti Mystérieux*[™], or "Mystery Setting." The stones are calibrated with rigorous care, and a very fine groove is cut along their sides. They are then threaded one after the other onto a gold lattice, so that there is no trace of a mount or claws to be seen on the exterior of the jewel. The duchess subsequently bought a pair of earrings in the form of ivy leaves in Mystery Set rubies and diamonds. The third jewel, created in 1939, involved the alteration of her ruby and diamond necklace. At the duchess's request, the classic round necklace was transformed into an extremely elegant cravat necklace embellished with an asymmetric ruby and diamond drop.

The Duchess of Windsor's last important purchase from Van Cleef & Arpels was in 1948. Was this partly financed by the insurance settlement on the Ednam Lodge burglary? In America a year earlier, she had bought two fabulous pear-shaped canary diamonds weighing 40 and 52 carats, which she had mounted on brooches. To go with them, on June 30, 1948, she chose "two jonquil brilliant-cut diamonds of 5.20 and 5.16 carats mounted on earrings."⁷

Her collection of Van Cleef & Arpels jewelry continued to grow throughout the 1950s, but no longer thanks to gifts from the duke. The Windsors' marriage was going through a major crisis. After fifteen years of marriage, the duchess was bored. She had grown weary, it seems, of the ceaseless round of society life, the Paris soirées, the visits to Biarritz or the Côte d'Azur, and the constant and slightly oppressive adoration of her husband. Her meeting with Jimmy Donahue, one of the heirs to the Woolworth fortune and first cousin of the millionairess Barbara Hutton, was to inject a note of excitement into her life. Twenty years younger than the Duchess, he was wealthy and personable, while also being gay and enjoying a scandalous reputation. His outrageous antics made for entertaining gossip on both sides of the Atlantic. Occasionally they displayed a certain panache: on a trip to Italy in the late 1930s, for instance, he was reported to have hurled provocative remarks at a Fascist parade as it passed beneath his balcony.

Wallis wasn't bothered about his sexual preferences: with his taste for forbidden fruit, danger, and scandal, Jimmy made her laugh. Coincidentally, Jimmy and his mother, Jessie Woolworth Donahue, were also clients of Van Cleef & Arpels. A number of Mrs. Donahue's purchases from the New York boutique were gifts to the duchess from Jimmy or herself, the largest being a gold evening bag with a clasp set with turquoises and rubies.⁸ This surprising and probably platonic affair



Top
The yellow gold, sapphire, and diamond brooch and bracelet, bought by the Duke of Windsor for the duchess from Van Cleef & Arpels.

Above
The necklace—set with a 32.26-carat yellow sapphire and a 34.81-carat blue sapphire and bought from

Van Cleef & Arpels in New York that was bought from the Duke of Windsor at Edna's auction, October 1946.

was to last for four years. It ended in farce. During a violent row, Jimmy was said to have slapped the duchess after she accused him of reeking of garlic. Flying off the handle for once, the duke threw him out. Typically, Jimmy—who died prematurely in 1966, probably from alcoholism—turned this episode into a *bon mot*. When a friend asked him a few months later if he still saw much of the Windsors he quipped, “Oh, them! Don’t you know I’ve abdicated?”

The duke died in 1972, in the Bois de Boulogne mansion rented to the couple by the Paris authorities. He remained passionately in love to the end with this woman who had changed his life so utterly. A few days before his death there was a reconciliation with the British royal family, who had given the Windsors the cold shoulder since the abdication in 1936. On a visit to Paris, his niece Queen Elizabeth, the Duke of Edinburgh, and the Prince of Wales came to tea, with Wallis

presiding as hostess. She survived the duke by fourteen years, but lived out her last ten years as a largely bedridden recluse. Never again would she wear the fabulous jewels that had been testimony to the most scandalous love story of the twentieth century. Shortly before his death, the duke had expressed his desire that these jewels should be dismantled and the stones sold, so that no other woman could ever wear these intimate pieces that he had given to his wife. Fortunately his wish was not respected. A year after the duchess's death, on April 2 and 3, 1987, her astonishing collection was sold at Sotheby's Geneva in aid of the Institut Pasteur. Estimated at \$10 million, the 306 lots sold for over four times as much, raising a total of \$45 million (equivalent to \$90 million in 2012).

Most of the jewels created by Van Cleef & Arpels during the crucial early years of their relationship, the abdication, and their marriage, were included in this sale. Intriguingly, the most important of these, the rubies and the Jarretière bracelet, appear to have been bought by the same collector, who since 1987 has guarded them jealously. The Windsor legend continues to fuel the dreams of jewelry connoisseurs throughout the world, moreover. Some twenty of the duchess's jewels were sold in London in November 2010 for nearly €10 million, or double their expected price. As for the jewels stolen from Ednam Lodge in 1946, they have never been seen again.

Opposite

The Duke and Duchess of Windsor at their residence in the Vallée de Chevreuse in 1960





For the Love of a King

LILIAN, PRINCESS OF RÉTHY

London, May 19, 2003

The dress is of blue organza, embroidered throughout with white silk flowers. With its matching coat, it bears the label “*Yves Saint Laurent pour Christian Dior*” and the date 1959. This was the era when haute couture dresses were still given names: this one was called “Venezuela.” This outfit, one of the loveliest from the wardrobe of Her Royal Highness Princess Lilian of Belgium, is valued at £5,000. Another model, this time an evening gown, also by Christian Dior, dates from 1956. In saffron-colored velvet, embroidered in gold and trimmed with sable, it may fetch £3,000, the experts hope. At a mere £1,500, a 1970s outfit from Saint Laurent’s Russian period, with a bolero jacket also edged with sable, is almost affordable.

In all, nearly two hundred haute couture dresses, a hundred or so pairs of shoes, and some fifty hats, and as many handbags by the greatest luxury houses in Paris were sold at Sotheby’s London on May 19, 2003, for a total sum of over £200,000. This exceptional wardrobe was testimony to the consummate elegance and refinement of one woman, Princess Lilian of Belgium, second wife of King Leopold III. Paradoxically, this elegance earned her hostility throughout her life, and still today influences the negative criticism from which her reputation sometimes suffers.

Opposite

King Leopold III and his wife, Princess Lilian. The princess wears emerald and diamond

jewelry that had belonged to the king’s first wife, Queen Astrid

Rarely can history have been so unjust. Right up to her death on June 7, 2002, at the age of eighty-six, and even beyond it, Lilian of Belgium remained a controversial and sometimes hated figure. A domineering and ambitious wife, according to her detractors, she was said to be at the bottom of the legendary rift between Leopold III and his eldest son King Baudouin from the 1960s onward. In her memoirs entitled *La Brisure*, her daughter Marie-Christine painted a vitriolic portrait of her mother that seemed to corroborate the harshest judgments. The second wife of King Leopold III, she never succeeded in taking the place of the legendary Queen Astrid in the hearts of the Belgian people, who was tragically killed in car accident in 1935. How could she possibly have fought against the ghosts of the past and a destiny that had its origins in the darkest period of Belgium's history? And yet she was beautiful, with looks that were perhaps a little classic but that she knew how to set off to advantage. "Several times a year," her youngest daughter Princess Marie-Esméralda would recall, "we would go to Paris for fittings at haute couture houses. When I was a child, these events were extremely exciting for me. The program for these days was always the same. We would leave Brussels early in the morning by car, and by late morning we were at Dior on avenue Montaigne. I used to feel a little like a spectator at a ballet. I used to watch the fitters twirling around us, carrying their tape measures and their fabrics, all glittering and embroidered. My mother would try several models and discuss the preliminary sketches for others. While this was happening, I would sit there without a word, watching the wonderful spectacle unfold. Before we went back to Belgium we would often go to the Relais Plaza for lunch with a designer from one of the prestigious couture houses, such as Marc Bohan or Hubert de Givenchy."⁹

On these "haute couture" outings to avenue Montaigne, it appears that Princess Lilian of Belgium, sometimes accompanied by her husband, made a number of visits to Van Cleef & Arpels on place Vendôme. They seem to have been particularly fond of the Fleur jewels created by the Maison in the 1950s. Their first purchase, in September 1951, was emblematic of the work of the Van Cleef & Arpels craftsmen. The Pavot ("poppy") clip, composed of 547 Mystery Set rubies, 45 round brilliant-cut diamonds, and 11 baguette-cut diamonds, was to mark the end of a dark period for the royal house of Belgium.

In the early 1950s, the country was finally emerging from a serious constitutional crisis. Leopold's behavior during World War II had attracted fierce criticism from his fellow Belgians. By staying in Brussels, he had distanced himself from his government, which had taken refuge in London. Admittedly the Germans had placed him under house arrest in the Palace of Laeken for three years. But it was during this time, on September 11, 1941, that he married Lilian Baels, and this second marriage in the middle of the Nazi occupation did nothing to increase his popularity. His young wife was a commoner, from the ranks of the haute bourgeoisie,



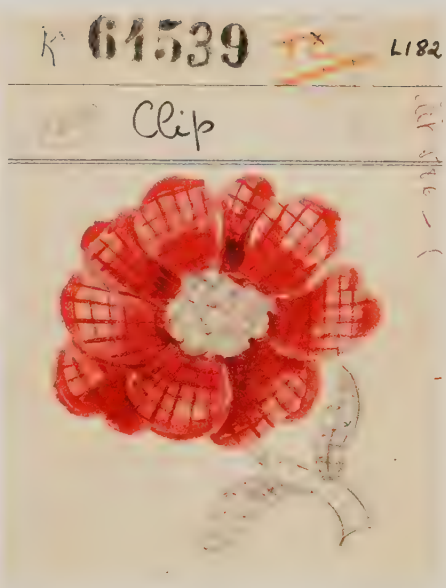
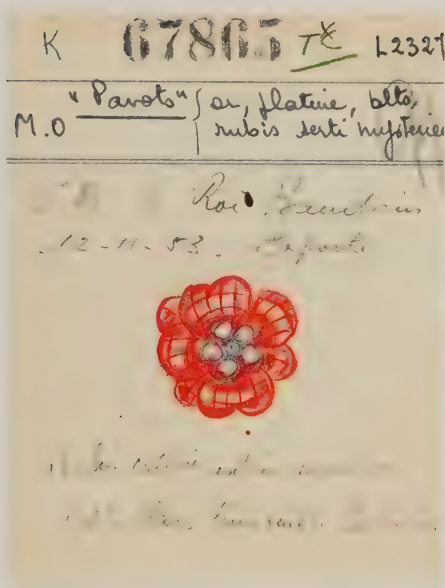
Above
Princess Lilian of Belgium in
the "Venezuela" dress designed
by Yves Saint Laurent for

Christian Dior in 1959, which
was to be sold in London
in 2003 along with the rest
of her wardrobe



Above
Princess Lilian wearing
the Feuille de marronnier
("Chestnut Leaf") clip

and the diamond and
Mystery Set sapphire bracelet
given to her by King Baudouin
in 1952



Above
 Pavot ("Poppy") earrings in diamonds and Mystery Set rubies given to Princess Lilian by King Baudouin and a Pavot clip similar to the one belonging to Princess Lilian.

Following pages
 Princess Lilian wearing her Pavot clip in diamonds and Mystery Set rubies, with one of her Marguerite ("Daisy") clips in white and yellow diamonds on her hat.

Beside her is Prince Felix of Bourbon-Parma, husband of Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxembourg.

and although the palace had taken care to specify that she would never bear the title of queen, this unequal marriage was frowned on. Many people criticized the king for parading his private happiness before a country that was suffering under the "Nazi jackboot."

In June 1944, Leopold was deported to Austria, along with Lilian, their one-year-old son Alexandre and his three children from his first marriage, Joséphine-Charlotte, Baudouin, and Albert. During this period of harsh detention, the princess appears to have thwarted an attempt to poison them, and throughout this difficult time she demonstrated unwavering courage. This was not sufficient, however, to dispel the suspicion with which the royal couple was viewed by some Belgians.

Liberated by the American forces in 1945, Leopold III wanted to return to his country, but the provisional government led by his younger brother Charles, Count of Flanders, advised him to move to Switzerland, where he was to spend the following five years. Only after his abdication in 1951 and the accession of his eldest son Baudouin did opinion soften in his favor—on the political front at least. The monarchy was saved, but within the royal family conflict raged on. Prince Charles,





**Above**

The abdication of King Leopold III (left) in favor of his eldest son King Baudouin (right) in July 1951.

Opposite

King Leopold III with his second wife, Princess Lilian, considered one of the world's most stylish women.

who for five years had been an exemplary regent, resented being so roughly pushed aside. Relations between the two brothers had never been good, and they deteriorated even further after the return of the king and his family to Brussels. When he arrived at the Palace of Laeken, Leopold is said to have surprised Charles in the act of carrying off some of the furniture. This led to an argument during which an antique commode, suspended from a pulley, fell into the courtyard and was smashed. The two brothers rarely spoke to each other again for the rest of their lives, dying unreconciled within months of each other in 1983.

Relations between father and son were ambivalent. During the day, the young King Baudouin, then in his early twenties, reigned over the country from the royal palace in Brussels. When he returned to the Palace of Laeken in the evening, where he lived with his father, however, he ceded authority to Leopold, who presided over the family meals with Lilian, whom all the children addressed as *maman*. There were now six children. After Alexandre, Leopold and Lilian had two daughters, Princesses Marie-Christine and Marie-Esméralda. They all got on extremely well together. But the obvious influence of Lilian, not only over her husband and their children but also over her stepchildren and notably the young king, was a source of irritation. Worse still, in those years of austerity she was simply



too beautiful and too elegant. With her couture gowns, her luxury accessories, and her sumptuous jewels, this woman who had been refused the title of queen seemed to cultivate all the attributes of royalty, and not always with a great deal of tact.

In September 1952, she commissioned Van Cleef & Arpels to make a "jersey mat" necklace, very haute couture in inspiration, in gold with matching earrings. From these hung eleven diamonds, weighing a total of 104 carats, nine on the necklace and one on each earring. These gems may have come from the celebrated tiara presented to Queen Astrid, Leopold's first wife, by the Belgian provinces. The rather heavy design of this piece consisted of a Grecian-style bandeau topped with the famous brilliant-cut diamonds mounted on metal spikes. Queen Astrid had arches added over the spikes, which had the effect of making the tiara even heavier. Princess Lilian sometimes wore the bandeau as a bracelet or even as a tiara, but never in its complete form topped by the eleven large diamonds. Even though the tiara had been altered, this was not popular with the public, who criticized her for wearing the jewels of the woman who had come before her in Leopold's affections.

Perhaps it was partly for this reason that Leopold III began to make more and more purchases from Paris jewelers. In November 1952, he bought a new brooch from Van Cleef & Arpels, a daisy with petals consisting of 185 jonquil diamonds and a center made up of round diamonds. Interestingly enough, he was not the only one to shower Lilian with jewels. That same day his son King Baudouin chose a Feuilles de marronniers ("Chestnut Leaves") brooch, a pair of Feuilles lampoons ("Chinese Lantern Leaves") earrings and a ribbon bracelet, all composed of Mystery Set diamonds and sapphires. The princess can be seen wearing these jewels in photographs taken at this time.

A year later, the two kings were back at Van Cleef & Arpels. In November, Baudouin bought a pair of Pavot ("Poppy") earrings in Mystery Set rubies and diamonds, as well as a set consisting of two pairs of earrings and a second Marguerite ("Daisy") clip, with the center formed from jonquil diamonds and the petals from white diamonds. On December 30, 1953, Leopold bought a 94.83-carat emerald-cut diamond mounted on a ring, for which the bill came to 60,805,000 francs. This sizeable stone was clearly for an occasion that Leopold wanted to mark in some style.

As memories of the war years gradually faded, the court in Brussels returned to some of its former splendor. The weddings of Princess Joséphine-Charlotte and the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, in 1953, and of Prince Albert and the beautiful

Opposite

Queen Astrid in 1909. Photo by
Léon Sarras, Van Cleef & Arpels,
Paris. Photo by Robert G. Scheraga,
Washington & Company, Inc.,
New York.

and earrings. The diamonds
probably came from
the Nine Provinces Tiara
which now belongs to
Princess Lilian.



Paris, le 13 sept. 52 ⁵¹

Désignation

M. Princesse Liliane

cd Faire monture
collier or avec
9 ct 5 à client
selon maquette
& dessin
& instructions Gérard

20 nov. 52

2979

Fait un collier collerette tout or
tissé ferseuf pour 9 ct 5

+ taxes

Paris, le 13 sept. 52 ⁵²

Désignation

M. Princesse Liliane

cd Faire monture
motif oreilles or
et 2 ct 5 rds à
client
selon maquette
& inst. Gérard

20 nov. 52

2980

Fait une faire motif oreilles
ferseuf or pour 2 ct 5

+ taxes

K 65753 *TC* ~~ET913~~

Clip

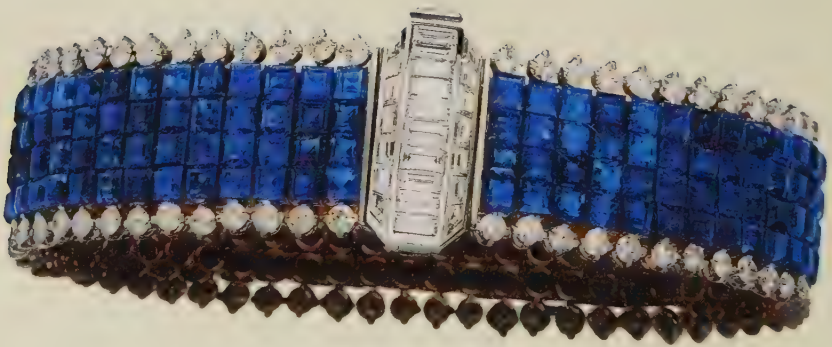
J. M. Baudouin 19.11.52



K 65873 *TC* L1911

Motif d'oreilles

J. M. Baudouin



Above

Design for the *Fleur de Marjolaine* clip and earrings in sapphire and diamond set supplied for the Princess

Lian by King Baudouin The *Myster* Set sapphire bracelet shares the same provenance. It is now in the van Cleef & Arpels Collection



Above
A reconfigured royal family: King Baudouin with Princess Lian, King Leopold III, and their eldest daughter, Princess Marie-Christine





**Opposite**

Princess Lilian at the ball given in 1960 for the marriage of King Baudouin and Doña Fabiola de Mora y Aragón. She is wearing the mysterious diamond tiara, in fact a

collarette that could be worn as a tiara, on loan from Van Cleef & Arpels.

Above

The diamond tiara-collarette loaned to Princess Lilian by Van Cleef & Arpels. It was worn a second time in the 1960s by a titled French lady at a Paris soirée

Italian aristocrat Paola Ruffo di Calabria six years later were celebrated in sumptuous style. In 1960, the marriage of King Baudouin and Doña Fabiola de Mora y Aragón was the height of splendor. The whole of European royalty, from Norway, Greece, Britain, and Spain, came to Brussels for the ceremony. At the grand court ball given at the royal palace, Princess Lilian was dazzling. She wore a brooch of two enormous cabochon emeralds given to her by her mother-in-law, Queen Elisabeth, and a tiara set with large pear-shaped diamonds, similar to the collarettes made by Van Cleef & Arpels at this period, which was probably lent to her for the occasion.

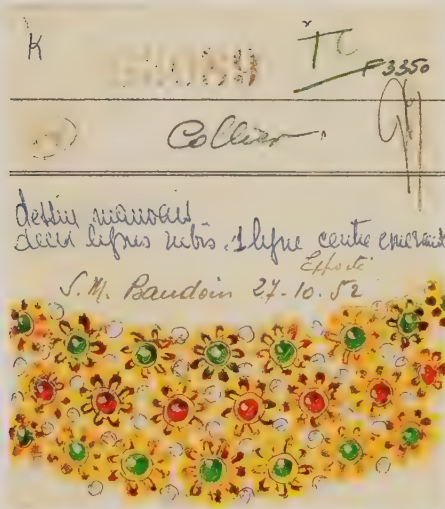
Paradoxically, this happy event was to mark the outbreak of a period of fresh strife. The arrival of a new queen meant a redistribution of roles within

the royal family. Leopold and Lilian were asked to leave the Palace of Laeken and move to the estate at Argenteuil that had been specially bought for them by the Belgian state. On their return from honeymoon, however, Baudouin and Fabiola discovered that a large part of the historic furniture and paintings from Laeken had been transferred to Argenteuil. This incident was only one of many gaffes on both sides that signaled the beginning of a rift between the two kings and their entourages. It was to last for twenty-three years, during which time the two courts, one at Laeken and the other at Argenteuil, ignored each other royally. They had nothing in common. Laeken cultivated a family image and was fairly restrained, while Argenteuil made an ostentatious show of luxury and sophistication. Gala dinners at Argenteuil were sumptuous occasions, with tables spread with crested linen, glittering with emblazoned porcelain and crystal, and gleaming with Odiot cutlery. Both food and wine were exquisite, and Lilian, always a picture of elegance, held regal sway over this royal residence.

Her son Alexander, who knew her as well as anybody, summed up her personality in the preface to the auction catalog for the Argenteuil furniture in 2003: "It is very difficult to capture the complexity of a person's character, even if that person was my mother. Princess Lilian was a private person. [...] But we can gain insights into her personality by an indirect means. For more years than I can remember, she loved to be surrounded by works of art and precious objects that expressed a certain quality of life. Wherever we lived, she always succeeded in somehow imbuing the space with a quality that impressed every visitor as being both effortless and unique."¹⁰

At their residence, Leopold and his wife entertained their high society friends and a number of foreign heads of state. On a state visit to Belgium in 1964, Queen Elizabeth II came to tea. For the occasion, Princess Lilian bought a Tapis persan ("Persian Carpet") brooch and earrings from Van Cleef & Arpels in rubies, diamonds, sapphires, and emeralds, which she wore in the official photograph taken outside the residence with the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. That same year, she commissioned a fleur-de-lis diamond brooch, for which she supplied the central stone, a 50-carat pear-shaped emerald. This was followed in 1965 by a Tête de cerf ("Stag's Head") clip in gold, rubies, emeralds, brilliants, and sapphires, with the letter "L" for Leopold in the stag's antlers.

When Leopold died in 1983, Lilian was only sixty-seven, but nevertheless chose increasingly to live in private. Henceforth the only dinners she gave at Argenteuil took place once or twice a year, and were in aid of the cardiology research foundation that she had set up with her husband after the serious heart surgery undergone by their son Alexandre in 1957. Perhaps it was this withdrawal from public life that in the late 1980s prompted her to sell—at an auction mounted by Christie's Geneva—much of the jewelry given to her by the two kings she had



Above
Princess Lilian's Broderie indienne ("Indian Embroidery") necklace (now in the

Van Cleef & Arpels Collection) and the fleur-de-lis brooch set with a 50-carat cabochon emerald that she commissioned



from Van Cleef & Arpels in 1964. It has a matching pair of earrings set with two faceted emeralds.

loved as a wife and stepmother. Jacques Arpels was present at this sale, where he bought the Feuille de marronniers brooch and the ribbon bracelet set with sapphires, as well as the Broderie indienne ("Indian Embroidery") necklace. A few years earlier, he had decided to set up a private collection to serve as an "ambassador" for the Maison of Van Cleef & Arpels, and these three jewels became part of this collection.

Princess Lilian of Belgium lived on for another fifteen years at Argenteuil. Her elegance was transformed into a sort of solitary dignity that was not without grandeur. On rare occasions she would attend a private view or talk, often accompanied by her younger daughter Marie-Esméralda. Prince Alexandre lived very discreetly, meanwhile, in a house on the estate. Princess Marie-Christine went into voluntary exile in America, where she chose to live apart from her entire family. After her mother's death in 2003, she refused to take even the smallest memento from her parents' collections at Argenteuil. Despite the efforts of Prince Alexandre and Princess Marie-Esméralda, the Belgian government refused to turn Argenteuil into a museum, and today it is in private hands. A large part of the collections was sold in Amsterdam in 2003, raising over €4 million. Nowadays, it is the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection that preserves the most authentic memory of the elegance of Princess Lilian of Belgium, in the form of a number of extremely precious jewels—souvenirs of the love of a king.

THE LOST EMERALDS OF QUEEN ASTRID

Royal Palace of Brussels, December 1960

It was a scene described by the celebrated hairdresser Alexandre in his memoirs.¹¹ The night before the wedding of King Baudouin and Fabiola de Mora y Aragón, a ball was given at the Royal Palace of Brussels—one of the last at the Belgian court. “King Leopold III summoned his children to a private audience. I saw King Baudouin and Prince Alexandre return, deeply moved, while Princess Joséphine-Charlotte tried to hide her tear-reddened eyes. The King had just spoken to them of their mother, Queen Astrid, before sharing her jewels between her daughter and daughters-in-law. Thus it was that I placed a tiara that had belonged to the much-loved Queen on the head of a deeply moved Princess Paola.”

A moving recollection indeed, yet it appears that when he sat down to write his memoirs in the early 1970s, Alexandre’s memory may have played tricks on him. An order placed with Van Cleef & Arpels indicates that Princess

Joséphine-Charlotte, Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, had already come into possession of the jewels she inherited from her mother Queen Astrid over seven years earlier, on the occasion of her marriage to Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg on April 9, 1953. Doubtless she found their settings rather old-fashioned, since on December 15, 1954, she took them to Van Cleef & Arpels to have them remounted in more contemporary style.

Among these pieces were a cross set with five emeralds, a pendant, and a necklace clasp, featuring in all eight emeralds weighing between 1.74 and 6.79 carats. The forms of these jewels, especially the cross-shaped brooch and the pendant, were distinctive: these were the emeralds given to Queen Astrid of Belgium, *née* Princess of Sweden, for her marriage in 1926, by her mother Princess Carl of Sweden, *née* Princess Ingeborg of Denmark. The set also included a pair of earrings and a bracelet added later, whose settings Grand Duchess Joséphine-Charlotte left unchanged.

Opposite

Queen Astrid of Belgium (1905–1935), first wife of King Leopold III, wearing her emeralds. The bracelet and earrings have remained intact

and are still in the collections of the Grand Dukes of Luxembourg. The motif and cross that she wears as a pendant on her pearl necklace, together with another simpler pendant, were

remounted by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1954 as a tiara-collare combination, at the request of Astrid’s daughter, Grand Duchess Joséphine-Charlotte of Luxembourg (1927–2005).





The provenance of these emeralds goes back a little further in history. Some of them were almost certainly from a very important parure that belonged to Princess Carl of Sweden. Consisting of a tiara and necklace embellished with seven pendants, these were a legacy from Queen Josephine of Sweden, who had herself been given them by her sister, Empress Maria Amélia of Brazil. Born Princesses of Leuchtenberg, both were granddaughters of Empress Josephine, first wife of Napoleon I. It appears that it was for the Empress Josephine that this set was created in the early nineteenth century. The inventory drawn up after her death, preserved in the Napoleon Collection in the French National Archives, states clearly that the empress's emeralds were among the jewels bequeathed to her son Prince Eugène, Duke of Leuchtenberg and father of the future Queen of Sweden and Empress of Brazil.

Unhappily for connoisseurs of historic jewelry, in the 1920s Princess Carl set about dismantling the necklace in order to give the pendants to her four children. In 1940, she gave the remains of the parure—the necklace minus nearly all its pendants and the tiara—to her second daughter Princess Martha, wife of the future King Olaf of Norway. It was these emeralds that had been given

to Queen Astrid that her daughter took to Van Cleef & Arpels in order to supply the stones necessary for the creation of a tiara-collarete that she would wear on many occasions. Today this jewel is in the collections of the Grand Dukes of Luxembourg and is worn by her daughter-in-law, Grand Duchess Maria Teresa of Luxembourg.

Also on the occasion of her engagement and marriage to Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg, in April 1953, Princess Joséphine-Charlotte of Belgium received several other jewels created by Van Cleef & Arpels. For his famous visit with his eldest son King Baudouin, on November 19, 1952, King Leopold III bought a pair of flower-shaped earrings and a brooch in rubies and diamonds as his daughter's engagement present. Two sumptuous wedding gifts to Princess Joséphine-Charlotte from Belgian organizations also came from Van Cleef & Arpels: a ruby and diamond bracelet and a necklace and bracelet set with hundreds of diamonds. The bracelet could be attached to an armature and worn as a tiara, and it was in this form that Princess Joséphine-Charlotte, her daughter-in-law Grand Duchess Maria Teresa and her two daughters, Princess Marie-Astrid and Princess Margareta, were to wear it on their wedding days.¹²

Opposite

Grand duchess Joséphine-Charlotte of Luxembourg, *née* Princess of Belgium, wearing the emerald and diamond tiara-collarete she commissioned

from Van Cleef & Arpels in 1954. The emerald and diamond earrings belonged to Queen Astrid. The diamond bracelet that the grand duchess wears on her right wrist was also

by Van Cleef & Arpels, and was part of the set she received on her marriage. The two antique diamond *rivières* are from the collections of the Grand Dukes of Luxembourg.



Above

Princess Joséphine Charlotte of Belgium and her fiancé the future Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg

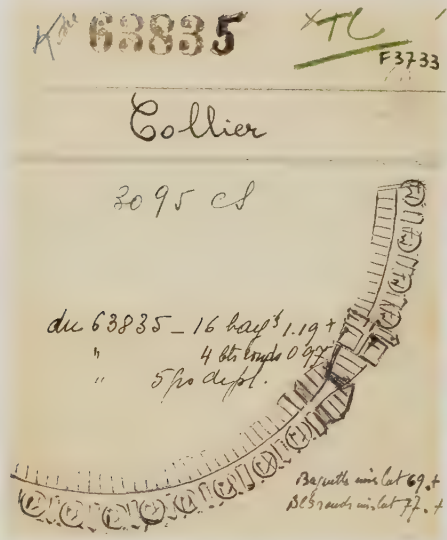
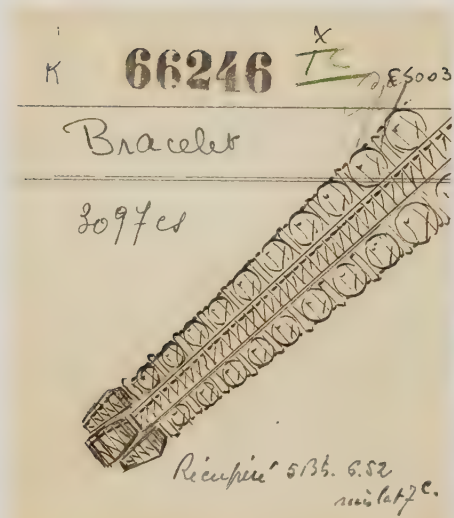
The princess is wearing the Van Cleef & Arpe's ruby and diamond earrings given to her by her father, King Leopold III



Above

The ruby and diamond brooch and earrings by Van Cleef & Arpels offered by King Leopold III

to his daughter, Princess Joséphine-Charlotte, Grand Duchess of Luxembourg

**Above**

Details (bottom right) of the diamond parure given to Princess Joséphine-Charlotte of Belgium, future Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, on her marriage, showing a bracelet (top) and a necklace in two parts (bottom)

These jewels may be worn in a number of different ways. The future grand duchess, her two daughters, and her daughter-in-law all wore the bracelet as a tiara on their wedding days. Top left: a ruby and diamond bracelet by

Van Cleef & Arpels given to the future Grand Duchess of Luxembourg on her marriage. Bottom left: the diamond bracelet from the Van Cleef & Arpels set mounted as a necklace, with the back section of the original necklace.

**Above**

Princess Joséphine-Charlotte of Belgium and her husband, Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg, on their wedding day in 1953

RENÉE PUISSANT, NÉE VAN CLEEF

OCTOBER 22, 1896—DECEMBER 12, 1942

Renée Puissant was born in Paris, in the eleventh arrondissement, fifteen months after the marriage of her parents, Alfred Van Cleef and Esther Arpels. She was their only child. No documents regarding her early years have survived, not surprisingly given that this was a time when girls' education did not lead to diplomas or apprenticeships. Only her first names give some indication, perhaps, of her parents' liberal tendencies: her birth was registered under the name Renée Rachel Van Cleef, so that her Jewish identity was encapsulated in her middle name, and she was known as Renée throughout her life.

She was not yet eighteen when World War I broke out in the summer of 1914, while she was staying with her mother on the Côte d'Azur, where Alfred Van Cleef had sent his wife and daughter in order to get them away from the field of military operations. The first documented event in her life was her marriage in 1918 to Emile Puissant, a young officer who was being treated in one of the hospitals where her mother Esther was a nurse. Quite possibly it was love at first sight. Born April 16, 1891, Emile was then twenty-six, and on their wedding day must have cut a handsome figure in his uniform as an officer of the Chasseurs Alpins. Of this wartime marriage, necessarily a modest affair, no photographs survive.

After the Armistice, Emile joined the family firm founded by his wife's father-in-law and uncles. There he became administrative director, and very quickly made his mark with his innovative ideas for advertising and what we would now call publicity. He introduced a practice that was revolutionary at this time in the world of jewelry: promotional sales of a proportion of the firm's stock at cut prices. He died prematurely in a car accident on the Côte d'Azur on February 14, 1926.

As a widow, Renée was now to emerge from the shadows. The few photographs of her that have come down to us show a woman of great elegance who was frequently seen at the races and at fashionable soirées, where she mixed with society ladies who influenced and wore the latest fashions. As a childless widow she doubtless found she had time on her hands, and proposed that she should take over as the firm's artistic director. Self-taught, she freely admitted that she had never even held a pencil. What she brought to the firm was her ideas, and above all a highly sensual approach to the wearing of jewels. Her natural flair encompassed settings, the flexibility of a mount, bold combinations of stones, and technical innovations. She was also an innovator in aligning Van Cleef & Arpels creations



Above
Renée Puissant, late 1930s



Above
Renee Puissant as a girl,
a few years before World War I

so closely with style trends. Far from neglecting the quality of the stones they used, which remained one of the firm's criteria of excellence, she set them in elegant lines that allowed women to wear them with greater ease.

Her work with designers, especially René Sim Lacaze, and the firm's workshops was to give rise to some of the Maison's masterpieces. The Mystery Setting technique, in which carefully calibrated stones are cut on their sides with tiny grooves and threaded onto a gold lattice, so that the setting is completely invisible, was patented during her tenure in 1933, even if Alfred Van Cleef had been working on it for several years. She was almost certainly the inspiration behind most of the jewels created for the duchess of Windsor between 1935 and 1940. From her conversations with the Duchess there emerged another revolutionary idea that remains one of the jewels in the firm's crown: the Zip necklace, inspired by the zip fastener that was becoming a feature of elegant wardrobes in the late 1930s. Invented in the United States in 1851, the process was not finally patented until forty years later, by the American Whitcomb Judson. As so often, this innovation was to have only limited success, and it was not until improvements were introduced by the Swede Gideon Sundbäck in 1912 that its use started to spread. Used on navy and air force uniforms, it was at first a military accessory. It was probably on the uniforms of her first husband, an airman named Earl Winfield Spencer, that the future Duchess of Windsor first saw this clever idea. In the late 1930s, she asked Renée Puissant to work on the creation of a flexible necklace in the form of a zip fastener. There was no time to develop the idea before World War II, but it was taken up again by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1951.

Passionately devoted to her work, Renée Puissant never remarried, and we know little of her private life. Only a few documents from her lifetime are preserved in the Arpels family archive. On October 31, 1938, she drew up her will. Then aged forty-two, she doubted that she would ever have children. From her father Alfred Van Cleef, who had died on June 11 that year, she had just inherited a large number of shares in the family jewelry firm. These she bequeathed to her uncles, Charles Salomon, Louis, and Jules Arpels, or in the event of their deaths to her first cousins, Claude, Jacques, and Pierre Arpels. To her mother Esther Van Cleef, *née* Arpels, she left the usufruct of her fortune. Three months later, on January 6, 1939, she confirmed her intentions by giving the bare ownership of these shares to her cousins.

Neither her mother, who had Renée's body brought back to the cemetery in Nice where she was laid to rest beside her father, nor her uncles or her cousins ever spoke about her tragic death. The entry in the Vichy municipal register of deaths to be found among the papers of her estate is bureaucratically laconic: "Deceased on 12 December 1942 at 1500 hours at her place of residence at 113 boulevard des Etats-Unis, René [sic] Van Cleef, born in Paris (eleventh arrondissement), unemployed."

Why did Renée Puissant take refuge in Vichy, provisional capital of France under Marshal Pétain? Did she think that her friendship with Josée Laval, daughter of the Minister of the Interior Pierre Laval, would protect her against the anti-Jewish laws? Why did she kill herself on December 12, 1942, a month almost to the day after the invasion of the "free zone" by the German army? Whatever the answers to these questions, she remains one of the most significant designers of her time.



CHAPTER III

PRINCE

CHARMINGS

Opposite

Iranian Crown Prince
Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and
Princess Fawzia of Egypt on
their wedding day in 1939.
The princess is wearing her

diamonds by Van Cleef & Arpels.
The necklace is in fact in two
sections: the third and lowest
section that can be seen
on this photograph is in fact
the triple diamond rivière from

the Iranian crown jewels.
For this very special occasion,
she wore this as well as her
Van Cleef & Arpels necklace



Diamonds on the Nile

*MOHAMMAD REZA PAHLAVI, CROWN PRINCE
AND FUTURE SHAH OF IRAN*

Cairo, March 16, 1939

He was young, handsome in a slightly saturnine way, and a prince. She was very beautiful and looked like a Hollywood film star. She was also a princess. And they were getting married. The celebrations seen in the streets of Cairo for the marriage of the Iranian crown prince and Princess Fawzia of Egypt were pharaonic in their dimensions. And this is no exaggeration: it truly was a spectacle worthy of Cecil B. DeMille. An endless succession of floats paraded in front of the Abdeen Palace, Cairo's answer to Versailles. Some were composed exclusively of flowers. Others were weighed down with a welter of papier-mâché figures of symbolic significance, including a golden lion, emblem of the Pahlavis, yoked to a state carriage embellished with the arms of both dynasties. A pair of antique goddesses many feet tall displayed crowns symbolizing those that the young couple would wear when the bridegroom became shah. The Egyptian people had gathered in the thousands in the palace square and neighboring streets to enjoy the show. Perhaps they would catch a glimpse of the prince and his bride as they waved to the crowds from one of the palace balconies.

The atmosphere that reigned inside the palace, by contrast, was more subdued, not to say stiffly formal. Neither Fawzia, who had turned seventeen only

Opposite

Empress Fawzia of Iran, née
Princess of Egypt, wearing

Van Cleef & Arpels jewelry:
a tiara, a necklace in two
sections, and earrings

four months earlier, nor Mohammad Reza, just nineteen, seemed to really grasp what was happening. To cap it all, they had only met for the first time two days earlier. This was a political marriage, the alliance of two oriental dynasties, arranged by King Farouk for his sister, and by Reza Shah, Shah of Iran, for his son.

The young couple were certainly not unhappy with each other, but it would take many months or even years before they could get to know each other properly, to appreciate each other, and perhaps one day to love each other. First and foremost, they had to find a way of understanding each other. His Arabic was mediocre. Her Persian was non-existent. So when they managed to snatch a few moments together in the one of the palace's immense salons—decorated in a style mingling orientalism, shades of art nouveau and touches of Versailles, with scarlet velvet hangings vying with carved paneling smothered in gold leaf—the few shy words they exchanged were in French.

Seventy years later, it is still difficult to do justice to the beauty of Princess Fawzia of Egypt without lapsing into superlatives. She looked like Gene Tierney, only perhaps even lovelier. She contrasted the slightly manufactured charms of a film star with a touchingly bashful air that made her even more irresistible and lent her a seductive aura of mystery. The celebrated photographer Cecil Beaton was dazzled: "If ever Botticelli were reincarnated and wished to paint an Asian Venus or primavera, here is his subject." The beautiful Egyptian princess had been born in Alexandria, in Ras el-Tin Palace, a colossal edifice overlooking the Mediterranean on one side and the inland lake of Alexandria on the other. She had spent her childhood and adolescent years between Montaza Palace, some nine miles (fifteen kilometers) outside Alexandria, and Koubbeh Palace in Cairo, in almost total seclusion. Her father, King Fuad I, was a secretive man and a suspicious and mistrustful husband, who had never really got over his first marriage in 1895 to one of his cousins, Princess Shwikar. Fabulously wealthy, she had brought a considerable fortune to her new husband, who was then merely the youngest son of the late Khedive Ismail. This brilliant but extravagant sovereign had reduced Egypt to bankruptcy, and earlier in 1895 had died in Turkey a ruined man, leaving his children only a meager inheritance.

According to the malicious gossips of Cairo—of whom there was no shortage—it was Prince Fuad's mistress Mme. Suarez, a member of one of Egypt's most influential Jewish families, who had arranged the marriage with Shwikar, in order to secure ample financial means for her lover. She had then used her shrewd business skills to help him turn his wife's large dowry into a colossal fortune.

Two children were born from this marriage: a son, Ismail, who died at birth, and a daughter, Fawkia, in 1897. The little princess lay at the origins of a tradition that persists to this day in the Egyptian royal family. In homage to his mother, Kadine Ferial, one of the many wives of the Khedive Ismail, Fuad decided to give



Above
Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-
1980) Crown Prince and later

Shah of Iran, in the late 1930s,
at the time of his marriage
to Princess Fawz a of Egypt

all his children first names beginning with "F." The birth of their baby was not to bring the couple happiness, however. Ever since her marriage, Shwikar had been bored stiff. While her husband lived in grand style with his mistress, she remained cloistered in the palace in Cairo. Assertive by nature and resolved that she was not going to put up with this state of affairs, she persuaded one of her brothers, Prince Seifeddin, to intervene. Seifeddin, who from childhood had been in awe of his beautiful sister, did not do things by half. He shot his brother-in-law. The bullet lodged in Prince Fuad's throat, so close to the artery that his doctors refused to remove it for fear of causing a fatal hemorrhage. For the rest of his life Fuad was to suffer from hoarseness, occasionally erupting into bouts of rasping coughing that sounded like as a dog barking. He judged it prudent, nevertheless, to rid himself of his troublesome wife.

Now that she had her freedom, Shwikar was to marry again no fewer than four times. For his part, Fuad waited until he became King of Egypt in 1917 before he married again, this time to a young woman of twenty-five from the Cairo haute bourgeoisie, Nazli Sabry. Of Franco-Egyptian ancestry—one of her forebears had been a soldier of Napoleon¹—Queen Nazli, or Malika in Arabic, was immediately cloistered in the Koubbeh Palace, which had been elevated to the status of royal harem. There she gave birth to five children: Farouk in 1920, Fawzia in 1921, Faiza in 1923, Faika in 1926, and Fathia in 1930. All the children were brought up in the palace, with only their mother for company, in a hothouse atmosphere that was as opulent as it was suffocating.

Once or twice a month, the young queen was allowed a rare outing to the Cairo Opera, where she sat in a little box closed off by grilles. The rest of the time, she whiled away her uneventful evenings with her exclusively female entourage. To relieve the monotony of this dull existence, she had taken to picking violent quarrels with her noble husband, to which he responded with gifts of new jewels in the hope of calming her down. Over the years, the queen's jewels became a sort of barometer for the mood at court. Every day her ladies-in-waiting would cast discreet glances at her wrists, where the presence of a new bracelet invariably indicated that there had been a particularly tempestuous row the night before.

While the death of King Fuad in 1936 liberated his wife, Queen Nazli, it also placed on the throne a youth of sixteen, Crown Prince Farouk, who was still at school in England. As queen mother, Nazli now planned to take her revenge for her years of seclusion, both in her public, political life and in her private affairs. Having no objection to playing the role of matchmaker, she supported plans for her eldest daughter to marry the Crown Prince of Iran—partly at least for the sake of demonstrating that henceforth she was a player in her country's foreign affairs.

On the Iranian side, this alliance was viewed as a diplomatic victory. The Pahlavi dynasty had been on the throne for only a few years, since the redoubtable

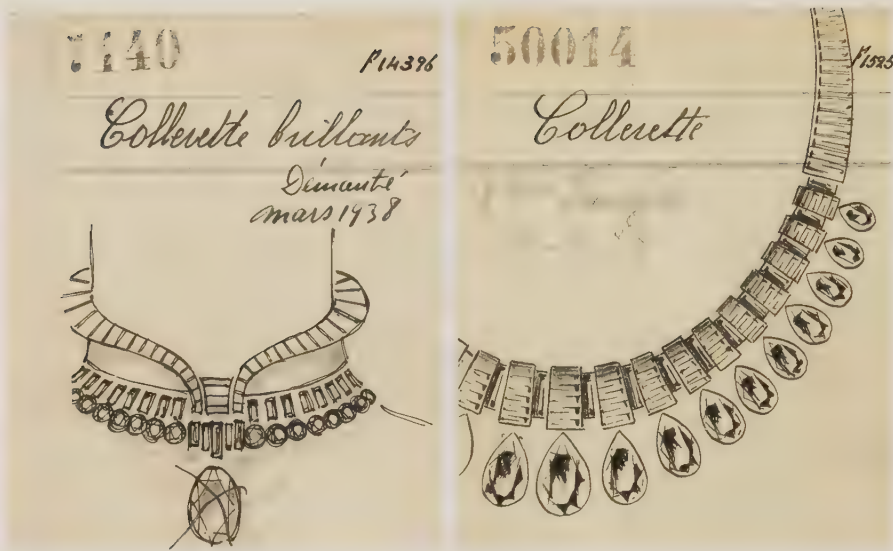
**Above**

The Egyptian royal family on holiday in Switzerland in the 1930s. Sitting on sleds, from left to right, are

Princesses Fawzia, Fath'a, and Faika. Standing behind them in the center are Princess Faiza and Queen Farida, first wife of King Farouk.

Reza Shah had ousted Ahmed Shah, the last of the Qajar dynasty, in 1925. An alliance with the prestigious royal house of Egypt, one of the most brilliant in the Orient, would endow it with a little of the luster that it lacked. Reza Shah, who was modernizing in his outlook, also wanted his son to marry a young woman who would support him in the progressive social and political measures that he, Reza, had initiated in Iran over the previous decade. A princess who spoke fluent French and English, and who was used to a European lifestyle, fitted the bill perfectly.

The only obstacle to the marriage lay in the matter of religion. The Pahlavis were Shi'ite Muslims, while members of the Egyptian Muhammad (or Mehmet) Ali dynasty (named after its founder) were Sunnis.² Between these two rival branches of Islam little love was lost. Two ceremonies were therefore planned, in order to appease the clerics of both countries. As for the two principal parties, no one even bothered to ask their opinion. It would never have entered the head of the young Shapur³ of Iran to oppose his formidable father's wishes. He consoled himself by gazing at the photographs of his fiancée: at least he would have the most beautiful princess in the Orient as his bride.

**Above**

Two drawings of the tiara of Princess Fawzia of Egypt. The diamonds of the necklace

on the left, with the exception of the pear-shaped diamond pendant, were reused to create the lower part of the tiara.

The collerette on the right formed the upper part.

Fawzia was equally submissive. In any case, no one would have understood if she had turned down this marriage to a future sovereign, nineteen years old, educated at Le Rosey in Switzerland, and handsome to boot. "At this time," recalled Adel Sabet, a cousin of King Farouk, "the King's sister lived in virtual seclusion on her mother's boat, moored permanently on the Nile. On her rare outings she was invariably accompanied by a large retinue of lady companions and servants; she was literally cloistered. Marriage might have appeared to her as a gateway to freedom, or even as a thrilling adventure with the young Iranian crown prince, who was hardly older than she was."⁴

It was the first ceremony of this royal wedding that took place in Cairo on March 16, 1939. At a time when armies throughout Europe were on the march, Queen Nazli just had time to order her daughter's lavish trousseau from Paris. Two hundred trunks were specially made to hold the two hundred dresses, one hundred and sixty pairs of shoes, and seven fur coats that the princess took home with her to Iran. Van Cleef & Arpels, doubtless on the recommendation of the Egyptian ambassador to Paris, Mahmoud Fakhry Pasha,⁵ were asked to supply the wedding jewels—a collerette, two pairs of earrings, and a tiara, all set with several thousand diamonds—in record time.

By the end of 1938 the set was finished. The collerette consisted of two *rivières* of 128 and 132 baguette-cut diamonds, from which hung four rows of 208 brilliant-cut diamonds. All the stones came from a dismantled collerette and

**Above**

Drawings for the necklace in two parts and the earrings from the diamond parure

of Princess Fawzia of Egypt. The set also included a second pair of earrings that was simpler in design.

double rivièrè from stock. The stones for the tiara, meanwhile, were taken from a collerette of 32 pear-shaped diamonds and 198 baguette-cut diamonds, while the armature itself was set with 355 smaller diamonds. Two pairs of earrings were added to the set, one consisting of two relatively simple bows in diamonds, the other taking the more elaborate form of pendants from which hung two beautiful pear-shaped diamonds together weighing 17.28 carats.

Queen Nazli took advantage of this opportunity to buy a second and even more lavish diamond parure for herself. Her tiara, which could also be worn as a necklace, comprised 719 round and baguette-cut diamonds weighing 292 carats, wrapped around a platinum armature. It was one of the most exquisite hair ornaments ever created by Van Cleef & Arpels. Her necklace was another masterpiece, consisting of 673 baguette-cut and brilliant-cut diamonds set in three rivièrès that merged in the center of the necklace in a “sun” motif, from which four rivièrès were suspended. The bill for these two sets came to nearly 7 million francs, or just under C3 million. In a letter dated February 15, sent to Messieurs Van Cleef & Arpels by her chamberlain, Queen Nazli expressed her “great satisfaction with the execution of these jewels.” The queen was later to order two more important pieces, a Passe-Partout necklace in yellow gold and colored sapphires, and a gold box decorated with a Colibri hummingbird motif in Mystery Set rubies and sapphires.



MAISON
DE
SA MAJESTÉ LA REINE NAZLI

Palais de Koubbeh,

le 16 Février 1939.

Messieurs Van Cleef & Arpels.

Place Vendôme. PARIS.

Messieurs,

J'ai l'honneur de vous informer que nous avons dûment reçu les bijoux de Sa Majesté la Reine ainsi que ceux de Son Altesse Royale la Princesse Fewzieh.

Sa Majesté m'a donné l'ordre de vous communiquer Sa haute satisfaction de la bonne exécution des ces bijoux ainsi que de l'empressement que vous avez mis pour les finir en temps voulu.

En m'acquittant de cette agréable mission, je vous prie d'agréer, Messieurs, l'expression de mes civilités les plus pressées.

CHAMBELLAN
DE SA MAJESTÉ LA REINE NAZLI.

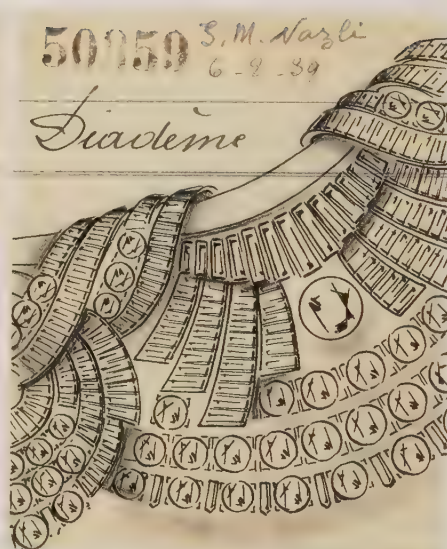
M. Aminou

Above
Letter of thanks to Maison
Van Cleef & Arpels from
the Egyptian court, following

the delivery of the diamond
parures for Princess Fawzia
and Queen Nazi



Above
Original drawing for the
necklace of Princess Fawzia
of Egypt.



Above
Drawing for the tiara of Queen Nazli. Top, drawings for Queen Nazli's tiara and necklace.

Opposite
Drawing for Queen Nazli's diamond necklace.





Above
Queen Nazli, her son King Farouk, and Sultana Melek, widow of Sultan Hussein Kamel,

King Farouk's uncle, who reigned from 1914 to 1917. The photograph was taken at the Abdeen Palace in Cairo,

during the gala dinner celebrating the marriage of Princess Fawzia and the Iranian crown prince.

For his part, the crown prince brought with him from Tehran a fabulous emerald and diamond parure chosen specially by his father for Princess Fawzia. The presentation of these jewels proved the occasion for a classic scene. Astounded by the avalanche of precious stones with which she had been showered over the previous week, the Princess was simply struck dumb by the sight of these jewels—despite the strenuous efforts of her mother, who repeatedly hissed, “Say thank you!” Only after a hearty pinch did Fawzia finally manage a timid “thank you.”

From the wedding photographs it also appears that the crown prince brought with him one of the most sumptuous treasures of the Iranian crown jewels, which Fawzia would merely have the legal right to wear but not own. On the corsage of her wedding gown can clearly be seen a third necklace of three diamond rivières, attached to the Van Cleef & Arpels necklace in order to make it even more imposing. This was doubtless the triple rivière created a year earlier using stones from the royal treasure, which still today forms part of the Iranian crown jewels. In a break with tradition, the bride's trousseau and jewels were not paraded through the streets of Cairo for the admiration of the crowds, as this lavish custom had been abolished a few years earlier. (see page 144)



Top
The arrival of the married couple in Iran. From left to right, a brother of the crown prince,

Princess Fawzia, Reza Shah, Queen Nazli, and Crown Prince Mohammad Reza

and his second wife, Queen Tadj el Molouk, on the occasion of the second royal wedding ceremony in Tehran

STREETS FILLED WITH DIAMONDS

Cairo, January 1873

The procession stretched for several hundred meters through the narrow streets of Cairo. On open litters, soldiers carried the most fabulous treasure ever amassed. Diamonds, rubies, sapphires, pearls, objects in gold and silver, sumptuous damasks and embroideries, and even piles of crested sheets and tablecloths were displayed for the admiration of the Egyptian people, who crowded the roofs and windows of the houses on the procession's route. This was the custom for all royal weddings. The trousseau had to be presented to the people, so that the humblest *fellah* could judge the power and greatness of the sovereign. This was one tradition that His Highness the Khedive Ismail was certainly observing to the letter.

Grandson of Muhammad Ali, the dynasty's founder, this sybaritic prince had dazzled European royalty three years earlier at the opening of the Suez Canal, when French Empress Eugénie and Austrian Emperor Franz-Josef arrived to celebrate Egypt's entry into the concert of modern nations. Today, the khedive was marrying not one, not even two, but no fewer than four of his children, Princes Tevfik, Hussein, and Hassan, and Princess Fatma. For weeks,

the riches destined to celebrate the four marriages had been piling up at the Abdeen Palace.

"In a vast drawing room, the bride's jewels were displayed on cushions of silky scarlet velvet," recounted Prince Muhammad Ali, grandson of the Khedive Ismail. Tiaras, bracelets, earrings and drops, diamond aigrettes and other ornaments, all gold set with the most precious stones, but chiefly with diamonds. Over each cushion was firmly fixed a covering of steel netting, strong but fine as lace, enabling everyone to admire the treasures while protecting them from any risk of theft.

"Two other large rooms were lined with shelves of various precious stones, goldsmiths' work set with jewels, gold and silver plate glittering with precious stones, censers with shining golden chains, amber mouthpieces for pipes, huge gold and silver trays, some plain, some inlaid with gems, bejeweled lamps, toilet sets with diamond-studded brushes and combs, in short a display of such dazzling magnificence that the spectator was tempted to ask if some Aladdin had not, thanks to his magic lamp, laid under contribution the fabulous treasures of these wedding jewels." All these objects, were also protected by steel netting, and the resplendent wedding gifts were carried through the streets



Above

The marriage procession of the Crown Prince and future Khedive Mohammad Tawfiq through the streets of Cairo, nineteenth century

by armed guards under the eager gaze of the people of Cairo.⁶

Unhappily, the expenses involved in these four weddings, the sums swallowed up in the building of the Cairo Opera (for which the khedive had commissioned Verdi to write a work that would become the famous *Aida*), the bills for the positively pharaonic works for the construction of the Suez Canal (some of which had been outstanding for years), and the opulence of the khedive's court all added up to make gaping holes in the national budget. In 1875, in order to avoid bankruptcy,

the Khedive was compelled to place his country under the financial stewardship of the European banks. Four years later, in 1879, he was forced into abdication and exile.

The nuptial procession of 1873 was to be the last of its kind. Sixty-six years later, the wedding gifts for the marriage of his granddaughter to the Crown Prince of Iran were every bit as sumptuous, but the Egyptian court judged it more prudent—and above all more discreet—to shield them from view within the salons of the Abdeen Palace.



(continued from page 140) Following Muslim tradition, Princess Fawzia was not present at the wedding ceremony, which took place on March 15 in the presence of her husband, her brother King Farouk, a handful of ministers and diplomats, and Sheikh Al-Maghrabi, rector of the Al-Azhar mosque and the highest spiritual authority in Sunni Islam. The young bride, her mother Queen Nazli, her sister-in-law Queen Farida, and the ladies of the royal family and the court were invited only to the gala dinner given in the Abdeen Palace. "Crowds decked out in feathers and plumes, bemedaled and beribboned, garbed in rich colors and wreathed in perfume pressed around the young Shapur as he wandered among the eminent figures of Cairo high society, stiff as a poker, with an escort of chamberlains and aides-de-camp, lavishing upon the hundreds of guests who had come to welcome him scowls that might at best pass as heavily suppressed smiles," recalled Adel Sabet. "Fawzia appeared in the full glory of her beauty, a little shy and daunted in the face of this unaccustomed hubbub. Queen Nazli wore a tiara and a sumptuous gown, white and sequined, trailing in her wake a diaphanous procession of ladies-in-waiting."⁷⁷ The menu for the wedding banquet was in French, naturally:



Consommé de volaille froid
Tronçons de saumon à la vénitienne
Soupe de mer à l'orientale
Galantine de faisan d'Écosse truffée
Agneau de lait à la bergère
Chaud-froid de pigeon en Bellevue
Aiguillettes de veau à la mode
Poulardes de Bresse Lamberty
Pâté de gibier à la Mirabeau
Langue de Charolais à la gelée de porto

Asperges en branches sauce divine
Dinde du Fayoum rôtie
à la gelée dorée
Salade gauloise
Baklava Pyramidal
Charlotte aux fruits
Gâteau Marguerite
Petits-fours variés
Glaces assorties
Friandises et fruits

Above

Official photograph of the royal wedding at the Abdeen Palace. Seated in the front row, from left to right, are Princess Faiza, Princess Nimetullah, daughter of the Khedive Ismail and

great-aunt of King Farouk, Sultana Melek, widow of Sultan Hussein Kamel, Queen Farida, King Farouk, Queen Nazli, Princess Fawzia of Egypt, and the Crown Prince of Iran

Following pages

The crown prince at an official dinner in the 1930s





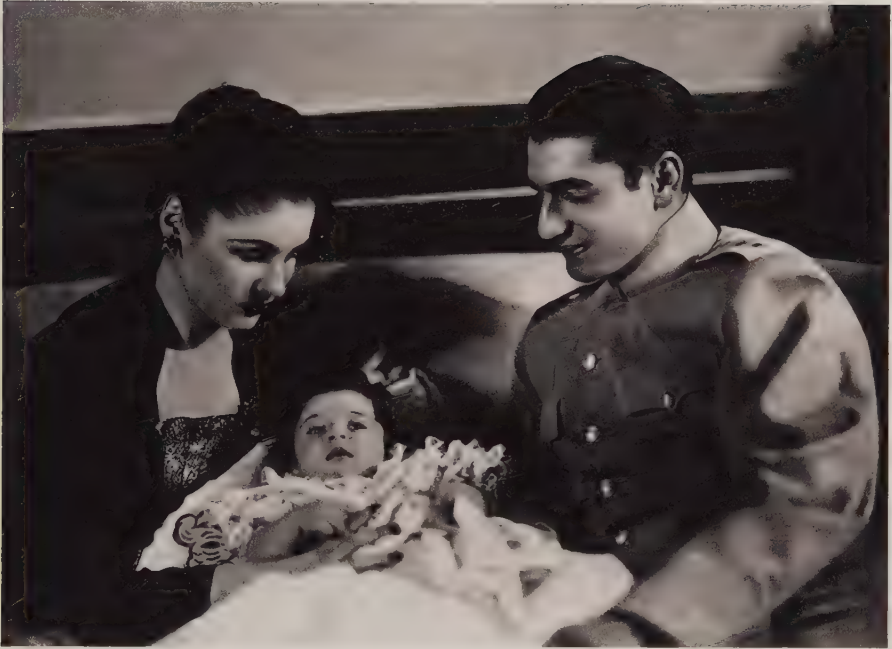


Above

Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi on a plane journey in the 1930s

After the dinner, the bride and groom and the royal family posed for the traditional family photograph. King Farouk sits on a throne in the center of the group, flanked by two queens: his mother Nazli and his wife Farida. To the right are the Sultana Melek and Princess Nimet, the king's aunts, and Princess Faiza, his second sister. To the left are the newlyweds, with the Iranian ambassador and his wife. The Crown Prince and the new Crown Princess of Iran wear forced smiles that barely conceal their bemusement at finding themselves married to each other with such haste.

The following day, a veritable caravan set off for Iran. To the two hundred trunks of the bride's trousseau were added those of her mother, who had decided to escort her personally to her new country—where her offhand manner and comments on the rustic nature of life in Tehran rapidly exhausted the patience of the Pahlavi family. As he greeted his daughter-in-law on the platform at Tehran railway station, Reza Shah kissed her on the forehead before presenting her to the officials who accompanied him: "Here is your future sovereign." Then he turned to Fawzia, adding, "Well, daughter, here are your country and your people."

**Above**

The young Shah of Iran, his wife Empress Fawzia, and their daughter Princess Shahnaz.

It was now time for the second, Shi'ite, marriage ceremony, from which Fawzia was absent as she had been from the first. At the dinner given at the Golestan Palace, she wore her Van Cleef & Arpels parure and a second wedding gown, also from Paris. Also present on this occasion was her mother-in-law Queen Taj el Molouk, a redoubtable little woman with fair hair and arresting green eyes, who was the only person at court able to stand up to her formidable husband. Her two daughters, the Princesses Shams and Ashraf, accompanied her, along with the numerous half-brothers and sisters born to Reza Shah's three other wives. The English court, which continued to view Egypt as a dominion in which the British ambassador ruled the roost, had given the union its blessing, and Princess Alice and her husband the Earl of Athlone had come as guests.

Despite the obvious best intentions of Reza Shah and the young couple, this glittering marriage was to prove disastrous. During their honeymoon on the Caspian Sea, Fawzia caught malaria, though she nevertheless managed to return to Iran happy and smiling. Her relationship with her husband was not one of great passion, certainly, but the couple got on very well and seemed to be genuinely close.



But war, politics, and—it has to be said—the ponderous atmosphere of the Iranian court were to snuff out these first flickers of happiness. In 1941, suspecting him of harboring pro-German sentiments, the Russians and the British forced Reza Shah to abdicate. His son succeeded him, aged twenty-one. Fawzia was queen, but her father-in-law's departure into exile had deprived her of a heavyweight ally against the increasingly invasive authoritarianism of her mother-in-law. Reza Shah had been able to stand up to his wife and he had been won over by his gentle, discreet daughter-in-law, whose nature was so very different from the volcanic temperaments of the female members of his close family. However, the new sovereign did not have his father's authority, especially when it came to facing up to his own mother. And the birth of a daughter, Princess Shahnaz, in 1940 was viewed as a disappointment, especially as she was to be the couple's only child.

Neglected by her husband, who was endeavoring simultaneously to thwart the designs on his country fostered by Germany, the Soviet Union, and the Allies, and snubbed by the royal family who criticized her for having only born a daughter, Fawzia spent her days repeating the same phrase, over and over: "I'm bored." Compared with the delights of Cairo, Paris, and the Orient, Tehran was at best provincial. The city could boast only two cinemas, and the only shops were in the bazaar, where it was not appropriate for the queen to venture. There were no luxury hotels where wealthy and sophisticated foreigners might stay, no fashion or jewelry boutiques, not even a Groppi® where she might go with a lady-in-waiting and a few friends to catch up on the latest gossip. In any case, Fawzia had no friends in Tehran. Boredom slid into depression, and probably the early stages of anorexia.

Early in 1945, King Farouk, appalled at reports that were reaching him about his favorite sister, asked Abdel Sabet to go to Iran and observe Fawzia's precise state of health for himself: "In the hour that followed our arrival at the Egyptian embassy, Empress Fawzia visited us, alone and without an escort; we were immediately shocked by the sight of her face, in which youth and beauty were no more than memories. She was a mere shadow of her former self, almost cadaverous, like a concentration camp survivor. Her shoulder blades protruded through the fabric of her clothes like fins on a starving fish, and the effects of jaundice and malaria were still visible in her features. [...] As soon as Fawzia had left, we discussed the situation: clearly something was wrong. We remembered then the rumor we had heard that the Princess was being slowly poisoned at court."⁹

Opposite

Princess Fawzia and Princess Faiza of Egypt at a gala soirée. The two sisters of King Farouk

are wearing the yashmak, a gauzy scarf that could be used to veil the lower half of the face. Very strictly observed

in the nineteenth century, it was a custom that had become much more discreet by the 1930s

A few days later, it was decided that Fawzia should return to Cairo. Officially this was just a holiday. In fact she would never set eyes on Tehran again. Her divorce from the shah was announced in November 1948. Four months later, she married a distant cousin, Colonel Ismail Shirin Bey. That same year, she went back to Paris for the first time. At Van Cleef & Arpels, she had some diamond parures transformed into slightly simpler jewels: her daily routine now no longer required the heavy ceremonial jewels that she used to wear in Iran. In 1952, she became one of the first to wear the new Zip necklace for which Renée Puissant and the Duchess of Windsor had launched the vogue before the war. Her necklace was of yellow gold set with rubies and diamonds, with a matching pair of earrings.

Her last public appearance had taken place ten months earlier, at her brother King Farouk's second wedding, to Narriman Sadek. It had been Fawzia's responsibility, as the king's sister, to fetch the young girl from her home and bring her officially to the Abdeen Palace—a job that might have fallen to Nazli the queen mother, had she not left Egypt a few years earlier. Having converted to Catholicism, Nazli now lived in California with her youngest daughter Princess Fathia, who had married Riad Ghali, a Copt. King Farouk was furious, and stripped his mother and sister of their civil lists and their titles. They were never to see each other again, although Nazli and Fathia attended Farouk's funeral in Rome in March 1965. The former King of Egypt died mysteriously at the age of forty-five, thirteen years after his abdication.

Ten years later, Nazli's jewels were all over the American front pages. In October 1975, a sale was announced at Sotheby's New York. Among the lots described in the newspapers was a tiara set with over 700 diamonds, which was certainly the one created by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1939. The rest of the story is unclear, although it appears that the sale was canceled. More jewels belonging to Nazli, this time principally emeralds and rubies with an estimated value of \$500,000, were offered at judicial auction in Los Angeles in September 1976. When bidding stalled at a mere \$160,000, the judge canceled the sale. Queen Nazli died in 1978, two years after her daughter Fathia's tragic death. On December 10, 1976, when President Sadat had just proposed to her that she should return to Egypt with her mother, Fathia had been murdered by her former husband, who refused to allow her to go. As for the queen's jewels, nobody knows what happened to them and whether or not they were sold.

After the revolution of 1952, Princess Fawzia did not leave Egypt again. With Ismail Shirin Bey she had two children: Nadia (1950–2009) and Hussein (born in 1955). She still lives in Alexandria, where she remains the last witness of the vanished world that was the fabled Egyptian court.



Above
Diamond necklace created by
Van Cleef & Arpels for Princess
Fatima Toussoun, wife of a

cousin of King Farouk. The central
part of the jewel could be
detached and worn as a brooch.
Another motif in the form of

a double bow in diamonds could
also be worn as the centerpiece
of this jewel. Zentrini Private
Collection, Rome

**Above and opposite**

Two designs for diamond necklaces for Princess Fawzia from the late 1940s. On the right-hand design, the central

section may be detached and worn as a bracelet. It is then replaced with a simpler central section, also in diamonds.



THE MYSTERY OF THE RUBY PEONIES

It is one of the most beautiful jewels ever created by Van Cleef & Arpels and one of the glories of its private collection.

The brooch symbolizes the very essence of the Maison's virtuoso jewelers, known as "*les mains d'or*" because of the detailed precision of their work. Everything is perfect, the stones, the quality of the design, the movement of the petals, and the Mystery Setting of the rubies.

This bouquet of peonies in rubies and diamonds dates from 1938. After World War II, on February 6, 1946, it was bought by Mahmoud Fakhri Pasha, Egyptian ambassador to Paris for over twenty years. Married to Princess Fawkia, daughter of King Fuad I and Princess Shwikar, he was doubtless charged with making a number of purchases from Parisian shops on his in-laws' behalf.

For whom was the sumptuous Pivoine clip intended? Almost certainly for one of King Farouk's sisters. Princess Faiza, the second daughter of King Fuad and Queen Nazli, married Mehmet Ali Bulent Rauf in May 1945. In 1950 she made a trip to Paris, and the clip consisting of two Mystery Set peonies surrounded

by diamond leaves was returned to Van Cleef & Arpels in her name for a "general review."

Of all of King Farouk's sisters, Faiza was the most seductive. Scarcely less beautiful than her elder sister Fawzia, she was much more outgoing and vivacious, and above all extremely stylish. Having married a distant cousin, she transformed the Zohria Palace in Cairo into an oasis of culture filled with entertaining people. "Her court," recalled Adel Sabet, "was a collection of colorful characters who formed a mixed bunch to say the least—one lost track of their Egyptian, Turkish, Circassian, Albanian, or Levantine origins—the most outré of the young people were real eccentrics, as much dandies as anarchists."¹⁰

Every year, the princess and her husband made a trip to Europe, and particularly to France. "She would arrive in Paris," remembered the hairdresser Alexandre, "trailing a retinue of eighty people and trunks filled with jewels. I would go and do her hair every day. At Jacques Fath, she would order up

Opposite

Princess Faiza of Egypt, sister of King Farouk, leaving the Ritz Hotel on the place Vendôme in 1946.

Following pages

Left page, the double ruby peony clip. The open peony shown in the advertisement

has vanished. The closed peony opposite is now in the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection.





Pierre Simon



**Above**

Original drawing for the double
Ballerina clip in diamonds and
Mystery Sapphire.

Opposite

Princess Faiza of Egypt in
the interior garden of the Ritz
Hotel on place Vendôme

She is wearing a diamond
Ballerina clip by Van Cleef
& Arpels.

the whole collection."¹¹ A photograph from 1946 shows her sitting in what appears to be the garden at the Ritz. In her wide-brimmed hat, she is the very image of a chic Parisienne. On the lapel of her jacket sparkles a brooch that is one of the symbols of the Van Cleef & Arpels universe: a ballerina in diamonds.

After the revolution of 1952 and the proclamation of the Republic in 1953, Princess Faiza left Egypt for Europe and Turkey. Finally she decided to join her mother and sister Fathia in California. Divorced from her husband, she refused to remarry, despite many tempting offers. For nearly thirty years she sought a special kind of anonymity, just as she sought a special kind of freedom.

Unlike many exiles who cling to symbols of their past, she always refused to rub shoulders with the jet set comprised of down-on-their-luck royalty. She also refused to return to Egypt when President Sadat suggested this to her. On the subject of her brother King Farouk, with whom she appears to have had a rather strained relationship, she remarked famously that he was "not mad, just bad."¹²

The death in Los Angeles on June 6, 1994, of the most fascinating of the Egyptian princesses went virtually unnoticed. Only the fabulous ruby and diamond Pivoine clip, which perhaps once belonged to her, preserves her memory. On November 18, 1971, one of the two clips appeared at auction at Christie's in Geneva. Happily it was bought back by Van Cleef & Arpels.







When Hollywood Met High Society

PRINCE RAINIER OF MONACO

**New York, Van Cleef & Arpels
Boutique, March 1956**

Since the engagement had been announced at the beginning of January, the whole world had been daydreaming. In America, people fell to wondering first and foremost where on earth Monaco was, anyway? In Africa, surely—or was that Morocco? In Europe, meanwhile, people delighted in the sight of a Hollywood star as entrancing as Grace Kelly—who had just won an Oscar for her part in the *The Country Girl*—succumbing to old-world charms. And in Monaco, above all, people agreed that a reigning princess would probably do the principality no harm.

Indeed, for nearly eighty years, there had been a cruel lack of feminine presence in the private apartments of the Prince's palace. In 1870, Albert I's wife, Lady Mary Victoria Hamilton, had more or less fled less than a year after her marriage. On July 12 of that year, she gave birth at Baden-Baden to a son, the future Louis II, who would be ten years old before he met his father for the first time. Perhaps traumatized by the conflicts of his childhood and his parents hate-filled marriage, Louis himself failed to see the point of getting married until he was seventy-six. His wife, Ghislaine Dommange, had been his mistress for years, in a lengthy and discreet liaison that it eventually suited him to put on a more official footing.

Opposite

Prince Rainier of Monaco and Princess Grace on their wedding day, in the Prince's Palace in Monaco.

Above

Drawing of the insignia of Princess Grace's ladies-in-waiting bearing her monogram, commissioned by Prince Rainier in 1979

Relationships between the dowager princess (as she was known after Louis II's death in 1949) and the princely family were strained. Prince Rainier and his sister Antoinette brought a lawsuit against her for squandering Louis II's fortune, and won.

As for the next generation, the best that can be said of the relationship between Prince Rainier's parents, Princess Charlotte, daughter of Louis II, and her husband Count Pierre de Polignac, was that it had issue: Antoinette, born in 1920, and Rainier, born in 1923. The couple separated a few years later, whereupon Princess Charlotte quipped, half in jest and half in bitterness: "How can you make love with a man who has to wear a crown every time?" Apart from a relatively long stay during World War I, Charlotte spent little time in Monaco, moreover, preferring Paris and her nearby chateau at Le Marchais, where in the end she found consolation for her life as a lonely princess. In 1944, she renounced her right to the throne in favor of her son.

In the absence of a first lady, the opulent Grimaldi palace, perched on its rock, had become silent and empty, scarcely lived in by an unmarried prince who preferred his private residence at Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat. A single, lonely prince of around thirty years of age was a highly eligible bachelor for any who were aware that the principality still existed—but in the early 1950s their numbers were increasingly few. The age of grand dukes and courtesans staking their diamonds on the gaming tables was over. La Belle Otero was now ruined and living in a seedy hotel room in Nice. And those Russians who had survived the century's massacres had to settle for driving taxis.

The announcement of the engagement of Rainier III and Grace Kelly came like a thunderbolt. More than half a century later, it is hard to imagine the incredulity that greeted the news that a world-famous film star was ready to give up her screen career to "bury" herself in Europe and marry a prince who—when all was said and done—was pretty obscure. In 1956, the Prince of Monaco had hardly been heard of outside Europe; Grace Kelly, on the other hand, was a star on a global scale.

The story of their first meeting, at the Cannes Film Festival in 1955, became famous throughout the world. It had been set up on May 6 by Pierre Galante, a *Paris Match* photographer who was married to the Hollywood actress Olivia de Havilland. Grace and the prince both agreed to the interview for promotional reasons, and neither of them attached any particular importance to it. She was running late that day and didn't have time to dry her hair, so she simply pulled it back with a bandeau. As she explained to a friend, the photos were only for a French magazine, no one would ever see them again anyway.¹³

When she arrived at the palace, the star was made to wait. The prince was late—which, as a surprised Grace did not fail to point out, was very rude. As it turned out, this quick visit to the palace by the American actress, accompanied by a prince of the blood, was to last for hours, and to set the readers of *Paris Match*

**Above**

Prince Rainier and Miss Grace Kelly during the famous visit to the Prince's Palace in May 1955, the occasion of their first meeting.

dreaming. Both of them were smitten. Perhaps Miss Kelly would like to visit the state rooms, suggested the prince? Then he whisked her off to his private zoo. Back in Cannes, Grace sent him a thank you letter, to which the prince, who was an excellent letter-writer and more at ease with the written word, immediately replied.

Their correspondence, which has never been published, was to continue for over six months. At the time Grace was going out with the French actor Jean-Pierre Aumont who—being Jewish and more importantly divorced—was not viewed as ideal fiancé material by the devoutly Catholic Kelly family. On her return to America she ended the relationship. After all, fate might take her to Monaco, to the palace overlooking the sea by the side of the Prince Charming who wrote her such delightful letters. And so it was that in late 1955 Rainier decided to make a trip to America.

On December 23 he was in New York, accompanied by the palace chaplain, Father Tucker, and his personal physician, Dr. Donat. Two days later, on the evening of Christmas Day, he arrived at the handsome red-brick residence that the Kellys had built in a residential district of Philadelphia. Mrs. Kelly invited the Prince—who was clearly under her daughter's spell—to stay the night with them. Grace's elder sister Peggy, who lived close by, invited Grace, the prince, and Dr. Donat to

her house to play cards: “While the rest of us played the card game Thirty-one in one room, Grace and the Prince went into the other room to talk.”¹⁴

On December 28, Rainier and Dr. Donat took Grace back with them to New York. By now the die was cast. The proposal had been made, and accepted. The engagement was announced a few days later, from the Kelly residence in Philadelphia. The Van Cleef & Arpels archives in New York contain a touching correspondence from this time. On January 6, Louis Arpels¹⁵ wrote to congratulate Prince Rainier:

“Highness, As we have for many years had a branch in Monte-Carlo, we feel we may be permitted to present Your Highness with this small memento for his fiancée, in the hope that Your Highness will excuse this liberty on our part and deign to accept it with all our wishes for future happiness. Louis Arpels.”

The memento in question was a Minaudière, a lady’s vanity case in guilloché yellow gold encrusted with diamonds, quite similar to the iconic Minaudières created by Van Cleef & Arpels in the 1930s in homage to Estelle Arpels. The prince and Miss Kelly accepted both congratulations and gift, and Prince Rainier replied: “Los Angeles, February 9, 1956. I thank you most sincerely for your congratulations on the occasion of my engagement to Miss Kelly. Concerning your proposal for the possible creation of jewels, I request that you submit photographs and drawings of your creations with full details and specifications of the jewels in question as well as their prices; photographs and drawings with full details and prices of: single-strand pearl necklace (short), graduated single-strand pearl necklace (long).”

Miss Kelly was no stranger to Van Cleef & Arpels. An inventory drawn up for insurance purposes of her personal jewels in 1950, also preserved in the New York archives, lists three pieces by Van Cleef & Arpels. The next step in the fairytale followed quite naturally. A reigning princess must wear magnificent jewels, and in this respect Monaco was not well endowed. Princess Charlotte possessed a large collection of jewelry, but appeared not to have the slightest intention of displaying any generosity toward her daughter-in-law, of whom she disapproved.

The daughter of Prince Louis II and Juliette Louvet, a laundress, Princess Charlotte had been legitimately adopted after World War I in order to prevent the principality from falling into the hands of Louis II’s German heirs.

Opposite

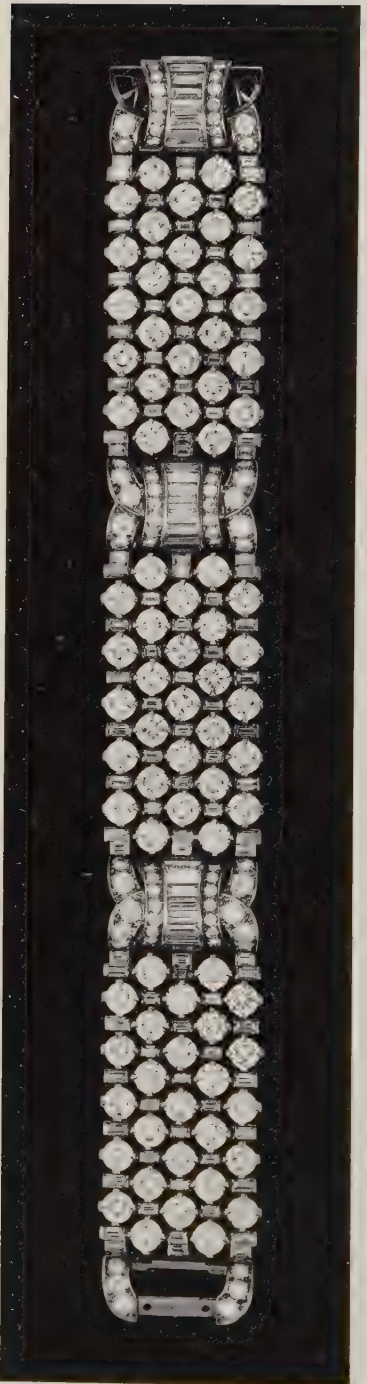
One of the first official portraits of the Prince of Monaco and Grace Kelly, a few days after their engagement



K 65655 F 4614

Bracelet

West Coast 23.4.56
1956-1957



She remained distant toward Grace, for one simple reason. Her husband Prince Pierre had lost no time in making the acquaintance of the young actress on a trip to California barely a month after the engagement, and had returned singing the praises of his future daughter-in-law. That was enough for Charlotte to strike a diametrically opposed position.

The municipal council expressed its desire to present its new princess with a piece of jewelry as a wedding gift, and chose a broad Ruban (“Ribbon”) bracelet in diamonds. Another wedding gift came from an anonymous admirer: a Marguerite (“Daisy”) clip, with diamond petals and the flower center formed from a large cabochon sapphire. Prince Rainier, in America once more in early March 1956, bought his own gift for his fiancée at Van Cleef & Arpels, choosing a pearl and diamond engagement set consisting of a three-strand necklace of cultured pearls with two motifs of baguette- and brilliant-cut diamonds, a small ring in the form of a lily in brilliant-cut diamonds set with a pear-shaped oriental pearl, cultured pearl button earrings in the classic style, and finally a small bracelet consisting of three strands of cultured pearls with three platinum fleurettes set with brilliant-cut diamonds.

The set left New York on March 28, 1956 (the dispatch note survives in the archives), and six days later half the city crowded on to Pier 84 to watch the ocean liner *SS Constitution* set sail, carrying the future princess to a new country and a new life. It had taken less than three months to arrange what was to be the world’s first great media wedding—an exploit that was only made possible by the fact that teams of MGM (Metro Goldwyn Mayer) personnel had organized most of the preparations. Hairdressers, makeup artists, gowns, trousseau, accessories: everything was prepared in record time. In Monaco, hundreds of extra telephone lines were hastily installed, as journalists from around the world invaded the city, filing story after story. The French police force meanwhile loaned several units to their Monégasque counterparts.

The arrival of the steamer off the coast of Monaco at nine o’clock on the morning of April 12 was the stuff of dreams. Here it wasn’t just half the city that lined the quayside, but rather the entire population, come to admire their new princess. The prince’s yacht, *Deo Juvante*, brought the young woman ashore. Wearing a stunning broad-brimmed hat that partially shielded her face, Grace was a picture of elegance, poise, and emotion. Her parents, who had not quite taken this unknown European prince seriously, were slightly flustered as they began to register that this was not just a fairy story but a real marriage with a foreign head of state.

Opposite

The drawing of the diamond bracelet given to the future Princess of Monaco by the Conseil municipal

de Monte-Carlo with the bracelet itself, and the sapphire and diamond brooch given to her by a Monégasque company.





Opposite

The diamond and cultured pearl set bought as a wedding gift for Princess Grace by Prince Rainier in New York

Above

Princess Grace and Prince Rainier on their honeymoon. The princess is wearing her wedding gift for the first time

744 FIFTH AVE., N.Y. 19, N. Y.
TELEPHONE PLAZA 5-0740

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FABULOUS JEWELLED WEDDING GIFTS FOR GRACE

- 1 - PRINCE RAINIER'S wedding gift to his bride was chosen by him while in New York, - from the world famous French jewelers, - VAN CLEEF & ARPELS. The ensemble consists of a triple pearl necklace with twin diamond ornaments, - a three-strand pearl bracelet with three diamond flower motifs, a diamond flower ring with a pearl center, and pearl earclips, highlighted with diamonds.
- 2 - THE PRINCIPALITY of MONACO gave a wedding gift of an important diamond bracelet
- 3 - ONASSIS,-SHIPPING MAGNET gave as his wedding gift, a ruby and diamond necklace-tiara combination. It contains 80 carats of rubies,- with diamonds

Released by:

Angela Forenza
VAN CLEEF & ARPELS
744 Fifth Avenue,
New York City

Plaza 5 - 0740

Above and opposite

The two press releases giving details of the "Fabulous jeweled wedding gifts for Grace." One

of them (above) mentions the wedding ensemble, the diamond bracelet and a "ruby and diamond

necklace-tiara combination" chosen by Aristotle Onassis but not in the end given to Princess Grace

NOT FOR RELEASE BEFORE WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 1956

WEDDING GIFT FROM PRINCE RAINIER TO GRACE KELLY

Bought in New York

While in New York, Prince Rainier chose an ensemble of pearls and diamonds from the world-famous jeweler VAN CLEEF & ARPELS which he intends to present to his bride, Grace Kelly, on their wedding day. The jewelers also have a branch in the principality of Monaco.

The ensemble consists of a triple pearl necklace with twin diamond ornaments, a three-strand pearl bracelet with three diamond flower motifs, a diamond flower ring with a pearl center, and pearl earclips highlighted with diamonds.

Released by:

Angela Forenza
VAN CLEEF & ARPELS
744 Fifth Avenue
New York City
PLaza 5-0740

**Above**

Movie star Grace Kelly with Prince Rainier on the day of her arrival in Monaco.

Opposite

The new Princess of Monaco on her wedding day, in the Prince's Palace of Monaco

When they arrived at the Prince's Palace they were brought back down to earth. Taken aback by the chilly atmosphere within the royal family, Grace's mother tried to break the ice by tapping Princess Charlotte on the shoulder and announcing, "Hi, I'm Ma Kelly."

Her efforts were in vain. Princess Charlotte could hardly bear to be in the same room as Prince Pierre. Moreover, she had chosen to come to Monaco with her chauffeur and lover, the notorious thief René Girier, nicknamed "*René la Canne*." The disappearance of \$50,000 dollars' worth of jewelry from the bedroom of Mrs. MacCloskey, the wife of one of the Kellys' friends, on the morning of April 14 did little to help already strained family relations.

In a diverting detail, one intended wedding gift was nowhere to be seen. The Greek millionaire Aristotle Onassis decided to keep the sumptuous ruby and diamond necklace that he had chosen for Grace at Van Cleef & Arpels, and instead to give it to his wife Tina. The pearl set, meanwhile, was to be given to the new princess by the prince on their wedding day. In New York, Angela Forenza,





Above
Princess Grace with Princess
Caroline and Prince Albert.
She's wearing a duck clip
by Van Cleef & Arpels.



Above
Princess Grace's duck clip
in sapphires, diamonds,
and emeralds.



Above

The tiara-collarete loaned to Princess Grace by Van Cleef & Arpels for the banquet given on the eve of Princess Caroline's wedding.

marketing manager at Van Cleef & Arpels, issued a press release: “Not for release before Wednesday, April 18, 1956. Prince Rainier’s wedding gift to Grace Kelly. During his stay in New York, Prince Rainier chose a pearl and diamond jewelry set from the collections of the world-famous jeweler Van Cleef & Arpels, as a gift to his wife, Grace Kelly, on their wedding day.”

Her Serene Highness Princess Grace of Monaco wore her pearl and diamond jewels for the first time on her honeymoon, and was to keep them throughout her life. The link established with Van Cleef & Arpels with the purchase of these jewels was never to be broken. In August 1956, moreover, the Maison was to receive a royal warrant as official supplier to His Serene Highness the Prince of Monaco.

The princess’s personal collection was to be enriched with other more modest pieces, including notably several sautoirs from the Alhambra collection, a design of which she was particularly fond. Over the years she was also given a number of animal clips, including a lion and a poodle.

Princess Grace’s relationship with Van Cleef & Arpels was not limited to her purchases and gifts from Prince Rainier, but also included numerous loans.

**Above**

Princess Grace and Prince Rainier at the ball given on the eve of Princess Caroline's wedding

For the Monte-Carlo Centennial Ball in 1966, Van Cleef & Arpels loaned pieces from their collection of antique jewelry selected to evoke Empress Eugénie, who had inspired Princess Grace's costume. And for Princess Caroline's marriage to M. Philippe Junot, on June 28, 1978, Grace wore a diamond tiara loaned by Van Cleef & Arpels, which she also wore for a ball at the Prince's Palace.

On September 14, 1982, Grace Patricia Kelly, Princess of Monaco, died prematurely in a car accident. The final document in her file at Van Cleef & Arpels is the telegram of condolence sent to the Prince's Palace on September 15.



Above

Princess Grace wearing three
A Harriba long necklaces
by Van Cleef & Arpels



Above
One of Princess Grace's
Alhambra necklaces by
Van Cleef & Arpels

HÉLÈNE OSTROWSKA, MME. LOUIS ARPELS

1909–2006

In his preface to the catalog for the sale of Hélène Arpels' jewelry that he organized in New York in 2006, François Curiel, international director of jewelry sales at Christie's, remembered her as, "a very special person, an extraordinary figure, which one would hope to cross in the path of one's life. [...] I will always remember how captivating she was—her charm, grace, and elegant style."

Born in Monaco to Russian parents in 1909, Hélène Ostrowska came to symbolize Van Cleef & Arpels in the 1930s. Though many compared her with the Duchess of Windsor, she was far more beautiful. Tall, slender, and supremely elegant, she was the embodiment of the type of perfection so envied by Parisiennes. In the late 1920s she became a model, principally for Worth and Schiaparelli. The Seeberger brothers, pioneers of fashion photography, took several portraits of her at this period. In 1933 she married Louis (1886–1976), youngest of the three Arpels brothers.

Also at this time, Van Cleef & Arpels created the "Ludo" bracelet, an iconic model named after Louis, whose nickname was Ludovic or Ludo.

Before World War II, Hélène Arpels was an habituée of Paris soirées and was frequently spotted at the races. Wherever she went, she wore the most original of the Maison's creations with inimitable flair and style. Inspired by eighteenth-century fashions, she extended her concern for detail even to wearing diamond clips on her shoes. "After all," she would say, "diamonds go with everything."

In 1939 she followed her husband to America, but their marriage was not destined to last and they divorced in 1954. Hélène remained in New York, where she opened a luxury shoe shop (for years she had designed her own footwear), where her regular clients included Jackie Kennedy. She frequently appeared on the lists of the world's best-dressed women, and became an icon of French fashion and elegance in the United States—a status she was to keep until her death in 2006. Her influence, her innate sense of style, and her elegance were very much in tune with the most sophisticated creations of the jewelry house of which she was a muse.



Above
Mme. Louis Arpès, nee Hélène
Ostrowska

Following pages
Mme. Louis Arpès, at a concert:
d'Élegance, c. 1930





7672-RL



CHAPTER IV

A GIRL'S

BEST FRIEND

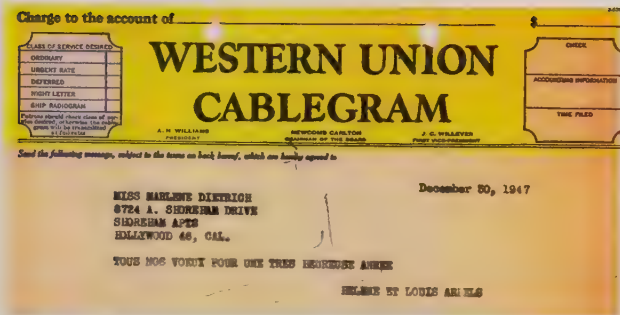
“Life’s not all about money, there are furs and jewelry as well.”
Elizabeth Taylor

Opposite
Marlene Dietrich in the 1950s.
She is wearing the fabulous

Jarretièrre (“Garter”) bracelet
created for her by Van Cleef
& Arpels in the late 1940s



NAT KING
COLE
QUINCY JONES
and his
BIG BAND



The World's Sexiest Garter

MARLENE DIETRICH

Paris, Van Cleef & Arpels Boutique,
22 place Vendôme, spring 1937

Her appearances set not just the boutique but the whole of the place Vendôme aflutter, every time. It was impossible to miss her. She was always preceded by a crowd of admirers, who were curiously respectful. Marlene Dietrich was not the sort of star to whom you called out in the street. She was a legend: you couldn't take your eyes off her, but you watched her from a hushed and respectful distance. In her biography of her mother, Maria Riva described the fascination that surrounded Dietrich on her trips to Paris: "Shop girls left their customers in mid-sales pitch and rushed out to catch a glimpse of her passing." In the sidewalk cafés, she went on, all service stopped, lunches got cold, sorbets melted, customers forgot to settle their bills. Men went off to follow her down the boulevard, oblivious of the fact that they were still holding their table napkins. Automobiles stopped, others drove at walking pace. Pedestrians forgot to cross at intersections, gendarmes forgot to blow their whistles. "The following of admirers grew," she concluded, "until a huge crowd moved with us."¹

From the release of *The Blue Angel* in 1930, the petite and still slightly plump actress from Berlin, who played in kitsch comedies such as *A Modern*

Opposite

Marlene Dietrich at a concert by Nat King Cole and Quincy Jones at the Olympia in Paris in the 1960s.

Above

The heading of a telegram from Louis Arpels to Marlene Dietrich

**Above**

Marlene Dietrich in a Paris street in the 1930s. Every time she appeared there was virtually a riot.

Opposite

One of Dietrich's most famous scenes from Josef von Sternberg's legendary *Shanghai Express*

Dubarry and *Prinzessin Olala*, had found her Pygmalion. Josef von Sternberg was the only one who knew how to render her face, her eyes, and her already legendary legs sublime. Through his subtle lighting, his unusual sets, and his daring plotlines for the time, he unveiled Dietrich the star to the cinema-going public. He opened up the gateway to Hollywood for her, the dream factory of the 1920s and '30s.

Within a few years she had become one of the queens of Paramount Studios, thanks to a sequence of now legendary films, *Morocco*, *Shanghai Express*, and *The Scarlet Empress*. She played flamboyant femmes fatales, such as Lola-Lola, Shanghai Lily, and Concha Perez, invariably arrayed in ostrich feathers, sheathed in diaphanous gowns trimmed with fur and strass, and draped with lace—all in an opulent profusion that no other woman has since been able to rival without looking absurd. Not only did Dietrich carry off these surreally glamorous outfits, but they were to become her trademark. Her makeup, highlighted by subtle black-and-white lighting, was a skilled creation in its own right, from the famous gold line traced down the bridge of her nose to correct a slight curve, to the legendary false eyelashes, which her critics mocked as being long enough to hang coats on.





The Dietrich myth was not entirely the product of chance. Paramount had invested considerable sums in her, with the aim of creating a star—sophisticated and European—who could rival Greta Garbo. Since 1925, the Swedish actress, dubbed “the divine Garbo,” had been the screen goddess who brought fame to Metro Goldwyn Mayer. Dietrich was to push her off her pedestal. She didn’t even need a sobriquet. To the public she was simply Dietrich, sultry and dangerous, a legend whose eccentricities delighted her admirers, who could never get enough of her. No one, it seemed, was immune to the bizarre phenomenon that Maria Riva called the “chinchilla syndrome,” by which even those who should know better picture their idol as a goddess swathed day and night in the rarest furs, silks, and diamonds.

Dietrich’s life was not wholly dissimilar from those of the heroines she played on the silver screen. Married to the assistant director Rudolf Sieber, with whom she had their daughter Maria, she displayed a very “European” nonchalance in the way she managed her love life. In Protestant, puritan America, this was a rare display of moral laxity, as she accumulated affairs and lovers while still being married to Rudi, her “Papilein”—who himself had a mistress.

John Wayne described her as “the most intriguing woman I’ve ever known.” Lupe Vélez, the exotic star of the silent screen from whom Dietrich stole Gary Cooper on the set of *Morocco*, declared that she would happily have scratched her eyes out. The public was unaware that her conquests—as well as embracing prominent names such as James Stewart, Jean Gabin, and later Yul Brynner—also included a handful of female lovers, including the Spanish-American poet Mercedes de Acosta, who was also the lover of Dietrich’s great rival Greta Garbo.

In life as on screen, Dietrich had a sensuality that was constantly on the edge of tipping over into perversity, and that was instinctively seductive. Jean Cocteau summed up this ambivalence with characteristic succinctness: “Her name begins with a caress and ends with a whipcrack.” She loved forbidden fruit. After the cabaret singer in *The Blue Angel* who drives an elderly professor out of his wits, she became the femme fatale in *Morocco* who lures a Foreign Legionnaire to dishonor before redeeming himself. In *Shanghai Express* she played an adventuress, a fallen woman, who eventually earns forgiveness through her courage. In Berlin in the 1920s she had been a legend of the city’s louche cabaret bars, spending her time with drag artists. Ever since, she had enjoyed playing on her androgynous looks.

Opposite

Dietrich as Catherine the Great in *The Red Empress*. The jewels are not real, needless to say

Her early appearances in top hat and tails unleashed the wrath of the nation's moral guardians. However, far from being chastened, Dietrich promptly adopted this style of dress in her everyday life, to symbolize her independence.

Her lifestyle was flamboyant. Unlike “normal” stars, who made films in order to buy the luxury of a quiet life on a ranch or a house overlooking the ocean, she was wildly extravagant. If Hollywood meant fame, Europe—and above all France, with all its elegance and luxury—was her true home. Every year, the star and her entourage, including Papilein and Maria, would cross the Atlantic on one of the great ocean liners—the *Ile-de-France* or the *Normandie*—that plied between the Old World and the New. She would spend several months in Paris, London, and Vienna or on the Côte d'Azur, where she would spend the enormous fees she earned from her films.

She stayed in only the best hotels and toured the great couturiers. And of course she would visit place Vendôme. Her jewelry included pieces in sapphires and diamonds given to her by Josef von Sterberg. The most fabulous set was a collection of cabochon emeralds, the largest of them, according to Maria Riva, “the size of a Grade A egg,” and the smallest of them “no smaller than a large marble.” These were mounted on two bracelets, two clips, and a ring. As Maria Riva recalled, their origins were unknown, but their destiny was to know so many different versions, all interpreted by Dietrich with extraordinary dramatic conviction, that in the end the truth was lost among all these inventions. But as long as the emeralds were part of their lives, their “reign” was sublime.²

Dietrich's famous Jarretièrè bracelet was created in the Paris workshops of Van Cleef & Arpels between 1937 and 1939. Set with 73 rubies and 141 diamonds, it is one of the most spectacular pieces ever created by the Maison. Curiously, no drawings for this piece have survived, nor is there any trace of it in the order books—as happened occasionally for special commissions for close friends of the Arpels family. Whatever the case, the platinum setting and the garter form clearly recall the sapphire and diamond bracelet created for the Duchess of Windsor. According to legend, the writer Erich Maria Remarque, Dietrich's lover at this time, had the idea for the piece and gave it to her. Even the date Dietrich acquired it is uncertain. She had been a client of Van Cleef & Arpels from 1933, but her purchases had consisted mostly of accessories such as cigarette cases, lighters, and cufflinks: her conception of the role of film star was akin to that of royalty, and accordingly at the end of every film it was her habit to distribute lavish gifts

Opposite

Dietrich on one of her famous ocean liner crossings between Europe and New York.

Following pages

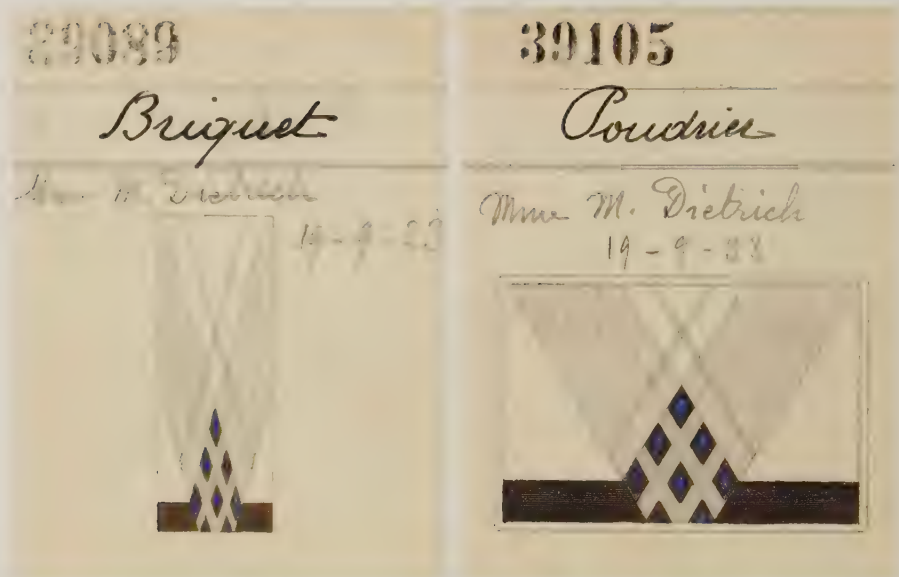
Left: Dietrich's ruby and diamond Jarretièrè bracelet, which was sold after her death.
Right: Dietrich wearing her

bracelet, with a double ruby and diamond clip, also undoubtedly by Van Cleef & Arpels, arranged as a pendant on a diamond rivèrè







**Above**

A typically art deco cigarette lighter and powder compact bought from Van Cleef & Arpels in Paris by Marlene Dietrich. The set also included a lipstick case.

Opposite

Marlene Dietrich with the writer Erich Maria Remarque. Legend has it that it was Remarque who gave her the ruby and diamond Jarretière bracelet.

to everyone on the production team. As for this bracelet, it seems to have entered her collection shortly before World War II.

Given the significance of garters in the film roles created by Dietrich (Lola-Lola in *The Blue Angel* has hers more or less permanently on display), there was nothing coincidental about the choice of form for the Jarretière bracelet. Unlike the Duchess of Windsor's sapphire and diamond bracelet, it casts off the rigidity inherited from the straight lines of art deco, embracing instead a remarkable suppleness and fluidity. In New York in 1948, Louis Arpels valued it at \$25,000, making it the most expensive piece in Dietrich's collection. She was to wear this outstanding creation in several of her films.

Relations between Dietrich and Van Cleef & Arpels were on hold during the war years. After formally adopting American nationality, the star was banned by the Nazis. She chose to play her part in the conflict that was tearing the world apart by starring in the shows put on by American artists for the troops on active service in Europe. From April 1944 to July 1945 she starred in dozens of concerts staged all along the front line. It was these concerts for



the troops more even than her reputation as a Hollywood sex symbol, that guaranteed her legendary status for the rest of her life. The routine was always the same. When the audience of thousands of soldiers had assembled in front of the improvised stage on which she was due to appear, an officer would walk up to the microphone and announce: "Sorry, guys, but Marlene couldn't come, she's having dinner with the General." Whereupon the place would erupt with boos and whistles, until suddenly a voice would be heard above the din: "No, no, I'm here." And Dietrich would appear, in uniform and clutching a small suitcase, and dash up to the stage and into the wings. Less than a minute later, a dazzling star in a sequined sheath would make her second entrance, and bring the house down.

One of her most celebrated turns was a mind-reading act. After announcing to the thousands of soldiers that she possessed the gift of mind reading, she would invite one of the G.I.s to join her on stage. After making a great show of concentrating for a long while on her lucky victim, who would meanwhile be devouring her with his eyes, she would say in a tone that was half-amused and half-shocked: "Oh no, think about something else! I really can't talk about *that!*" Beyond the lighthearted fun of her performance, Dietrich's commitment was wholehearted. In the late 1930s, the Nazi regime had offered her a fortune to make a film for them. She had turned them down, which had earned her the hatred of Hitler, his entourage, and even some of the German people. Her front line appearances displayed real courage in the face of danger.

The end of the war saw Dietrich's return to the cinema. But with the exception of Hitchcock's *Stage Fright*, in which she played a murderess, the golden age of cinema was over. It hardly mattered to her. Now she was a living legend, keeping the myth alive through world concert tours, with fans crowding to see her and listen to her in reverential silence. Poured into a flesh-colored Dior gown, wrapped in a swans' down cloak, its long train spread behind her, she declaimed her songs for an hour rather than sang them, before being ritually pelted with roses by her tearful fans.

In the early 1970s, she retired from public performance. Those legendary legs were having increasing difficulty in supporting her. Her final concerts had been disastrous. Knowing that the only way of keeping her myth alive was to make it impenetrable, she decided to shut herself up in her apartment on avenue Montaigne. Only her daughter and a few rare friends were now allowed visit her. Her main contact with the outside world was a telephone that she used day and night and that cost her a fortune in bills. In the late 1980s, she sold a few pieces of jewelry at Christie's Geneva.

Marlene Dietrich died in Paris on May 6, 1992. Her funeral was held, following her wishes, at the church of La Madeleine. Thousands of her faithful

fans, silent and reverential, gathered to pay her their respects one last time before she was taken to Berlin for burial. Her daughter Maria later sold most of her wardrobe and archives to the German Cinema Foundation. Nearly 3,000 objects, 15,000 photographs, and over 300,000 documents are now preserved in Berlin. At the express demand of Maria Riva, the contract of sale stipulated that every time these items are put on show, there must also be an exhibition about Marlene Dietrich's work on behalf of the Allies during World War II. Her jewels had long since disappeared, with the exception of one solitary piece: the sumptuous Van Cleef & Arpels ruby and diamond bracelet. Dietrich had kept it to the end. Sold at Sotheby's New York on June 24, 1992, it fetched \$990,000. It is now in a private collection.

Following pages

Dietrich's performances for Allied troops during World War II—sometimes right behind the front line—earned her

the status of a true legend. This photograph captures the moment of her triumphant return to New York.







The Demure Jewels of a Star Who Was Anything But

AVA GARDNER

For once, the jewels scarcely live up to the legend of their owner. They are simple, sober, reasonable almost. And—heaven knows—Ava Gardner was not. Her most important ring was a 7.46-carat octagonal emerald, a beautiful and exceptional stone of a deep-green hue that had probably been bought at auction by Van Cleef & Arpels in New York in 1957. Mounted originally on a simple gold band set with two round diamonds, it was reset in a more sophisticated mount composed of eight brilliant-cut diamonds.

This was the form in which Ava Gardner bought it on September 15, 1961, for a little over \$15,000. Apparently this setting was a success for her, as a month later she deposited her diamond solitaire with Van Cleef & Arpels, a square-cut stone of 6.35 carats that had been given to her in 1942 by her first husband Mickey Rooney, the 1930s musical comedy idol. She wanted it set in the same way as her emerald, and chose eight rubies to encircle it. In 1963 she would have this ring altered again, replacing the rubies with eight diamonds, which were more discreet.

Throughout the 1960s, the woman who was called “the world’s most beautiful animal” regularly bought jewelry from Van Cleef & Arpels, as though she felt she deserved a reward for each of her films. In September 1961, she bought a four-strand bracelet, each strand consisting of 95 cultured pearls, with a clasp formed

Opposite

Ava Gardner, Hollywood star, legendary beauty, and faithful client of Van Cleef & Arpels.

Following pages

Ava Gardner with her third husband, the singer Frank Sinatra.





from a spray of diamond motifs in the shape of flames. In January 1962, a few weeks before filming started on *55 Days at Peking*, she bought a flower brooch in yellow gold set with 169 round diamonds. In 1964 it was the turn of *Night of the Iguana*, after the play by Tennessee Williams, in which she played one of her greatest roles, a hotel owner with a weakness for drink and the charms of her male staff. She marked this masterpiece with a Marguerite (“Daisy”) brooch set with 277 diamonds and 21 emeralds. In 1966, the year that she filmed *The Bible*, she made her finest purchase: a pair of emerald and diamond ear pendants costing \$16,000. The two pear-shaped emeralds, weighing 5.78 carats and 5.38 carats, were ringed by twelve round diamonds and were suspended from two motifs consisting of eight pear-shaped diamonds and eight marquise-cut diamonds. In 1975, she had the ear pendants altered so that she could wear the two largest pear-shaped diamonds as pendants instead of the emeralds.

Paradoxically, the period when she was making these purchases at Van Cleef & Arpels was also the wildest time of her life. An international star, she had acted in masterpieces such as *The Barefoot Contessa*, *Mogambo*, and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, and had only just been released from the contract that had bound her to Metro Goldwyn Mayer for nearly twenty years. Her private life was similarly unfettered. Between 1942 and 1951, she was married three times, first to Mickey Rooney, then to the jazz musician Artie Shaw, and finally to Frank Sinatra. None of these relationships was to endure, although she kept ties with Sinatra for the rest of her life—to the intense irritation of his wife. Between marriages she had a string of affairs, with the millionaire Howard Hughes, with actors, with directors, and even—if her latest biographer Elizabeth Gouslan is to be believed—with the magnificent Lana Turner.³

Liberated from the MGM yoke and pursued by the American tax authorities for unpaid arrears, Ava took advantage of an affair with the Spanish bullfighter Luis Miguel Dominguín to flee to Spain, where she made her home. Strangely enough, in this country ruled by General Franco with an iron rod, she indulged every possible whim and behaved outrageously. Not many people could keep up with her on her regular torrid and well-oiled tours of Madrid’s bars and flamenco joints. Half the time the night would end with her joining the dancers on stage.

For eight years she lived at the Ritz, before being thrown out after a particularly drunken evening. When she staggered back to the hotel at dawn, Gouslan relates, she “couldn’t hold out any longer and, mistaking the hotel lobby with her room, gracefully lowered her panties and peed copiously on the Persian carpets.”⁴ Having moved to a sumptuous duplex apartment on a residential avenue, she set tongues wagging again with her “neighbor disputes.” Her downstairs neighbor complained continually about the noise she made at night, regularly hurling abuse



Above
Ava Gardner and Frank Sinatra.
Their marriage, in 1951, caused
a tremendous scandal.

As Sinatra had divorced his
wife Nancy in order to marry
her, Gardner was branded
a "home-wrecker."

**Above**

Four Van Cleef & Arpels jewels from Ava Gardner's collection: her emerald in its second mounting, her interchangeable

ear pendants, her emerald and diamond Marguerite brooch, and her pearl and diamond bracelet.

Opposite

Ava Gardner at the Paris première of *Mayerling*. She is wearing her emerald and diamond earrings by Van Cleef & Arpels



at her from his balcony. Unabashed, Ava gave as good as she got, yelling back that he was an “old faggot”⁵—a scene that is all the more entertaining for the fact that the neighbor was none other than the former Argentine dictator Juan Perón (whose first wife Eva Duarte, known as Evita, was also incidentally a client of Van Cleef & Arpels before her death at the age of thirty-three).

In the late 1960s, Ava faced reaching her fifties with a degree of serenity. She made another great film, *Mayerling*, in which her performance as Sissi was both sumptuous and sensual. For the Paris premiere, she wore her emerald and diamond ear pendants. She had two more gems set as rings by Van Cleef & Arpels: an outstanding 8.75-carat Kashmir sapphire in November 1966, and a 10.97-carat jade cabochon in June 1967.

She lived out the rest of her life quietly in London, the tax authorities of the Spanish dictatorship having proved no more understanding than their democratic American counterparts. The woman who had enjoyed such an uproarious nightlife in Madrid now became a well-behaved Londoner, with a taste for parks, whisky, rain, and even fog. Very occasionally she would travel to Monaco for one of the balls thrown by her friend Grace Kelly, now Princess of Monaco. There she would meet up with her old friends Gregory Peck, Cary Grant, and Frank Sinatra, and for one night she would become once more the femme fatale and impassioned dancer of her former life.

She had left Madrid, as it turned out, just in time to avoid a new neighbor who was not only something of a liability but also a little sinister. In the early 1970s, Juan Perón had obtained permission from the Argentine government to transport the body of his dead wife Evita to Spain, as her tomb in Argentina had become the focus of a veritable cult. The decision had been taken with the agreement of his second wife Isabel, who like him wanted to avoid any possible desecration of the former first lady’s tomb. To avoid any possibility of such sacrilege, they decided it was best to keep the coffin containing Evita’s embalmed body in their apartment, and simply placed it on a plinth in their dining room.

The Ava Gardner collection was sold at auction by Sotheby’s in 1989 and 1990, a few months after the star’s death. As well as the major pieces by Van Cleef & Arpels, the sale also contained simpler jewelry set with small diamonds, amethysts, and topazes. As a whole, the jewelry was a model of good taste, of the sort that might easily adorn an elegant and discreet lady of the American bourgeoisie.

Opposite

Three Van Cleef & Arpels jewels from Ava Gardner’s collection. The diamond, given to her

by Mickey Rooney, was originally encircled by rubies. Gardner had it remounted with other diamonds in the 1960s

The bracelet and brooch were both bought at Van Cleef & Arpels in New York.





Christmas Stocking Filler

ELIZABETH TAYLOR

Gstaad, December 25, 1968

It was a snowy Christmas evening in Gstaad, in the Swiss Alps. “Richard and I had been married for I don’t know how many years,” Elizabeth Taylor recalled in her book describing her love affair with jewels:⁶ “We’d had Christmas and all the gifts and the food and wrappings and had been through the cleanup. I was just about to take a shower and get ready for friends coming over when my little girl Liza came into my dressing room with her hands behind her back, clutching something, and she said:

- Mommy, Mommy!
- What is it?” I asked.
- Daddy said to tell you that you left something important in the bottom of your Christmas stocking.
- We’d stuffed the stockings with nice things, likes apples and oranges and walnuts all mixed together. Cute things—Christmasy stuffing things.
- Oh my goodness. I exclaimed, What is it?
- Which hand? she asked.
- I pretended to ponder very hard and then said:
- That one!

Opposite

The Burton-Taylor wedding

**Above**

The 8.24-carat ruby bought for Elizabeth Taylor by Richard Burton at Van Cleef & Arpels.

Opposite

Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, the legendary couple of 1960s cinema.



Her face split into a smile and her eyes danced. In her hand was the smallest box I'd ever seen. By now my heart was beating and bouncing and I opened the box very, very slowly. Inside it glowed with the fire of the most perfect coloured stone I'd ever seen. With the most perfect cut. I'm sure I almost fainted. I screamed, which probably echoed over the mountains, and I couldn't stop screaming. I knew I was staring at the most exquisite ruby anyone had ever seen."

Four years earlier, Burton had declared to her: "One day I'm going to find you the most perfect ruby in the world." He had searched all the great jewelers for it, and it was at Van Cleef & Arpels that he finally found this extraordinary ruby, weighing 8.24 carats and of the most perfect red. Mounted on a yellow gold ring and surrounded by eight brilliant-cut diamonds, it was to become a favorite jewel of this star who possessed so many treasures. She always thought of it as her most fabulous and tiniest Christmas present.

Few women have been so inextricably associated with gemstones as Elizabeth Taylor. Jewels punctuated her life, her loves, her marriages, her divorces, and even her friendships, as witnessed by pieces given to her by close friends such as Michael Jackson and millionaire Malcolm Forbes. Her third husband, Mike Todd, first gave her a 29.40-carat emerald-cut diamond, for their wedding on February 2, 1957. During their brief marriage—he was killed in an air crash on March 22, 1958—Todd was to give her several more spectacular pieces of jewelry set with diamonds and rubies.

A widow at twenty-six, Taylor found consolation with Eddie Fisher, Todd's best friend. But there was one obstacle in their path: Eddie was already married, and his wife was Debbie Reynolds, one of America's most cherished actresses. From being the tragic weeping widow, Taylor now saw her name dragged through the mud by the American press, which branded her a "home-wrecker." But marrying Fisher, on May 12, 1959, was just an impulse. Those who knew her well had no doubt about it: Fisher was no match for Elizabeth Taylor.

Their idyll came to an abrupt end in early 1961, following an uneasy encounter that was to go down in the annals. Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton were filming *Cleopatra*, the only movie in history in which no one would ever know where fiction ended and reality began. The scene took place in Rome. For over a year, the film had been mired in delays, budget overspends, and changes in distributors. Before signing the contract, Taylor had demanded the most exorbitant fee ever paid to a film star: a million dollars. Then at the last minute she also asked

Opposite

Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra



for—and got—sixty-five different costumes and the permanent presence of her hairdresser, Alexandre of Paris. Shooting started in the London suburbs. September 1960 was particularly wet, however, and this proved to be a disastrous choice, as the cardboard scenery disintegrated in the incessant downpours. Taylor then contracted pneumonia and had to be admitted to hospital for an emergency tracheotomy. Joan Collins, who at one point had been approached for the role, was even put on standby to replace her at a moment's notice if necessary.

Taylor recovered, but the production team decided to move the shoot to Italy, where they built reconstructions of ancient Rome and Alexandria under more clement skies. Meanwhile, Rex Harrison had replaced Peter Finch in the role of Julius Caesar, while the part of Mark Antony, originally to be played by Stephen Boyd, the legendary Messala in *Ben Hur*, was in the end given to the Welsh actor Richard Burton. All this came at a price, and the original budget of \$2 million finally rose to over \$35 million.

Eddie Fisher, who had followed his wife and her three children to Rome, was probably the last person to learn that these two screen legends had fallen in love at first sight. Alexandre of Paris, who probably knew them better than most, recalled in his memoirs: "Anyone who has seen a couple of wild animals together will make of it what they will. The last refuge of tenderness, perhaps. She only had to roar, 'Richard!', or he to explode, 'Lisbeth!', and the whole Court would scatter, terrified. When they held hands in public, they were already throwing down the gauntlet, it was as though they were making love."⁷

In a last-ditch attempt to save his marriage, Fisher took a major gamble. On the evening of Taylor's thirtieth birthday, he invited thirty of her friends to the *Hosteria del Orso*, one of Rome's most stylish restaurants. At the party, he gave her a fabulous pair of ear pendants set with sumptuous canary diamonds. "She was very dismissive," remembers Joan Collins, a guest at the dinner, "A lot of us were quite horrified at the way she treated the poor guy."⁸ Forced to concede defeat, Fisher returned to Hollywood without his wife. It appears that he did however allow himself the pleasure of sending her the bill for the earrings.

Once again, the newspapers dragged Taylor through the mud. The end of shooting on *Cleopatra* was a nightmare, with the couple surrounded by a crush of hundreds of paparazzi. Even the Vatican got involved, venting its wrath on this woman twice taken in adultery. Taylor couldn't have cared less. Beside her passion for Burton, and his for her, everything else paled into insignificance. It was a love story like no other, filled with passion, sex, excess of all kinds, and gemstones. Their scandalous relationship assured them huge popularity, and their films drew crowds the world over, whether they were mediocre like *The VIPs* and *Boom* or brilliant like *The Taming of the Shrew*. Their share of the profits on their joint films in the 1960s was colossal: *The Taming of the Shrew* alone earned them over \$10 million.

**Above**

The most fabulous jewels in Elizabeth Taylor's collection were gifts from Richard Burton.

In Rome, Paris, or London, in their chalet at Gstaad or on their yacht, they were constantly surrounded by an entourage of some thirty or more. At jewelers' and auctions, Burton tracked down the rarest jewels, including fabulous emeralds, La Peregrina, one of the largest pearls in the world, enormous diamonds, immaculate sapphires, and the peerless ruby he bought at Van Cleef & Arpels for Christmas 1968.

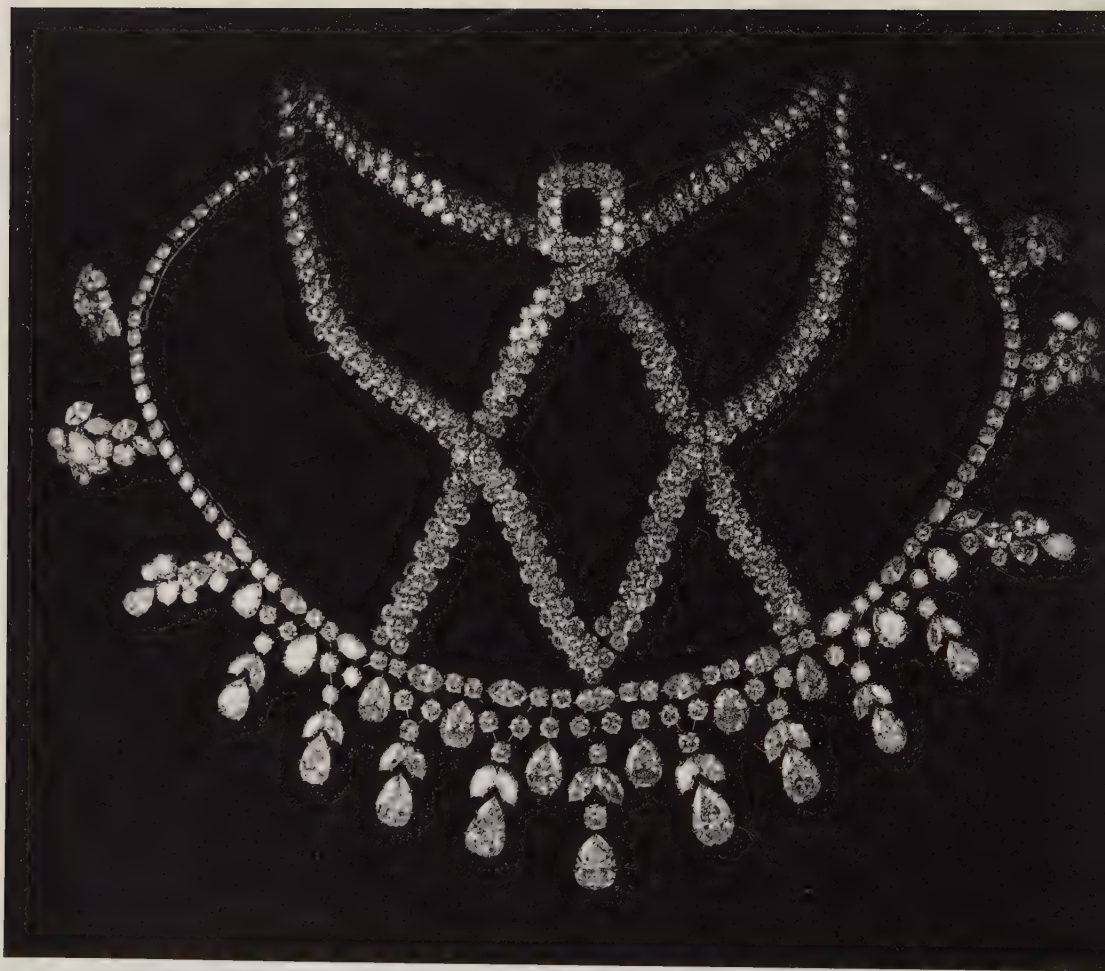
It may be that Alexandre of Paris was responsible for introducing Burton and Taylor to Van Cleef & Arpels. The celebrity hairdresser was in the habit of borrowing jewelry from the Maison, as he recounted in his memoirs. In 1967, he dressed Taylor's hair for the premiere of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and for the first time she wore diamond jewelry by Van Cleef & Arpels. Had she left her own jewels in London or Gstaad? Was it simply a whim on her part? Whatever the case, that night none of the jewels she wore were her own. Van Cleef & Arpels hastily assembled a tiara from two bracelets and a brooch. With matching ear pendants, the effect was spectacular. It was to be repeated five years later, at the legendary Proust





Opposite and above
For the Paris première of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Van Cleef & Arpels loaned Elizabeth Taylor

a diamond tiara that had been hastily created for her from two bracelets and a brooch.



Above and opposite

For the Proust Ball given by Baron and Baroness Guy de Rothschild at the Château de Ferrières, in Seine-et-Marne.

Taylor's hair was dressed by Alexandre of Paris, who arranged this diamond net—specially created for her by Van Cleef & Arpels—in

her coiffure. Like all the other guests at the legendary ball, the couple were photographed by Cecil Beaton



**Above**

Drawing for a long amethyst and diamond necklace bought by Richard Burton for Elizabeth Taylor from Van Cleef & Arpels.

Opposite

Taylor wearing her amethyst and diamond necklace.

Ball given by Baroness Guy de Rothschild at the Château de Ferrières. Once again, Alexandre dressed Taylor's hair, adding a mesh of diamonds specially created by Van Cleef & Arpels using brooches and necklaces.

The couple were entranced by the Maison's creations, and the early 1970s were marked by a series of spectacular purchases heavily inspired by the hippy movement and flower power. Taylor loved the embroidered caftans then in vogue, especially versions by Yves Saint Laurent, and accessorized them with heavy beads, as fashion demanded, except that hers were set with precious gemstones. They bore strange names. Triphanes was set with amethysts and diamonds. Ibiza and Pompon, meanwhile, were embellished with coral, diamonds, and amethysts. Amethysts were a more or less constant leitmotif, paying tribute—naturally—to Taylor's violet eyes.

The most famous *coup de foudre* in cinematic history culminated in 1976 with not just one divorce, but two. Not even the tumultuous mutual passion of Burton and Taylor could withstand so many excesses, so many Bloody Marys, so many rows. The first divorce was signed in June 1976, but neither of them could accept that this was the end of the story. Sixteen months later they married again, very discreetly, in Africa. This time it lasted less than a year. Antony and Cleopatra would be forever linked in the collective memory, but henceforth they would live apart.







Opposite

The Ibiza long necklace in coral, amethysts, and diamonds, bought by Richard Burton from Van Cleef & Arpels.

Above

Another coral, amethyst, and diamond set bought for Elizabeth Taylor by Richard Burton at Van Cleef & Arpels.

Burton died in 1984. Taylor survived him by twenty-seven years, twice remarried and twice divorced.

She remained faithful, by contrast, to her passion for jewels, and for Van Cleef & Arpels. One of her last purchases was the pair of earrings that she commissioned in 1999 for her investiture by Queen Elizabeth II. She had originally bought them, she explained, for a friend, with a matching brooch. But the friend didn't really wear earrings, so she gave them back and kept the brooch. Taylor put the earrings away in a drawer, thinking they really weren't her type. She loved long ear pendants that swayed and shimmered. Then, wondering what to wear for her investiture and wanting something new, she had the idea of reusing the flower earrings to make something more spectacular. She took them back to Van Cleef & Arpels, where they had originally come from, and there discovered the Maison's little diamond-set butterflies. At that moment, she said, the design just came into her head.⁹

Taylor's love affair with gemstones reached its denouement on the evening of December 13, 2011, at Christie's New York, with the sale of her "legendary jewels," the eighty finest pieces from a collection numbering two hundred and sixty-nine altogether. Twenty-two of these legendary sets were by Van Cleef & Arpels. The "crown jewels of Hollywood," as the press release dubbed them, had toured the world, from London to Hong Kong via Dubai, Paris, and Moscow. François Curiel, international director of jewelry sales at Christie's, estimated the sale price of the whole collection at a very conservative \$30 million.

As soon as the auction started, bidding took off. In their seats in the sale-room, the representatives of Van Cleef & Arpels were on the verge of panic. "My one fear was that we would leave empty-handed," one of them remembers. "All the prices were so very, very high. Sometimes they rose so fast that we didn't get a look-in with the bidding." In the end, and after a hard-fought battle, they carried off lot 67, the Barquerolles diamond necklace with a lion's head motif, given to Taylor by Richard Burton on the birth of their first grandchild, in 1971. Estimated at \$150,000, it finally reached \$900,000. As for the famous ruby, it reached over €3 million, far in excess of its estimate of €1 million. Altogether, the sale raised €89 million—a sum to match the stratospheric fame of Elizabeth Taylor, who would no doubt have relished the excessive lengths to which the bidders were prepared to go. Talking about her taste for ostentatious jewels, she remarked to a friend one day: "They say I look common, but I couldn't care less."

Opposite

The Barquerolles necklace with lion head and diamond navette motifs given to Elizabeth Taylor by Richard Burton on the birth

of her first grandchild. Bought at the sale of Taylor's jewelry at Christie's New York in December 2011, it is now in the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection





DANCING

JEWELS

New York, Van Cleef & Arpels Boutique, 1967

It was pouring with rain in New York. Passersby sought shelter in the doorways and shops of Fifth Avenue. One of them found refuge at number 744. To pass the time, he cast his eye over the displays in the vitrines. They reminded him of the glittering stage jewels worn by the dancers at the Metropolitan Opera when they performed the great classics of the ballet repertoire. The man's name was George Balanchine, and he was a choreographer. As Balanchine gazed into the window, an unknown man appeared suddenly and invited him inside. Why not? This man was Claude Arpels (1911–1990), the eldest of the three sons of Julien and Léa Arpels. Though Claude didn't know it at the time, he had just ushered dance into the world of jewels. This chance encounter was to inspire a ballet that Balanchine would call simply *Jewels*, with three parts: “Emeralds,” “Rubies,” and “Diamonds.”

Nine years later, in 1976, the ballet entered the repertoire of the Paris Opera. Balanchine and Suzanne Farrell, principal ballerina in “Diamonds,” went to 22 place Vendôme, where they were welcomed by Jacques Arpels. *Jewels* is the symbol of all the legendary stones that have passed through the vaults and workshops of Van Cleef & Arpels since its foundation.



Emeralds

THE LEGEND OF THE EMERALD CROSS

Paris, Van Cleef & Arpels Boutique, 1974

Even its origins are shrouded in mystery, hidden behind a veil of oblivion that was perhaps willful, intended to conceal the murkiness that surrounds it. It would have been too much to expect an object of such beauty—and such value—to have avoided brushes with a handful of assassins, a clutch of conquistadors, or merely a bunch of unscrupulous thieves. Attempting to trace the story of the emerald cross is quite literally a treasure hunt. It has made a regular habit of vanishing from sight for decades at a time, then making spectacular reappearances for another two or three decades, before subsiding once more into oblivion. The last occasion on which it could be admired was at Van Cleef & Arpels. It can be seen in a photograph taken in the Paris boutique in 1974 or 1975. Pierre Arpels, the youngest of Julian and Léa Arpels' three sons, is looking at a vitrine. On the top shelf, to the left of the picture, is the emerald cross. At that time it was valued at a million dollars, and according to its owner was believed to be of “Spanish royal provenance.”

Its story does indeed stretch a long way back in European history. Four centimeters long and cut from a single emerald weighing 45 carats, it represents a veritable tour de force of the gem-cutter's art. Emeralds are friable, and only

Previous page

George Balanchine and Suzanne Farrell, a dancer in the ballet *Jewels*, at Van Cleef & Arpels in 1976, when the ballet was performed at the Paris Opéra.

Opposite

Empress Eugénie wearing her fabulous pearl necklace. From it hangs the emerald cross which Queen Victoria wrote in her diary had been given to the empress by the King of Spain







stones of the finest quality can be used in this way. Who cut it? And when? Impossible to know. Only one thing is certain: the stone is Colombian, from the Muzo mines famed for supplying the finest emeralds in the world. Its earliest official mention comes from no less illustrious a source than Queen Victoria. On August 18, 1880, she received a visit from the Empress Eugénie, widow of Napoleon III, last Emperor of the French, who had lived in England for ten years. In her diary, Victoria noted that the empress “asked me to keep a small packet, which I was only to open after her death, and then said, would I like perhaps to open it and ‘*de l’avoir de mon vivant,*’ which I said I would, and she undid the parcel, and took out a most splendid emerald cross, cut out of one stone, without any joints, and set at the points with fine diamonds, with two magnificent large ones at the top. It had been given her by the King of Spain when she married. When I asked her if she would not still wear it, she answered, ‘*non, non, jamais plus de pareilles choses,*’ that it was one of the few things she had kept and reserved for the future wife of her dear son. Alas! she gives everything away now.”⁷¹

A few months before this, the exiled empress’s only son, the twenty-three-year-old prince imperial, had been killed in a Zulu ambush in South Africa. As his brothers-in-arms fled at a gallop the young prince tried to follow, but the worn girth of his saddle gave way, and he was left alone to face a dozen Zulu warriors. Pierced by their spears, he died on the spot. Devastated by her son’s death, Eugénie—who had already sold much of her personal jewelry collection at Christie’s in London in 1872—decided soon afterward to part with her remaining jewels. Never again would she wear the precious stones that she loved so much.

Her collection—enriched as it was by gifts from the Emperor Napoleon during his eighteen-year reign, by her own very considerable purchases, and by gifts from foreign rulers—was one of the most important of the nineteenth century. Despite Queen Victoria’s assertion in her diary, the emerald cross was not in fact given to her as a wedding present by King Francisco of Spain, husband of Queen Isabella II. In her famous memoirs, Princess von Metternich, wife of the Austrian ambassador to France, described the festivities given at Versailles in June 1867 for a visit by Francisco: “At a quarter past nine, Their Majesties made their entrance with the poor wretched little King of Spain, who wore the most miserable expression imaginable. Their entrance into the Hall of Mirrors was dazzling! The ravishing sight of the hall all lit up, and especially of the immense windows looking out over the parterre glittering with a thousand flames, was an enchantment!

Previous pages

Pierre Arpels in front of a vitrine in the Van Cleef & Arpels boutique in Paris. Displayed

in the left-hand pane of the emerald cross had been bought by the Metternichs in 1871.

Opposite

Queen Isabella II and King Francisco of Spain in 1867. The emerald cross was displayed in the left-hand pane of the



Everyone exclaimed in wonder. Even the King of Spain remarked that ‘a little expense’ had been gone to in his honor. After dinner, His Majesty took the arm of his august guest and went out with him onto the terrace. At that moment the first Ruggieri fireworks were lit, succeeding each other with such rapidity that the sky seemed to be on fire.”² On this official visit, the “poor, wretched little King of Spain” had nonetheless arrived bearing a sumptuous gift for his hostess. “On leaving France, the King of Spain presented Her Majesty with a splendid jewel,” continued Princess von Metternich. “It was a piece of emerald cut into the shape of a cross.”³

Did the cross come from the Spanish royal collections? Possibly. A portrait of Queen Isabella II preserved in the Royal Palace of Madrid shows that she possessed a vast collection of emeralds that was doubtless unique in the world. Since the Spanish Crown owned a fifth of all spoils of war from the New World, emeralds from South America had poured into its coffers from the sixteenth century onward. To begin with, they were simply confiscated from the last Aztec emperor, Montezuma, by Cortés’s armies and by Pissarro’s from the last Inca emperor, Atahualpa. In the late sixteenth century, the rediscovery by the Spanish conquistadors of the Inca mines at Muzo and Chivor meant that regular shipments of emeralds could be sent to Spain.

With the fall of the Second Empire in 1870, Empress Eugénie was forced to flee Paris. On September 4, she left the Tuileries Palace to take refuge with her

**Opposite**

The emerald cross, cut from a single stone.

Above

Queen Victoria Eugénie of Spain, suspended from

her emerald and diamond sautoir with the emerald cross, a gift from her mother.

dentist, Dr. Evans, who arranged her passage to England. Her fabulous jewels had been safely stowed away a few days earlier. Two parcels had been sent in the utmost secrecy to the empress's mother, the Countess of Montijo, in Madrid. Eugenie had had other jewels taken to her friend Princess von Metternich. As for the emerald cross, on her death in 1901 Victoria bequeathed it to her youngest daughter Princess Beatrice, wife of Henry of Battenberg, who wore it on a number of occasions before passing it to her only daughter, Princess Victoria Eugénie of Battenberg. On May 31, 1906, Princess Victoria Eugénie married Alfonso XIII, King of Spain—and so by a twist of fate the emerald cross returned to Madrid, probably in the early 1920s, when it was mounted in a parure that had also belonged to the Empress Eugénie.

The empress died in 1920, aged ninety-four. She left her goddaughter the Queen of Spain a collection of nine square-cut emeralds weighing 196 carats, which were concealed in a fan case in order to avoid the heavy customs duties of the time. This was how Queen Victoria Eugénie found them when her godmother's bequest was presented to her. She commissioned a jeweler to make a long diamond sautoir set with the nine square-cut diamonds, and from this the emerald cross was hung.

Queen Victoria Eugénie was to keep this jewel for a little over a decade. When the Spanish monarchy was overthrown in 1931, she sought refuge in France, where before long she sold the emerald cross to the jeweler Cartier. Mounted on a new emerald necklace, it was sold again just before World War II to the wife of the Bolivian "king of tin" Simón Patiño. This is the last official record before its reappearance at Van Cleef & Arpels in 1974. Between these two dates it was parted once again from its necklace, as the latter was inherited by Mme. Patiño's daughter Luz Milá, Comtesse Guy du Boisrouvray, to be sold with the Comtesse's other jewels by her daughter Albina at Sotheby's New York in 1988.

Today the emerald cross slumbers in the secrecy of a mysterious private collection, perhaps one day to reappear at Van Cleef & Arpels or in an auction room, there to continue on its age-old journey peppered with queens, collectors and—above all—enigmas.

Opposite

Portrait of Empress Eugénie, by
Gustave Courbet, 1855. Musée
de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

Portrait of Empress Eugénie, by
Gustave Courbet, 1855. Musée
de la Ville de Paris, Paris.





A Revolution and Two World Wars

THE SAGA OF THE ROMANOV EMERALDS

**New York, Van Cleef & Arpels Boutique,
January 28, 1949**

It was the first time a king had come to Van Cleef & Arpels, or at least to the New York boutique. Peter II of Yugoslavia might only have been twenty-six years old, but he had nevertheless been a reigning monarch for fifteen years, since the day in 1934 when his father King Alexander was assassinated in Marseille, along with the French foreign minister Louis Barthou, by a Croatian terrorist. In April 1941, after the Germans invaded Yugoslavia, he had left his country to seek refuge in London. Peace had returned, but his crown had not been restored to him. Despite his exemplary conduct during the war, Yugoslavia had been ceded to the Soviet bloc, and on April 29, 1945, the country's Constituent Assembly, made up exclusively of Communist Party members, quite simply deposed the king.

A child king at the age of eleven, Peter II became a king in exile at the age of twenty-three. His already strained relations with his mother, Queen Marie, were not improved by his marriage in 1944, although as the daughter of the late King Alexander I of Greece his young wife Alexandra was herself a princess. But the queen mother was displeased that her eldest son had asked her to give

Opposite
Grand Duchess Elizabeth
Feodorovna of Russia wearing

the emeralds she had inherited
from her mother-in-law, Tsarina
Maria Alexandrovna



**Opposite**

Queen Marie of Yugoslavia received the Romanov emeralds on her marriage. She had the necklace transformed into a long sautoir by Cartier.

Above

The Romanov emerald tiara is now in the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection. The emeralds have been replaced by imitation stones

the dynasty's fabulous emeralds to her new daughter-in-law in order to mark this union. Incandescent with rage, she arranged to meet her son at her bank. As their respective lawyers proceeded to draw up an inventory of the jewels and organize the handover, the queen mother returned to her country residence and announced that she would not go to the wedding. The grudge she felt toward her son proved as entrenched as it was bitter, as she went on to cut him out of her will, specifying that he had received his share of her estate on his marriage.

The emeralds were indeed spectacular. The stones had been amassed in the nineteenth century by the Russian Tsar Alexander II for his wife, Maria Alexandrovna. On her death in 1880, the jewels passed to her fifth son, Grand Duke Sergei, who offered them to his bride, Princess Elizabeth of Hesse, on their marriage in 1884. The marriage was to end in tragedy in 1905, when the grand duke was assassinated by a Socialist-Revolutionary terrorist.

Widowed and childless, Grand Duchess Elizabeth founded a religious order and withdrew to it. She sold most of her jewelry to finance the building of the convent she set up. But she gave her emeralds to her niece, Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, on her marriage to Prince Wilhelm of Sweden in 1908. Separated from her husband and ruined by the Revolution of 1917, Grand Duchess Maria was one of the few members of the Russian Imperial family to escape the massacre of the Romanovs organized by the Soviets in 1918. She took refuge in Paris, where—on the advice of her friend Gabrielle Chanel—she opened an embroidery workshop.

Perhaps this was not sufficient to support her lifestyle, as in 1922 the grand duchess was obliged to sell her emeralds to King Alexander I of Serbia. Alexander, who bought the jewels for his wife Queen Marie, had the necklace and brooch remounted to make a set that was more in keeping with 1920s fashions. The heavy nineteenth-century necklace with its numerous pendants became a long sautoir, with matching brooch, earrings, and ring. Only the tiara remained intact. Peter II's bride Queen Alexandra was to wear these emeralds only once, in public at least, one evening in November 1947, for a reception at the Dorchester Hotel on the eve of the marriage of her cousin Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark to Princess Elizabeth of the United Kingdom.

Two years later, the King and Queen of Yugoslavia were in exile in New York. As the Communist government in Yugoslavia had confiscated all their goods, they were forced to sell the famous emeralds. Negotiations surrounding the sale were to continue for over a year. Times had changed. The era when the queens of Europe wore fabulous jewels seemed to be over. The twenty-nine cabochon emeralds with which the parure was set, the largest of them the size of a walnut, were split up to make new pieces that were sold to wealthy clients. No one knows where they are today. Only the tiara is still in existence, preserved



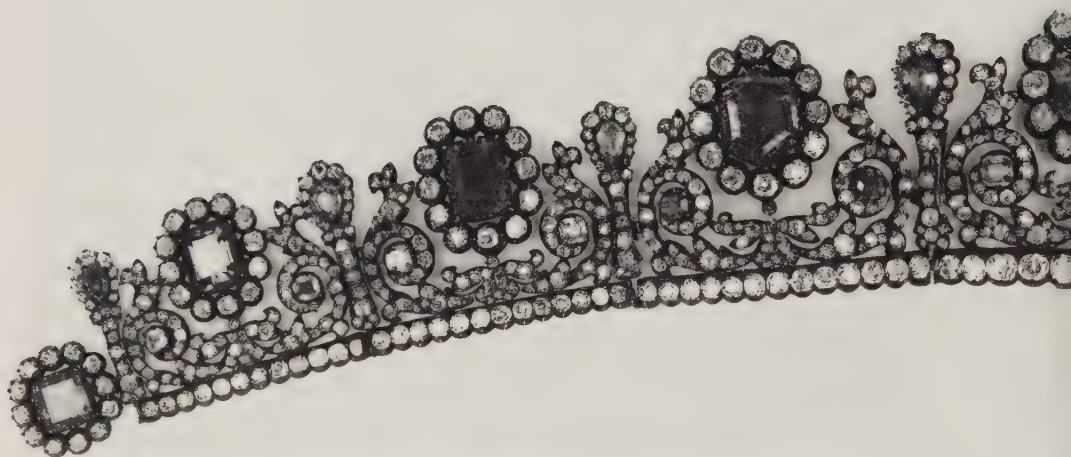
Above
King Peter II of Yugoslavia
with Prime Minister Winston
Churchill and Lieutenant-

General (later Field Marshal)
Montgomery (left) during
World War II.

in the private collection of Van Cleef & Arpels. The cabochon emeralds that adorned it have been replaced with imitation stones, but the mounting and the old-cut diamonds are authentic.

King Peter died in exile in 1970, while Queen Alexandra lived on until 1993. But there was a happy ending after all. Prince Alexander of Yugoslavia, only son of Peter and Alexandra, moved back to his country in 2000. The property of the royal family has been restored to him, and he now lives in the royal palace of Dedinje, just outside Belgrade. Presiding over one of the first floor drawing rooms is a life-size portrait of Queen Marie, his grandmother, decked out in the fabulous Romanov emeralds.

THE DIADEM OF THE LAST QUEEN OF THE FRENCH



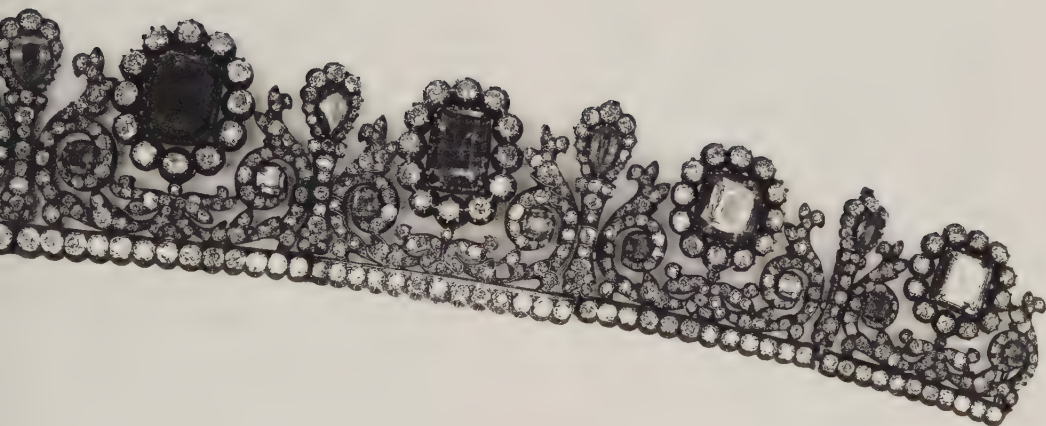
Above

The emerald and diamond diadem that was remounted by Van Cleef & Arpels in

the early 1950s. It almost certainly belonged to Queen Marie-Amélie

It was a sumptuous piece, and indisputably royal in origin. Composed of eight motifs in emeralds and diamonds, the design featured two foliate scrolls flanking a cushion-cut emerald set with twelve brilliant-cut diamonds. These motifs were linked by stems of diamonds topped with pear-shaped emeralds, all in a pattern of fleurs-de-lis. A ninth motif appears to have been removed. In the photograph, which dates from the early 1950s, the square-cut emerald that adorned it sits beside the diadem.

What was the provenance of this magnificent diadem? That was the question. Also at this time, the same owner deposited another royal jewel with Van Cleef & Arpels, this time a well-known piece: the sapphire and diamond tiara of the Austrian branch of the Saxe-Coburgs. This branch of the august dynasty, members of which still reign in Europe—Queen Elizabeth II in the United Kingdom and King Albert II in Belgium—came into being in 1815 with the marriage of Prince Ferdinand (1785–1851) and a fabulously wealthy



Hungarian heiress, Princess Antoinette Koháry (1797-1862). Their son August formed an alliance with the royal house of France by marrying, at Saint-Cloud in 1843, Princess Clémentine d'Orléans, youngest daughter of King Louis-Philippe and Queen Marie-Amélie.

It appears that the sapphire and diamond tiara was worn for the last time by their daughter-in-law, *née* Princess Louise of Belgium, for a costume ball. A photograph of this occasion is reproduced in Christophe Vachaud's scholarly book devoted to the jewels

of the Belgian queens and princesses. The author also refers to the presence of this tiara at Van Cleef & Arpels.⁴ It is tempting to imagine that the emerald and diamond diadem might share the same provenance—and all the more so because the design of this diadem recalls that of another. Since 1985, the Louvre collections have contained the sapphire and diamond parure of Queen Marie-Amélie, wife of King Louis-Philippe. The sapphires, which came from Empress Josephine's collection and had been inherited on her death by her daughter

**Above**

Princess Clementine of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, née Princesse Clémentine d'Orléans, inherited the emerald and diamond diadem on her mother's death

Opposite

Queen Marie-Amélie wearing her magnificent sapphires. The design of the brooch she wears at the bottom of her corsage

is similar to that of the sections of the emerald and diamond diadem altered by Van Cleef & Arpels in the early 1950s.

Queen Hortense, were bought in 1821 by Louis-Philippe, then Duc d'Orléans, who gave them to his wife. Their descendant the Comte de Paris (1905-1999) donated them to the Louvre.

The two diadems display precisely the same decoration of fleur-de-lis and central motifs set with a principal stone. The sapphire and diamond jewel in the Louvre was also originally composed of nine linked parts. Four of these were removed in the early 1860s and turned into separate brooches, of which only one remains, on display in the Louvre, with the original diadem, necklace, and earrings.

Furthermore, the two inventories of the jewels of Queen Marie-Amélie drawn up by the French jeweler Bapst in 1939

and the jeweler Hancock in 1863 both mention an emerald and diamond diadem "composed of nine parts." The files concerning the succession of Queen Marie-Amélie, which may be consulted in the Archives Nationales in Paris, mention that when her jewels were divided up the emeralds went to her daughter Princess Clémentine, wife of Prince August of Saxe-Coburg. Add to this the fleur-de-lis decoration, the heraldic attribute not only of Queen Amélie, who was born Princess of the Two Sicilies, but also of her husband, the Duc d'Orléans and future King of the French, and it becomes very tempting to include in the provenance the last Queen of the French.





From Napoleon to Stalin

*THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS
OF EMPRESS MARIE-LOUISE'S EMERALDS*

**New York, Van Cleef & Arpels
Boutique, 1952**

This time there was no doubt about it: this was an imperial diadem, a gift from the Emperor Napoleon I to his second wife, Empress Marie-Louise, in 1810. The marriage between the French sovereign and the Austrian archduchess was the culmination of long-drawn-out diplomatic negotiations. As he himself observed, the emperor was acquiring a pedigree. Through this marriage to a Habsburg, daughter of the Austrian emperor and niece of the late Queen Marie-Antoinette, he hoped to gain not only an heir but also entry into the hermetically sealed royal houses of Europe. The wedding gifts he ordered from Nitot, the imperial jeweler, were of a splendor befitting this dynastic alliance. The French crown jewels that Napoleon had reassembled boasted several parures of sapphires, rubies, diamonds, pearls, and even turquoises. But there was no set of emeralds. Hence it was a suite of emerald jewelry that he commissioned from Nitot, to be accompanied by a second parure set with opals and diamonds. These two sets, costing 278,000 and 290,000 francs at the time, were to be a gift for the empress's personal jewelry collection.

One hundred and forty years later, in the early 1950s, the New York newspapers printed an advertisement that was enticing, to say the least: "An Emerald

Opposite

Empress Marie-Louise, second wife of Napoleon Bonaparte

for You from the Historic Napoleonic Tiara!” Connoisseurs of historic gems had only to head to Van Cleef & Arpels on Fifth Avenue if they wanted to buy one or more of the seventy-nine emeralds set in the diadem given to Marie-Louise by Napoleon. It had arrived in the United States by an extremely roundabout route. On her death in 1847, Marie-Louise bequeathed it to her aunt, Archduchess Elise (1800–1856), who in turn left it to her son Léopold (1823–1898). Leopold died childless, and left the emeralds to one of his cousins. By 1945, they belonged to Archduke Karl Albrecht (1888–1951), whose seat was in Poland, part of which belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. In spite of the vicissitudes of history, the archduke contrived to hold on to his Zywiec estate, and to the sumptuous single-storey white palace, a Schönbrunn in miniature, that was his residence. He served in the Polish army, and in 1920 made a morganatic marriage to the Swedish commoner Alice Ankarkrona (1889–1985), who never bore the title of archduchess, and whose children did not inherit any titles. All of them were Princes of Altenburg, however.

The arrival of the Russian army on Polish soil in 1945 marked the start of difficult times for this princely family, which since 1918 had nonetheless striven to adapt to a world in a state of perpetual change. For old landowners with large estates, the gradual spread of Communist rule became increasingly oppressive as their lands were nationalized. The German occupation had been a terrible time for Archduke Karl Albrecht, who had refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the Reich when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. Arrested by the Gestapo, he had been imprisoned and tortured for six years. His wife Alice and their children were placed under house arrest for the duration of the war. The “liberation” of Polish territory by the Russians was no more favorable to them, as Hitler was succeeded by Stalin. After fleeing to Krakow, the archduke and his family finally decided to leave for Sweden, Princess Alice’s native land. They left everything behind except their most precious jewels, including notably Empress Marie-Louise’s emerald and diamond parure.

In 1951, soon after their arrival in Sweden, Archduke Karl Albrecht died at the age of sixty-three, an exhausted man. Princess Alice was well aware that she would never again wear this imposing diadem. Van Cleef & Arpels purchased both the diadem and the belt plaque, set with a square-cut emerald of 35.50 carats. The rest of the set—the necklace and earrings—remained in the possession of Karl Albrecht’s descendants for some years before being sold a private collector.

Opposite

The necklace and earrings
from the emerald and diamond

parure of Empress Marie-
Louise, now on display
in the Louvre



**Above**

The tiara from the emerald and diamond parure of Empress Marie-Louise, as it was bought

by Van Cleef & Arpels in the 1950s. The emeralds were remounted on modern pieces by the Maison

**Above**

The central emerald of this brooch created by Van Cleef & Arpels is from the Empress Marie-

Louise tiara. The brooch, from a private American collection, was sold at Christie's New York in 1999.

**Above**

The Empress Marie-Louise tiara as it looks today. The emeralds have been replaced by turquoises.

Van Cleef & Arpels sold it to Mrs. Marjorie Merriweather Post, who later donated it to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

Opposite

Marjorie Merriweather Post casting a final glance over her dinner table before the arrival of her guests.

In 2004, they were acquired by the Louvre for the sum of €3.7 million. These jewels are thus not only a reminder of an empress who has been forgotten by history, but also a witness to the turbulent history of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

After being worn by an Austrian archduchess at the balls of the Viennese court in the time of Sissi and Franz Josef, they passed into relative obscurity in a castle in Polish Silesia, before spending World War II in hiding, away from the rapacious attentions of the SS. They then resurfaced on their way to Sweden, in order to escape the confiscations being carried out by the Communist government in Poland. Then, in the early 1950s, they arrived in New York, following the death in exile of their last owner, the heroic Austrian archduke who had refused to submit to the era's dictatorships.

The diadem has survived, although altered. Over the years, the seventy-nine emeralds that adorned it had been remounted on rings, brooches and bracelets. Two of these pieces, from a private American collection, came up for sale at Christie's New York in October 1999. Reduced to its silver armature and original diamonds, the diadem would doubtless have been dismantled, if Van Cleef & Arpels had not had the idea of replacing the missing emeralds—as with the tiara of the Queen of Serbia—with less costly turquoises. Thus modified, it was bought in 1971 by Mrs. Merriweather Post, who donated it to the Natural History Museum in Washington, where it may still be seen.





Above

The emerald and diamond bracelet created by Van Cleef & Arpels in the 1950s for Comtesse Guy de Boisrouvray

Along with the rest of her jewelry collection, it was sold at Sotheby's New York in 1989. The central emerald weighs 11.61 carats

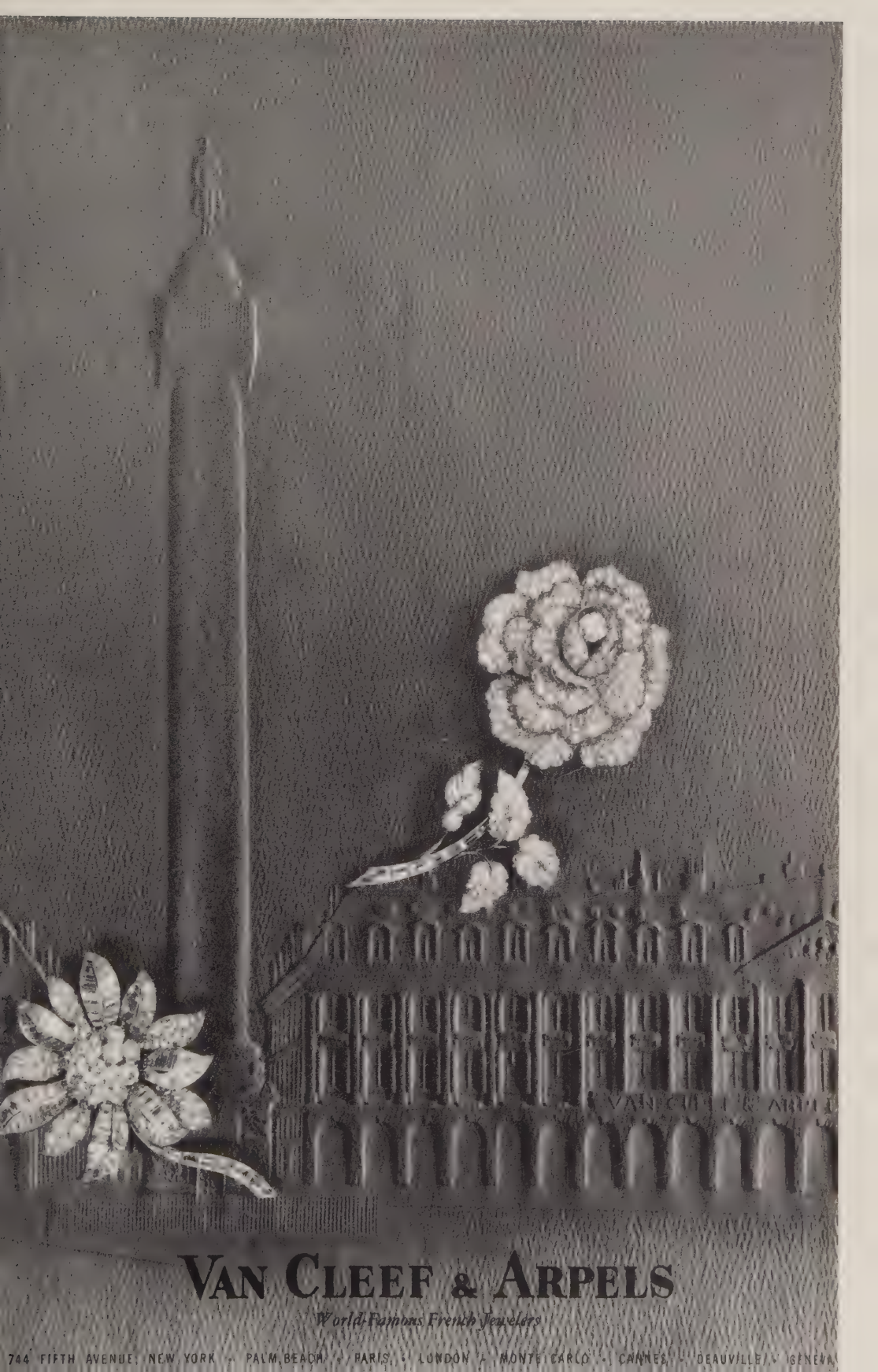


Above

The emerald and diamond bracelet created by Van Cleef & Arpels for Mme. Hélène Beaumont in the 1930s

It was sold with the rest of her jewelry collection by Sotheby's Geneva in 1994

*Catalog of historic jewelry
published in 1950
as publicity for
Van Cleef & Arpels New York*



VAN CLEEF & ARPELS

World-Famous French Jewelers

744 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK • PALM BEACH • PARIS • LONDON • MONTE CARLO • CANNES • DEAUVILLE • GENEVA



Symbol of Excellence

For nearly a hundred years the Column Vendôme with its famed statue of the Emperor Napoleon has been a symbol of Van Cleef & Arpels.

In the firm's private collection are two outstanding jewelry heirlooms of the Napoleonic era—the Empress Josephine and the Empress Marie-Louise Tiaras. Both typify the French craftsmanship and exquisite design of the last century, qualities continued by Van Cleef & Arpels in today's modern jewels.

Necklace: Superb necklace with detachable pear-shaped diamond pendant of over 50 kts. and magnificent collection of round and emerald-cut diamonds.

Platinum setting. Actual size. Designs © Gerard's portrait of Napoleon reproduced with the permission of the Musée National de Versailles.





VAN CLEEF & ARPELS
World-Famous French Jewelers



VAN CLEEF & ARPELS
World-Famous French Jewelers



The Empress Josephine Tiara

This historic heirloom—presented by Napoleon to his first wife in 1804—is now part of the private collection of Van Cleef & Arpels. The Tiara's magnificent collection of superb diamonds and the grace of its design combine to make it a masterwork of the jeweler's art. Like this and other great French jewels of the past, the creations of Van Cleef & Arpels are designed to retain their classical beauty and freshness far into the future.

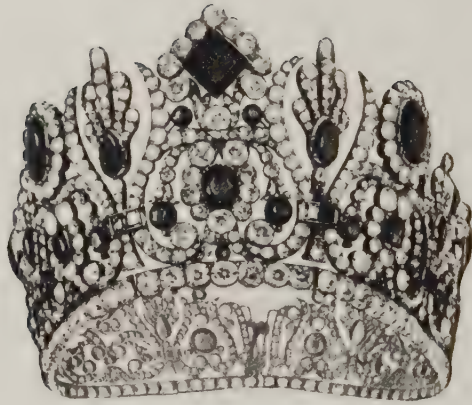
Necklace: A superb garland of fiery blossoms, pear-shaped, marquise and round diamonds.

Clip: Classically elegant olive branches of round, marquise and pear-shaped diamonds. Detachable as two clips.

Earclips: Sunbursts of marquise, pear-shaped and round diamonds.

Platinum settings. Actual size. Designs © David's painting of the Coronation of Josephine, reproduced with permission of the Musée du Louvre.





The Empress Marie-Louise Tiara

When Napoleon's second wife, the Empress Marie-Louise, gave birth to an heir in 1811, Napoleon presented her with this magnificent Tiara.

Now in the possession of Van Cleef & Arpels, the heirloom originally contained a matchless collection of round, square and pear-shaped gem emeralds impossible to duplicate today. These gems were dismantled and sold to eminent collectors as authentic historical gems. The Tiara now contains a marvelous collection of large turquoises; the diamonds and mounting are still the Napoleonic original.

Necklace: A majestically matched collection of cultured pearls, glowing with lustrous magic. Clasp of platinum and pave diamonds.

Ring: A miracle of elegance, large cultured pearl in a platinum setting with graceful circle of round and marquise diamonds set in platinum.

Earclips: Lustrous, perfectly matched cultured pearls in ornaments of round and marquise diamonds set in platinum.

Clip: Three rare, pear-shaped pearls of exquisite beauty inspired from a regal ornament of marquise and round diamonds set in platinum. Pendants are detachable.

Designs © Actual size. Gerard's portrait of Marie-Louise reproduced with permission of the Musée du Louvre.



VAN CLEEF & ARPELS
World-Famous French Jewelers

FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK • PALM BEACH • PARIS • LONDON • MONTE CARLO • CANNES • DEAUVILLE • GENEVA

Design © Arpels 1938



Rubies

THE BLOOD-RED “THIBAW” RUBY

Mandalay, Burma, February 15, 1879

It was one of the bloodiest massacres in history, a mass slaughter provoked by the folly of one man and the unbridled ambition of one woman. Yet an indication of what was to come had filtered out a few weeks earlier, when Queen Supalayay (1859–1925) had ordered Marie Denigre, a French shopkeeper who had been living in Burma for some years, to supply her with lengths of red velvet. Experienced courtiers, versed in the subtleties of Burmese court etiquette, consequently inferred that murder was in the air. And it had to be a royal murder. Tradition dictated that the glorious blood of the royal dynasty must not be spilt: the royal victim must thus be enveloped in red fabric before being battered to death. But none of them could have imagined that this was not to be the murder of one member of the dynasty, nor even of two or three, but rather of over eighty of them.

That night in February 1879, assassins in the pay of King Thibaw (1859–1916) burst simultaneously into all the palaces of the different members of the royal family. One after another, all the princes and princesses of the royal line of King Mindon, who had over eighty children, were arrested, sometimes violently, by half-drunk soldiers. Swaddled in scarlet velvet, they were then either battered or strangled to death, mothers with their children, husbands with their wives. Queen

Opposite

King Thibaw of Burma with his two wives, Queen Supalayay and Queen Supayagi

Supalayatt, who ruled over the kingdom with her mother, the Dowager Queen Alenan Daw, had been ruthless in her orders: every member of the dynasty must be slaughtered, to ensure that her husband Thibaw would have no rivals to the throne.

The British Resident, Robert Shaw, gave horrified accounts of the murders. The victims' screams were stifled as their murderers' grip tightened around their throats. Others were beaten with coshes, suffering lingering deaths as their drunken assailants bludgeoned them relentlessly but often ineffectually. Infants were torn from their mothers' arms and smashed against walls.⁷ In the morning, the bodies were all tossed together into a hastily dug ditch. When this proved too small to accommodate all the corpses, eight carts were loaded with the rest of the dead and driven to the Irrawaddy River, where the bodies were thrown into the current.

A year earlier, the great Mindon Min (1808–1878) had died in his palace at Mandalay, the new capital that he had created twenty years earlier in order to banish the weight of the past from his dynasty. He had also brought in reforms of the army, police and educational system, granted a degree of press freedom, and opened negotiations with the voracious British and French colonial powers, in which he deftly played on their mutual rivalry in order to protect his kingdom's independence.

His death had proved a catastrophe for both the dynasty and the country. The last months of his reign had been completely overshadowed by the influence of Queen Alenan Daw who—having only two daughters, Supalayatt and Supayagi—feared that the crown might escape her clutches. She therefore organized the succession in favor of Prince Thibaw, the nineteen-year-old son of Mindon Min and a short-lived favorite who had since become a Buddhist nun. Unknown at court, Thibaw lacked any support. His mother had renounced all power and influence, and furthermore he suffered from epilepsy. Alenan Daw had arranged for him to marry both her daughters, who were also his half-sisters. Between them, these three women organized the massacre of all other possible claimants to the throne in order to ensure their absolute rule over Burma.

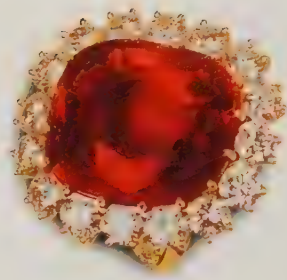
Thibaw had given them free rein. The only thing he really cared about, apart from Buddhist calligraphy, was the matchless collection of fabulous rubies that the Burmese kings had amassed since the dawn of time. Several times a day

Opposite

King Thibaw, the last sovereign of Burma, on his accession to the throne in 1878

He possessed the most fabulous collection of rubies ever seen





he would lift the lids of the caskets that were kept in his apartments, slip the blood-red stones out of their little silk pouches, hold them up against the light, and gaze at them. Since the discovery of the fabulous Mogok mines in the north of the country in the early sixteenth century, all the largest and finest rubies of the unique hue known in Europe as “pigeon’s blood” and in India as “bull’s blood” had been reserved for the Burmese Crown.

The French writer Joseph Kessel, who was fortunate enough to spend several months at Mogok in the early 1950s, described how the mines were reputed to have been discovered in his superb book *La Vallée des rubis*:

“A Burmese king had a convoy of criminals deported to the north of the country, far beyond Mandalay. Their escort abandoned the prisoners in the middle of an uninhabited jungle that stretched to infinity over untamed mountains, hills, and valleys. To protect themselves from the wild animals, snakes and insects, the exiled criminals started to live in trees [...], surviving largely from hunting. One morning, some young men who had set off in pursuit of their quarry left the jungle hilltops behind them and climbed down into a small valley. There some stones that glittered with crimson flashes caught their eye, and they took some back with them to amuse the others in their camp. But when they saw them, the oldest among the deportees grew strangely excited. These men recognized the fabulous red stones that Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese merchants used to bring from unknown places, and they realized that their young companions had discovered the mysterious source of the ruby.”⁶

If contemporary accounts are to be believed, there was one ruby in his collections that King Thibaw prized above all the others. Not only was its hue the most intense, it was also the largest in size, at 98 carats. With its smaller sibling weighing 74 carats, it had been found during the reign of Bodaw Paya, great-grandfather

Above

The Thibaw ruby, an extraordinary stone weighing 24.82 carats, was sold by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1976

Opposite

The Mogok Valley, where legendary “pigeon’s blood” rubies are still found today



**Above**

A magnificent pair of earrings displayed by Van Cleef & Arpels in 2012. The two rubies of a

perfect red hue are from Tanzania and weigh 13.34 and 13.83 carats.

of Mindon, in the early nineteenth century. Together, the two jewels had originally formed a single uncut stone of herculean proportions, the largest ever discovered at Mogok or anywhere else in the world, weighing over 500 carats. Unearthed by a miner by the name of Nga Mauk, this fabulous stone had very early on become associated with cruelty and bloodshed.

According to some accounts, Nga Mauk sliced the stone in two. The larger part, destined to become the 98-carat ruby, was to be presented to the king, according to custom. The smaller part, which was to become the 74-carat stone, was meanwhile sold in secrecy in Calcutta. According to others, Nga Mauk wanted

to present the uncut stone to his sovereign himself, in order to claim the honor for this sumptuous gift in person. But the guards of the mine, alerted to his departure, set off in pursuit, arrested him and accused him of attempting to conceal the ruby from the royal treasure.

Whatever the truth of the matter, his punishment was a terrible one: Nga Mauk was arrested, tied up in chains, and dragged before each of the four gates of the city of Amapura, at the time the Burmese capital. Then he was whipped till the blood flowed, taken into the remotest depths of the jungle and abandoned to the tigers. The fabulous ruby meanwhile entered the royal collections, producing the two finest stones in the royal treasure. According to accounts collected by Kessel in the 1950s, the 98-carat stone was so enormous that King Thibaw used to hang it from one of the ears of his favorite elephant.

Unfortunately for Thibaw and his queens, the royal massacre did not ward off the ill luck that dogged the throne of the Golden Foot. On the contrary, the British—who normally didn't give a fig for the lives and deaths of Burmese princes—seized upon it as a pretext for issuing severe reprimands to Thibaw. To little effect: obsessed with his rubies, the king scarcely left his apartments, while Supalayay (dubbed “Soup Plate” by the British) and her mother and sister continued to amass gold and jewels.

The increasingly evident influence of France in this part of Asia now propelled the British into action. Lower Burma was already under British control; in November 1885, a military expedition under the command of General Prendergast was launched to conquer the north of the country, under the official pretext of restoring order. The capital surrendered without a fight. At their final official audience, Thibaw and Supalayay appeared in the palace throne room decked out in all their most glittering finery. Sobbing, the king announced that he was offering his country and his crown to the British. Terrified by the thought that he might be massacred not by the invaders but by his own subjects, he asked to be granted a few more days in Mandalay, with a guard of European troops.

It was at this precise moment in history that the Burmese royal rubies vanished legend took their place. Imprisoned in their palace, the royal couple were supposed to have smuggled out some of the rubies via ladies of the court, who passed them on to emissaries charged with hiding them from covetous British eyes. But Thibaw could not bring himself to part with his 98-carat ruby, it was said, instead choosing to conceal it in his traditional topknot. Another version of the story claimed that the ruby and its gold casket were stolen by a British officer.

When King George V came to India in 1911, Thibaw, by then exiled to Ratnagiri, in southwest India, is supposed to have asked for restitution of the rubies set in the imperial crown to be used at the great coronation Durbar in Delhi.

Interestingly, the official guide to the British crown jewels published only a few years ago, which describes all the gems set in the treasures preserved in the Tower of London, is extremely reticent on the subject of the rubies in the Imperial Crown of India, which is displayed with the crown jewels, specifying only that the four cushion-cut rubies in the center of the four fleurs-de-lis are “of Burmese origin.”

Thibaw died in 1916, and three years later Supalayay returned to Burma, though she was never allowed to go back to Mandalay. Granted a residence in Rangoon, she gradually became a national heroine of sorts, a symbol of resistance to the British invaders. On her death in 1925 she was buried in Kandawmin Gardens, where her much-visited tomb lies beside that of the mother of a true national heroine, Aung San Suu Kyi. Fifty years later, a ruby named after Thibaw came up for sale at Christie’s Geneva on May 27, 1971. The “Thibaw” Ruby weighed 26.13 carats, and was of a peerless “pigeon’s blood” hue. The catalog was very discreet regarding its provenance, but mentioned that it had belonged to the American banker J.P. Morgan, a contemporary of King Thibaw.

Bought by Van Cleef & Arpels, the stone was recut to eliminate an impurity and a slight cavity on one side, to give a cushion-cut stone weighing 24.82 carats. Set in a ring, it was sold to a private collector in 1976. Another fabulous Burmese ruby, weighing 24.20 carats, was sold at Sotheby’s New York in 1989. This stone came from the collection of Comtesse Guy du Boisrouvray, *née* Luz Mila Patino (1909–1958), for whom Van Cleef & Arpels had set it as a pendant on a diamond necklace. The origins of both stones are shrouded in mystery. The name of the first one, directly inspired by the last king, and their Burmese provenance apart, is there any other link between these rubies and treasure of the Burmese court? Since the rubies of the Burmese crown jewels have never been seen again, it seems more than likely.

Opposite

The 24.20-carat ruby mounted as a pendant to a diamond necklace by Van Cleef & Arpels for

Comtesse Guy du Boisrouvray. It was sold at Sotheby’s New York in 1989, with the rest of the Boisrouvray collection.





A Wedding Gift

FOR THE QUEEN OF SPAIN

Royal Palace, Athens, May 13, 1962

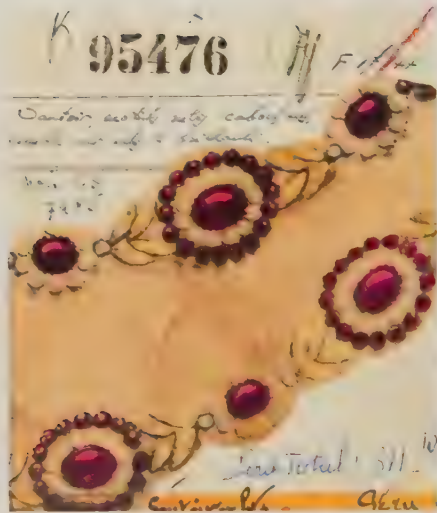
It was one of the greatest parades of jewels and gems ever witnessed in the annals of high society. On the evening of May 13, 1962, the staircase of the Royal Palace in Athens became a showcase for place Vendôme, as King Paul and Queen Frederica of Greece greeted representatives of the royal houses of Europe who had come to Athens for the wedding of their daughter Princess Sophia to Prince Juan Carlos of Spain. The Dutch queen wore her fabulous sapphires, while her daughter, Crown Princess Beatrix, wore her equally spectacular rubies. The Duchess of Kent wore white, with a matching set of sapphires and diamonds, while her sister the Princess of Yugoslavia wore blue with diamonds. Queen Ingrid of Denmark wore a ruby and diamond parure which was said to have been a gift to Désirée Clary, first Queen of Sweden of the Bernadotte dynasty, by her first fiancé, later Emperor of the French, Napoleon I. Queen Frederica of Greece wore the ruby and diamond parure of her husband's grandmother, Queen Olga of Greece, for which King George I of Greece had collected the stones one by one throughout their forty years of marriage. The bride's mother, the Countess of Barcelona, and her grandmother, Queen Victoria Eugénie of Spain, wore pearls and diamonds. As did the bride herself.

Opposite

King Juan Carlos of Spain, then crown prince, and his wife Princess Sophia of Greece,

at the time of their wedding. Princess Sophia is wearing one of the two strands of the Médallions necklace

in cabochon rubies and diamonds given to her by the shipping magnate Stavros Niarchos

**Above**

Pancarte or stock card for the Medaillons necklace given to the Queen of Spain by General Franco during the 1946 wedding.

**Opposite**

A Médailles necklace in rubies and diamonds similar to the one given to the Queen of Spain by General Franco, Rome.

That night, Princess Sophia wore two jewels that were among her wedding gifts. Sparkling in her hair were the diamond and pear-shaped pearls of an antique tiara given to her by her parents-in-law, the Count and Countess of Barcelona. At her throat she wore a garland of foliage and roses set entirely with diamonds. This necklace, which could also be worn as a tiara, was her wedding gift from the Spanish dictator, General Franco. Franco, who had taken over the education of Prince Juan Carlos by holding out to the royal family the possibility of a restoration of the monarchy, had given his blessing to this marriage, and it was the Minister for the Navy, Admiral Abarzuza, who had come bearing the dictator's congratulations and prestigious gift. Very diplomatically, Princess Sophia chose to wear both jewels, one given her by her future father-in-law and the official claimant to the Spanish throne, and the other by the general who had been the country's "temporary" regent for over thirty years. The two men had little time for each other, but although Franco had chosen not to attend the royal wedding in Athens it was important not to ruffle his feathers.

Yet the bride could have worn different jewels altogether. Among her wedding gifts was a piece that was far more spectacular, and above all more modern, which she might have preferred to wear for her wedding ball. Stavros Niarchos, the most lavish of the Greek shipping magnates, had given her a sumptuous double necklace of rubies and diamonds by Van Cleef & Arpels, a classic of the Maison



known as the *Médailles* necklace. The principle of the design was simple. Cabochon stones—rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and even turquoise and coral—were mounted in a double setting of precious stones, one of diamonds and the other of colored stones. Each motif thus formed an oval medallion, and the medallions were linked by foliage motifs in diamonds and by other simpler medallions, composed of oval cabochons surrounded by a single row of diamonds. The double row of medallions followed the curve of the gown's low neckline, and was fastened at the back of the throat by a garland of foliage in diamonds.

One important detail demonstrated the virtuoso skill of the Van Cleef & Arpels workshops: the necklace, composed of fifteen medallions with double settings and twenty-two cabochon rubies with single settings, could be completely dismantled and worn as a sautoir, a bracelet or a single-strand necklace, close to the throat or curving to echo a *decolleté*. Princess Sophia, now Queen Sofia of Spain, was to find yet another way of wearing it, sometimes attaching the back of the necklace to a velvet *bandeau* so as to form a tiara.

In the early 1960s, *Médailles* necklaces were among the most popular pieces created by Van Cleef & Arpels. The archives list at least two other versions in rubies and diamonds, one worn by the Italian actress Sophia Loren, and the other bought by a European client for his wife, who had apparently seen Sophia Lauren's necklace. A fourth version in rubies and diamonds was purchased by a South American millionaire. Versions in turquoise and coral date from the late 1960s, and another bolder variation, of which at least two examples are in existence, is composed of cabochon sapphires and emeralds.

Opposite

Some of the detached elements of the *Médailles* necklace shown on page 287. *Médailles* necklaces, which also exist in sapphire, emerald, turquoise, and coral versions, may

be transformed into one long necklace, two shorter necklaces, and a bracelet. Queen Sofia has occasionally worn the back section of her necklace as a tiara.





Above

A ruby and diamond necklace by Van Cleef & Arpels, quite similar to the first version of the necklace bought by

Edward, Prince of Wales, for Mrs. Simpson. This necklace belonged to Hélène Beaumont, and was sold at Sotheby's Geneva in 1994.



Above
The ruby and diamond bracelet
created by Van Cleef & Arpels
for Florence Jay Gould. It was
sold at Christie's in 1988.



Diamonds

FROM THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE TO PRINCESS GRACE

**Opéra Garnier de Monte-Carlo,
May 26, 1966**

That night, the principality was dazzling. In the salons of the Opéra Garnier de Monte-Carlo, the whole of high society, from Monaco and across the world, awaited the arrival of the evening's guests of honor, Their Serene Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Monaco. The ball was being held to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the principality's resort, Monte-Carlo, named in honor of Prince Rainier's ancestor Prince Charles III.

The creation of Monte-Carlo—the prelude to the building of the famous Casino and the Opera, followed by the grand hotels of the Société des Bains de Mer—had marked the beginning of Monaco's prosperity, and of its status as a symbol of luxury and elegance that endures to this day. The event being held in its honor was a costume ball, naturally, with the ladies present recreating, for this one evening, all the opulent splendor of the age. In mid-19th century France, when the Second Empire was in its sumptuous heyday, fashions in Monaco were not exempt from the diktats of Paris. Consequently, the 1966 ball echoed this elegance—crinolines and chignons were de rigueur, and the ladies waiting for their hosts in the gilded salons were all decked out in gowns with voluminous flounced skirts.

Opposite

Princess Grace of Monaco at the Centenary Ball in 1966. Her imperial tiara was loaned

to her by Van Cleef & Arpels, as was her sapphire and diamond necklace.

At the Prince's Palace, a few hundred yards away on the Rocher de Monaco, the hairdresser Alexandre of Paris was putting the finishing touches to a masterpiece. For this one evening he had created a coiffure that was utterly unique. Using blonde hairpieces, he had increased the volume of Princess Grace's natural hair by three or four times—to the point where her coiffure towered so high that it wouldn't fit in the car. "She was wearing the Empress Josephine's diadem, and the ladies had put on their crinolines," he recounted in his memoirs. "I had created a style of immense proportions for her, mingling precious stones and gold thread. In order to do this, I had delayed the entrance of the Prince and Princess by an hour. At the last moment, the official car proved too small to accommodate my coiffure, so the Princess went to the ball standing in a pick-up truck."⁷

The mode of transport was immaterial: the effect was spectacular. Floating above the impressive flounces of her pink crinoline, Princess Grace glided in at a stately pace, looking every inch the empress. Crowned with the famous diadem, her coiffure was so tall that she had to be careful not to lean over too far in case the pyramid of blonde tresses and diamonds toppled over. It was thus with a regal smile that she greeted the many bows and curtseys that followed her entrance. Even Prince Rainier seemed to be awed by her beauty and elegance.

The imperial diadem with which Alexandre adorned Princess Grace's hair that night came from Van Cleef & Arpels. What was its provenance? Jacques Arpels had himself provided the answer in an interview on high jewelry that he gave to RTF, the French public broadcasting organization, a few years earlier: "You see the diadem in the vitrine behind me, I bought it at the end of World War II from an aristocratic English lady. It's the one that the Empress Josephine wore on the day of her coronation. It was passed down to the Empress Eugénie, who sold it when she was in exile after the fall of the Second Empire in 1870. It was bought by an English lady who knew Empress Eugénie. Subsequently it was left to the lady from whom I bought it."⁸

Since entering the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection, the diadem—without doubt one of the most impressive diamond diadems ever created—has been on regular display in one or other of the Maison's boutiques throughout the world. It also formed part of the enormous exhibition devoted to Napoleon at the Grand Palais in Paris in 1969. A press release issued by the Maison in 1974, probably on the occasion of a jewelry exhibition in Geneva, traced its history:

"Napoleon gave it to the Empress Josephine. This is the diadem, it is said, that he chose to place on the Empress Josephine's head at the moment of coronation.

Opposite

The original press release containing the description of the diamond diadem and mentioning its imperial provenance.

Following pages

It is possible that this diadem, or part of it at least, may have belonged to the Empress Josephine, and after her

to the Empress Eugénie. But it is not the tiara that Josephine wears in David's painting of the coronation

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I. DIADEME OFFERT PAR NAPOLEON A

L'IMPERATRICE JOSEPHINE

Napoléon Ier l'offre à l'Impératrice Joséphine. C'est un diadème que, dit-on, il a voulu poser lui-même sur la tête de l'Impératrice au moment du Sacre.

On perd la trace de ce joyau après la répudiation de Joséphine et on le retrouve assez curieusement à Londres en 1871, où l'Impératrice Eugénie le vend pour adoucir les rigueurs de son exil.

On suppose que Joséphine l'aurait légué à sa fille Hortense, Reine de Hollande, qui l'aurait elle-même donné à son fils, le futur Napoléon III. On pourrait ainsi expliquer que l'Impératrice Eugénie l'avait en sa possession en 1871.

Ce diadème est composé de 880 diamants pesant 200 carats environ.

VAN CLEEF & ARPELS/BICHSEL-PUBLICITE,
SERVICE DE PRESSE 1974





After the empress's divorce, all trace was lost of the jewel, until in 1871 it resurfaced in rather curious fashion in London, where the Empress Eugénie put it up for sale in order to soften the rigors of exile. It may be assumed that Josephine bequeathed it to her daughter, Queen Hortense, who in turn gave it to her son, the future Napoleon III. This would explain how it came to be in the possession of the Empress Eugénie in 1871. The diadem is composed of 880 diamonds weighing some 200 carats."

In her extremely handsome book devoted to Van Cleef & Arpels, Sylvie Raulet questions the date given in the press release for the reappearance of the diadem, since in her view "it would have appeared on the list of jewels sold by the empress in March 1872."⁹ Two years later it made one last appearance, at the ball given at Schloss Friedrichshafen in Germany for the marriage of Duchess Mathilde of Württemberg to Crown Prince Erich von Walburg zu Zeil. It was the bride's maternal grandmother, Madame la Comtesse de Paris, wife of the claimant to the French throne, who wore it, with a stunning blue and black velvet Balmain gown. Once again, it was Alexandre who dressed her hair, and doubtless it was also Alexandre who borrowed the diadem from the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection.

In 1988, however, the imperial origins of the diadem were called into question by the historian Bernard Morel, in his book devoted to the French crown jewels: "This diadem did not exist in the 1804 inventory [of the jewels of the Empress Josephine], nor in that of 1814. Nor have we been able to find any trace of its sale by the Empress Eugénie in 1871."¹⁰ The pointed shape of the front part of the diadem did not seem to him to correspond with the Empire style either, a doubt that was confirmed by "M. Serge Grandjean, curator of the department of objets d'art at the Musée du Louvre."¹¹ Some time after this, the diadem left the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection.

What was the diadem's true provenance? Today it is difficult to say. The name of the lady who sold it just after World War II might have given a clue, but when Jacques Arpels died in 2008 he took the secret with him. Bernard Morel's argument based on the diadem's absence from the inventories of the Empress Josephine is not necessarily beyond dispute. It could well have been given to Josephine, or bought by her, between 1804 and 1814, especially if it was presented to her at the coronation that took place on December 2, 1804. She might in turn have given it to her daughter a few years later, particularly after her divorce in 1809, when although she kept her title of empress she lived in relative seclusion at Malmaison. After that date, she certainly never again wore jewels of such grandeur. And her generosity, especially toward her children, was legendary.

The second point, concerning the absence of the diadem from a sale of jewelry organized by the Empress Eugénie in 1871, is no more irrefutable than the first. The catalog for the sale that took place not in 1871 but on June 24, 1872, at Christie's, includes, under lot 78, "a magnificent diadem of brilliants composing

**Above**

The motifs with the pear-shaped diamonds set between foliate scrolls are mounted in a different way, which might

suggest that the diadem is a composite piece. The person who bought it at the sale of the Empress Eugénie's jewelry in 1872 was close not only to

the empress but also to Queen Victoria. After the new owner's death, the diadem was sold to an aristocratic English lady, who sold it to Jacques Arpels.

an ensemble of foliate motifs." The description is vague, but it could apply to the Van Cleef & Arpels diadem.

There remains the question of the pointed shape of the front part of the diadem. It is certainly much easier to imagine this diadem on a voluminous belle époque "pompador" hairstyle than as a bandeau worn over the forehead, as was fashionable under the First Empire. But there is one last possible counterpoint to this argument. Even from an examination of the black-and-white photographs of the diadem, one significant detail emerges: not all the diamonds are set in the same way. Those of the foliate motifs are claw-set on stems wrapped in silver strips. Those of the pear-shaped motifs set between foliate scrolls and on the pointed front section—not a particularly harmonious match—are simply claw-set on mountings that are not sheathed in silver. This detail might indicate that the diadem was altered at some point in its history. The pear-shaped motifs may have been added at a later date in order to replace others that had been removed. If this is the case, the traditional attribution of this diadem to the Empress Josephine may well be true.

THE PINK DIAMOND OF THE PRINCE OF BARODA

**London, Sotheby's Auction Room,
March 17, 1960**

If contemporary reports in the British press are to be believed, thirty-nine millionaires were present in the auction room that evening, and all were there to bid on lot 100 in the catalog: "A magnificent cushion-shaped diamond of remarkable pink color and brilliance; the stone is unmounted, brilliant cut and weighs 34.64 carats." The origins of this gem were summed up in the single discreet phrase: "The Property of a Gentleman." But the rumor had been doing the rounds for weeks already: the stone belonged to one of the world's wealthiest men, one of the greatest gem collectors of all time, the Nizam of Hyderabad (1886–1967).

The most outlandish stories swirled around this prince, who was then aged seventy-four. Some told of the day when, wanting to have his fabulous collection of several tens of thousands of pearls cleaned, he summoned his jewelers. Overwhelmed by the number of pearls they were expected to dip individually into

an acid bath and then rinse with care, they asked the Nizam to provide them with a place that was secure but exposed to the sun, where they could put them to dry. The aged maharaja, whose wealth was matched only by his avarice and suspicious nature, was said to have replied: "Do it on the roof." And so for an entire day, tens of thousands of pearls were put out to dry on the roofs of the Hyderabad palace. No ruler could boast finer diamonds, whether white or colored. Indian Independence might have relieved him of a portion of his income, but his wealth was still legendary. To fend off demands from the Indian tax authorities, he had divided his innumerable jewels and precious stones into a series of trust funds, each assigned to one of his descendants. The largest of these he allotted to his grandson and successor.

Ian Balfour, author of an authoritative work on diamonds, suggests even earlier origins for the pink diamond put up for sale at Sotheby's in 1960: it might have been among the jewels of the Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey. This ruler, who was deposed in 1909, possessed over

Opposite

The pink diamond of the Prince of Baroda in a 1970s' publicity

shot by Richard Avedon for the catalog of Van Cleef & Arpels in New York



VAN CLEEF & ARPELS

World-Famous French Jewelers

**Above**

The saleroom at Sotheby's London during the auction of the pink diamond, on March 17, 1960.

Opposite

The description of the pink diamond in Sotheby's catalog.

a hundred brilliant-cut diamonds of all sizes, with weights ranging from a few carats to 82. They were sold at auction in Paris in 1911. When the sale ended, according to Balfour, the dealer Etienne Fallek had in his hands a rectangular brilliant-cut diamond weighing 36 carats, of a pink hue verging on salmon, and originating from Golconda or the Indies.¹² Was it the property of the Nizam? Or of the Sultan? Or even of both? The only certainty appeared to be the stone's Indian provenance.

A representative of Van Cleef & Arpels was present in the saleroom on the evening of March 17, and it was he who

won the bidding war, carrying off the diamond for then record sum of \$128,000. The diamond was transported to Paris immediately, where it was remounted as the pendant to a colla­rette of baguette-cut diamonds. But what should it be called? The Maison then had the idea of asking the young Prince of Baroda, son of Maharani Sita Devi, if he would allow it be named after him. The fourteen-year-old prince gave his assent, and on April 5, Paris high society crowded into the Van Cleef & Arpels salons in order to admire the largest pink diamond in the world, now known as the "Princie" diamond. It is currently in a private collection.

Thursday

20

March 17th, 1960

The Property of a Gentleman

100 A MAGNIFICENT CUSHION-SHAPED DIAMOND OF REMARKABLE PINK COLOUR AND BRILLIANCE; THE STONE IS UNMOUNTED, BRILLIANT CUT AND WEIGHS 34.64 CARATS

*** Diamonds combining this colour size, and brilliance are extremely rare. The stone described above as lot 100 is believed to be the largest example of its type ever offered at auction in this country.*

Scientifically the stone is interesting in displaying a strong orange fluorescence and phosphorescence when exposed to ultra-violet rays. Further, the fluorescence is notable in showing a bright-line emission spectrum. The density of the stone was found to be 3.517.



THE DIAMONDS OF THE QUEEN OF THAILAND

**Paris, Van Cleef & Arpels Workshops,
March 26, 1963**

It was not a straightforward commission. The principal stones, "supplied by the client," had not come to Paris. All the client had supplied were twenty-one zircons of the exact size of the diamonds to be mounted on the collarette that could also be worn as a tiara. True, this was a client who could have demanded anything, as she was not only a queen but also very striking. Sirikit, Queen of Thailand, was preparing for the wedding of the young King Constantine of Greece and Princess Anne-Marie of Denmark, and like all the female guests she was planning to wear fabulous jewels. But she had decided to have her twenty-one largest diamonds remounted on a tiara and necklace combination, created by the most fashionable jeweler of the early 1960s, Van Cleef & Arpels.

The finished jewel, in rococo style, was clearly a success. The queen wore it as she walked down the famous staircase of the Royal Palace of Athens on the evening of the wedding ball in March 1964.

Curiously, she was on the left arm of the bride's father, the King of Denmark, while his wife Queen Ingrid was on his right. The rigors of protocol had evidently been relaxed for the evening. It was in groups of three that the assembled sovereigns descended the famous staircase. Behind the King of Denmark, his wife and the Queen of Thailand came the Dutch queen, her husband Prince Bernard, and the King of Norway, with King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand and King Hussein of Jordan following close behind.

The queen was delighted with tiara/collarette, and subsequently commissioned other similar jewels to display the large diamonds in her collection. The first was a brooch decorated with the emblem of the Chakri dynasty. The second was a collarette based on a motif taken from Thai embroidery, which could also be worn as a tiara. The Thai queen was to wear these jewels frequently in the 1960s and '70s. Nowadays, it appears that she prefers to wear parures of colored stones, of which she has one of the finest collections in the world.

Opposite

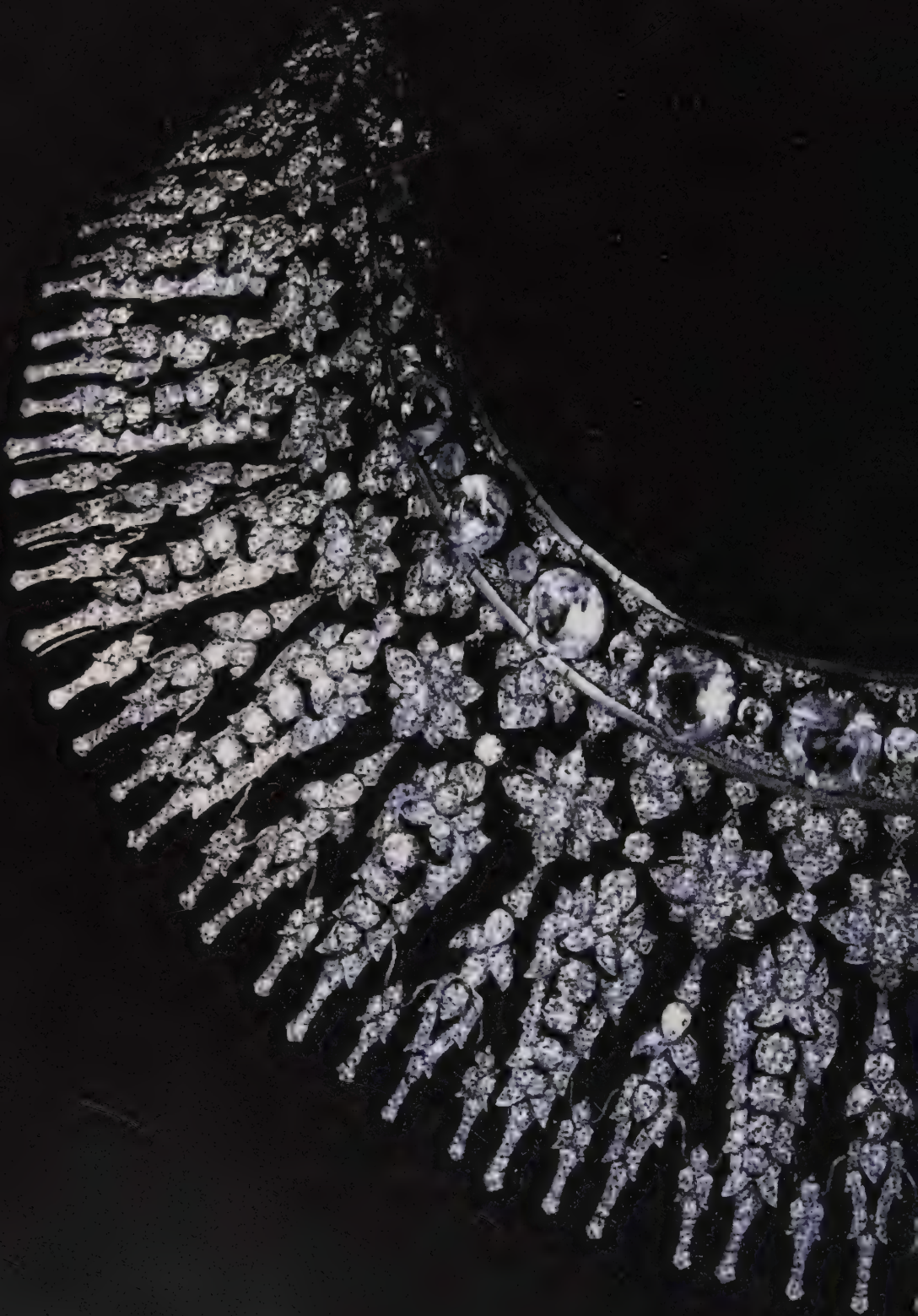
Queen Sirikit of Thailand wearing as a tiara a collarette with Thai motifs created for her by Van Cleef & Arpels

Following pages

The Thai-style collarette. A number of other pieces were created for the Queen of Thailand, including notably

the tiara-collarette that she wore for the marriage of King Constantine of Greece and Princess Anne-Marie of Denmark.









Above

Diamond colarette created by van Cleef & Arpeis for Comtesse Guy dJ Boisrouvray, and sold at Sotheby's in 1994 with the rest

of the Boisrouvray collection. The central pear-shaped diamond weighs 10.50 carats and its color is graded as D, or "exceptional white," the finest in existence.



Above

A pair of diamond and ruby earrings from the Bals de légende collection, presented in 2012. The two pear-shaped

pendants are Type A diamonds, including a Golgotha provenance, the finest diamonds in the world, of peerless brilliance and the first water. The two stones,

which weigh 20.42 and 21.26 carats, are mounted on motifs in Mystery Set rubies.



CHAPTER VI

QUEENS

OF STYLE

Opposite

The singer Maria Callas in the early 1960s, the era of her stage triumphs and her tumultuous affair

with Aristotle Onassis. She was the incarnation not only of bel canto, but also of consummate and studied elegance



The Heartaches

OF NINA DYER

**Geneva, Hôtel Richemond,
evening of May 1, 1969**

It was a legend that reached its denouement in the salons of one of the finest hotels on Lake Léman. For its first auction sale in Switzerland, Christie's was fortunate enough to put under the hammer an intriguing jewelry collection of the sort that comes up for sale only once every ten or twenty years. The catalog listed forty-six lots, including a fabulous three-strand black pearl necklace with matching earrings and ring, two rings set with enormous diamonds of 32 and 27 carats, a brooch with a central emerald weighing over 37 carats, earrings of sapphires encircled by diamonds, and dozens of more personal jewels such as pendants, bracelets and St. Christopher medallions.¹

Lot 16 was a gold travel nécessaire, the whole piece made throughout by Van Cleef & Arpels, containing all the elegant accessories required by a lady on her travels at the time: two photograph frames, a traveling clock, a pillbox, a lipstick, a memo holder engraved with the words "Lucky 13," a tortoiseshell comb and case, a cigarette box, and a key ring fringed with gold and rubies. All these items came from the collection of one of the most stylish women of her time: Nina Dyer, successively Baroness Thyssen and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan.

Opposite

Nina Dyer in the early 1960s, in a photograph taken near her chalet in Switzerland.

She was rich, twice divorced, and had a fabulous jewelry collection, but she was still alone.

Page 315

Nina Dyer with her first husband, Baron Thyssen, at a Paris soirée.

Her story was like a fairytale, but it was one in which not all the fairies were good ones. It began one day in Paris in 1951, when a beautiful and mysterious young woman appeared as a model at a fashion show. Her enigmatic features and distant smile had something of the Mona Lisa about them. Her life contained strange and unexplained gaps. No one knew exactly where she came from. Her official biography could be summed up in one sentence: "She is an English model." Very soon, the myth began to grow. Her father, Stanley Dyer, had been a British tea planter in Ceylon, it was said, while her mother (who remained nameless) was Indian. Other rumors had it that her parents had never married, that she had been born in London after her father had an affair there. Still today her origins remained shrouded in secrecy, lending an added mystique to the fascination of this very private woman.

Photographs of Nina Dyer are sufficient to explain her hold over everyone, including the great couturiers, who wanted her to model for them. It was Pierre Balmain who "discovered" her. She had only just arrived in Paris from London. Memories of World War II were beginning to fade in 1950s' Paris, and this sleek and slightly exotic young woman caused a sensation in the capital of elegance. Unlike so many other models who seemed frozen in stiffly stereotypical poses, she exuded a kind of nonchalance. Her expression, her look, her reticence when she talked—all this was both intriguing and seductive. One man in particular noticed her. He was a handsome and extremely generous millionaire—but, as it happened, he was also married. Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen Bornemisza (1921–2002) was heir to an industrial empire founded a century earlier in the steelworks of the Ruhr. Educated in Switzerland, he had inherited most of the family fortune on his father's death in 1947. He remodeled the business which had been compromised by the war and its associations with the Third Reich. In 1946, he married a classically charming princess named Theresa zur Lippe-Weissenfeld (1925–2008).

Nina was already a client of Van Cleef & Arpels when she met the Baron in 1953. Her first purchase was a surprising one: two wedding rings, bought in August 1951 and evidently never used. During the course of 1952, she bought a number of accessories of great elegance, such as two hair clips, a slide, and a platinum ring set with diamonds. Nina smoked, like many women at this time, but she always did so in style, buying her cigarette cases and holders from Van Cleef & Arpels. Contrary to what we might imagine today, cigarette holders were not intended to reduce the toxicity of the tobacco smoke, since the dangers of nicotine had not yet been discovered. Their purpose was simply to prevent the smoker's fingers from becoming stained with nicotine. Nina Dyer's were in gold, sometimes set with precious stones. In a sophisticated detail, one of them, probably intended for gala evenings, was long, while the other, for everyday use, was short. (see page 319)



THE EUGÉNIE BLUE DIAMOND

It is one of those fascinating stones to which—flying in the face of all the evidence—legendary and apocryphal adventures cling like a limpet. Even the name is misleading. With its heart shape, its 30.82 carats, and its rich blue color, it is one of the most entrancing diamonds in the world. But it never belonged to the Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoleon III. Its first official appearance in the world of jewelry goes back to the year 1911. It was cut in Paris by the house of Eknayan, which appears to indicate that it might have come from South Africa and not—like most other large blue diamonds—from India. Shortly before World War I, it was bought from Cartier by Mme. Unzue, one of the wealthiest women in Argentina. At this time, it formed the centerpiece to a corsage ornament.

In the early 1950s, Van Cleef & Arpels bought it from the family to whom it then belonged. On June 16, 1953, the celebrated ballet dancer Zizi Jeanmaire wore it to a ball held in aid of cancer research in the Orangerie at Versailles. Five months later, it glittered at the throat of Nina Dyer, but she did not keep it after her first divorce.

The blue heart diamond returned to Van Cleef & Arpels in the early 1960s.

Sold in the United States, it was mounted on a ring and became the property of the richest of the American cereal heiresses, Marjorie Merriweather Post (1887-1973). A passionate collector, this multimillionairess was fascinated by imperial Russia and by French eighteenth-century furniture, and had assembled a collection of fabulous jewels. These included the famous Empress Marie-Louise tiara, in which Van Cleef & Arpels had replaced the original emeralds with turquoises. In the late 1940s, her third husband, Joseph Davis, was appointed American ambassador to Moscow. It was during his tenure that she bought some of the finest pieces in her collection, which she brought back with her to the United States and kept at her Hillwood estate near Washington, now one of the world's loveliest museums. Overlooking the ocean at Palm Beach, Florida, she built the residence called "Mar-A-Lago" that is still considered the most sumptuous mansion in this millionaires' playground. On her death, Mrs. Merriweather Post bequeathed the blue diamond and the Marie-Louise tiara, to the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, where they may still be seen.



Above
Original drawing of the necklace
created by Van Cleef & Arpels
for Nina Dyer in order to mount

the heart-shaped blue
diamond weighing 30.83 carats.
The triangular blue diamond
weighs 3.81 carats and the pink

diamond 2.05 carats.
The necklace was bought
by Baron Inyssen on
November 9, 1953.



(continued from page 314) Very soon, the news of Baron Thyssen's *coup de foudre* for Nina Dyer was doing the rounds of Paris. Heini—as his friends called him—instituted divorce proceedings and showered Nina with gifts. He adored Nina and gave her a black pearl necklace, two black panthers, a coat of wild chinchilla, a West Indian island, and two sports convertibles. Attentive to detail as ever, on October 12, 1953, Nina took the ignition keys to Van Cleef & Arpels to have them mounted in gold and encrusted with rubies and sapphires.

When the Baron obtained his divorce the couple were married at last, on June 23, 1954. Photographs taken at a gala dinner in Paris show the young Baroness wearing a fabulous gem as a pendant. This was a famous jewel, a blue diamond weighing 30.83 carats and cut in a heart shape, surrounded by diamonds and mounted by Van Cleef & Arpels as the culmination of a motif composed of a pink diamond of 2.05 carats and a second blue diamond, also heart-shaped, of 3.81 carats. In her book on Van Cleef & Arpels, Sylvie Raulet mentions that this jewel “was sold to a German baron” for 35 million francs at the time.² The “German baron,” who was of course Thyssen, did not stop there. Also from Van Cleef & Arpels he bought a 56.03-carat sapphire, and a ruby to be mounted on the clasp of one his wife's white pearl necklaces.

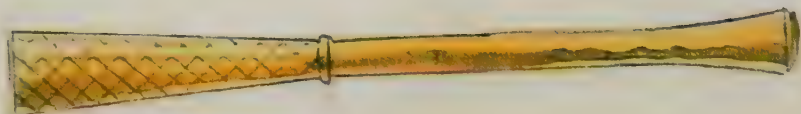
Despite these extravagant gifts, the marriage lasted barely two years. In a Paris cabaret one night, Thyssen came to blows with a young French actor who was making eyes at his wife. The divorce was pronounced in July 1956. As her settlement, Nina received the chateau of Garches and a sum estimated in press reports at around \$3 million. She kept most of her jewels, with the exception of the blue diamond, which remained the property of her ex-husband and would return to Van Cleef & Arpels within a few years.

Nina did not remain alone for long. In 1957 she married again, this time in a ceremony that was virtually public. Her second husband belonged to one of the richest and most celebrated dynasties in the world, that of the Aga Khans. If her first wedding could hardly have been more discreet (to the point where even today we cannot be sure whether it was celebrated in Ceylon or Paris), the second was of positively regal splendor. The family into which she now married was legendary throughout the world, known for its ancient roots, its magnificence, and its spiritual significance, which for some approached the status of divinity.

Prince Sadruddin was twenty-four years old when he married Nina on August 27, 1957. The ceremony took place at eleven o'clock in the little *mairie* of

Opposite

Nina Dyer wearing the blue diamond.



Top
The long cigarette holder
in plaited gold bought by
Nina Dyer in June 1953.

Above
The two keys in plaited gold,
one set with a ruby and the
other with a sapphire, bought
by Nina Dyer in October 1953.

Opposite
Nina Dyer at the races with
her second husband
Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan



Collonges-Bellerive outside Geneva. Six weeks earlier his father had died, leaving behind him a considerable fortune and a slightly troubled succession. Instead of his son Ali, he had appointed his grandson Karim, who was only just twenty-one, as his successor. Everyone respected the decision, but it gave rise to tensions within the family.

Only the groom's mother, Princess Andrée, his brother Prince Ali, and his nephew were present at the wedding. Wearing a champagne-grey Dior gown, Nina waved to the crowd of well-wishers, with local people mixing with crowds of photographers from all over the world who had come to cover the event. They included a young British photographer, Anthony Armstrong Jones, who a few years later would himself become famous by marrying the queen's sister, Princess Margaret.

The weekly magazine *Point de vue* followed the ceremony and elicited a few confidences from the bride: "I met Sadruddin a year ago," she explained, "immediately after my divorce from Baron Thyssen. It was at the reception given by Prince Ali for the Paris Grand Prix every year. I fell in love with him at first sight. We saw each other often, but we didn't make any plans. Then he went back to the United States, to continue his studies, while I stayed in Europe. When he returned he asked me to marry him, and I didn't have to think long before saying yes."⁴ The article went on to offer a few clues as to the new princess's mysterious origins: "Her teenage years were a difficult time. She was born in London, but at the age of eighteen months was taken to Ceylon, where her father was a tea-planter. She lost her father in 1945. Her mother, who married again, was killed in a car accident in 1954."⁵ All the features of a classic fairytale were there: a beautiful young woman, orphaned and disappointed in love, had at last found her Prince Charming and married into an oriental family of staggering wealth.

After the civil ceremony, the couple submitted to a second, religious ceremony. In order to marry Sadruddin, Nina had agreed to convert to Islam, taking the name Shirin, meaning "sweetness." On her finger there sparkled an enormous 32-carat emerald-cut diamond, and among the prince's other gifts to her was a string of black pearls, to add to the two that she already possessed. Perhaps the finest of all of them, this necklace came from the collection of the Yusupov princes, the wealthiest of all the aristocratic families of imperial Russia. Before them, the pearls had belonged to Catherine the Great. In March 1959, Prince Sadruddin completed his wife's parure with the purchase from Van Cleef & Arpels, for over

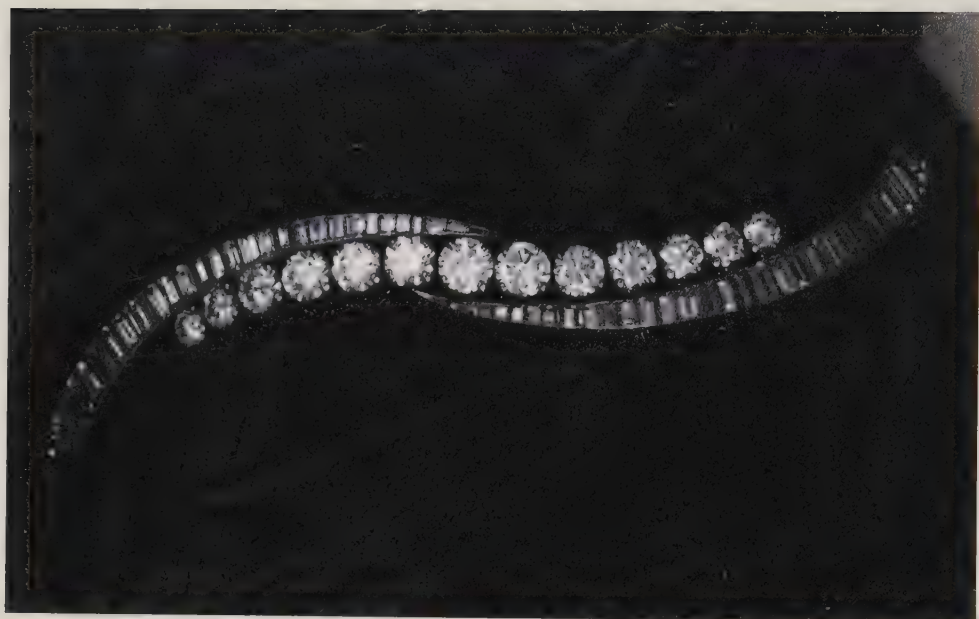
Opposite

The wedding of Sadruddin Aga Khan and Nina Dyer, 1957. Behind the

bride and groom and bridesmaid Princess Yasmin Khan are, from left to right, the groom's mother Princess

Andrée (hidden), his brother Prince Ali Khan (obscured), and his nephews Prince Aryn and Prince Karim





Above
Top, a large Barrette clip in
diamonds ordered in June 1953
Above left, the Medallions
necklace in emeralds.

diamonds, and sapphires
bought by Nona Dyer in 1963
Above right, a 56 carat
sapphire mounted on a ring
in 1954

CHRISTIE'S de LONDRES

mettra en vente à Genève, jeudi 1^{er} mai

MAGNIFIQUES BIJOUX

Propriété de S. M. LA REINE MARIE-JOSÉ d'Italie,
feu NINA DYER et autres.



En haut, magnifique broche de Cartier à Paris avec émeraude (37,41 carats) et diamants. Au-dessous, paire de clips avec de très beaux saphirs et diamants.

Collier à trois rangs de perles noires. Paire de clips en perles noires et diamants par Cartier à Paris.

En haut, bague avec diamants (27,22 carats). Au-dessous, clips en émeraudes et diamants.

En vente également un diamant taille émeraude (32,07 carats).

La vente aura lieu à l'hôtel Richemond à GENÈVE à 19 h.

Exposition les deux jours précédents « entrée seulement sur laissez-passer ».

Catalogues chez le représentant de Christie's à Paris :
Princesse Jeanne-Marie de Broglie, 59, rue Bonaparte, PARIS-VI^e. Tél. 633.98.43

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Above

Advertisement for the sale of Nina Dyer's jewelry held by Christie's Geneva on May 1, 1969, the first sale by

the famous British auction house to take place in Switzerland

four million francs, of a ring set with two fabulous black pearls surrounded by diamonds. To these extravagant wedding gifts he then added a second Caribbean island, next door to the one she already owned. In her honor he named it *Ti Amo* (Italian for “I love you”).

Nina’s second marriage was to prove no happier than her first, and in 1960 the couple separated. Their divorce was pronounced two years later. Sadruddin went on to find happiness with his second wife, Catherine Sursock; they had no children, but together they set up the Bellerive Foundation for the protection of nature and the environment. Meanwhile Nina returned to a life of solitude, her only home being the chateau at Garches, where she lived surrounded by her pets and a few loyal servants. In May 1963 she returned to Van Cleef & Arpels to buy her last beautiful jewel, a two-strand Médallions necklace set with cabochon emeralds encircled by diamonds and sapphires.

Two years later, one morning in July 1965, her butler found her dead in her bedroom. She had taken a massive overdose of sleeping pills. She was buried in the cemetery at Garches. Once again, her private life became the subject of wild rumors: her last love had been a woman; another failed love affair had driven her to suicide; she had been driven to despair by infertility. Even the details of her estate are hedged around by gray areas. She bequeathed her worldly goods to animal charities, but heirs then appeared to contest the will. Whatever the case, a number of fabulous jewels bought from Van Cleef & Arpels were missing from the sale held in Geneva in 1969. No one knows what happened to them. A copy of the catalog kept by a private collector lists all the buyers, with the name of Van Cleef appearing several times,⁶ notably for lots 104 and 106. The first was a ring set with a 16.38-carat emerald; the second the magnificent 37.41-carat emerald that had featured in the advertisements for the sale. This gem was to embark on a new story that cannot yet be told.

Opposite

Nina Dyer and Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan on holiday in the West Indies. This marriage, like her first, was to end in divorce



THE GILDED LEGEND OF THE AGA KHANS

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan (1933–2003) was the second son of His Highness the Aga Khan III (1877–1957), Imam of the Nizari Ismaili community. This branch of Islam traces its origins back to Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, in around the eighth century. Over its thousand years of history, its followers have known very mixed fortunes. In the late tenth century they experienced a golden age in Egypt, where they contributed to the founding of the city of Cairo and the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate. Their reign came to an end in the late twelfth century, when Saladin's armies took over the country.

The Ismaili Muslims and their imams withdrew to Iran, where they established a Nizari Ismaili state around the mountain fortress of Alamut, described by Marco Polo in his *Travels*. Persecuted and forced virtually underground, the movement survived in the shadows. One of its most famous subgroups was the Assassins, whose members displayed unconditional loyalty to their spiritual leader, known as the "Old Man of the Mountain." Alamut was destroyed in 1256 by the Mongol

armies who surged into Persia, and the Ismaili community retreated further and further into obscurity.

They emerged from the shadows in 1817, when Fath Ali Shah Qajar, Shah of Persia, appointed the forty-sixth Imam as governor of the province of Kerman and "Aga Khan," a title derived from two words in Persian and Turkish, *aga* meaning chief, and *khan* meaning sovereign. This alliance with the Qajar dynasty was to prove short-lived. Twenty years later, following an insult to one of his daughters, the first Aga Khan rebelled. Vanquished by the shah's armies, he went into exile in Afghanistan, before moving on to Bombay in India, which was home to a large Ismaili community.

He died there in 1881, having laid the foundations for the fabulous wealth of his family by introducing a voluntary tax on the faithful, representing a percentage of their annual income and payable to the Imam. His son, Aga Khan II (1831–1885), succeeded him for a brief reign of four years. When his grandson became the Aga Khan III in 1885 he was only eight years old. Yet it was he who

Opposite

The Aga Khan III, father of Prince Sadruddin, when

he became Imam of the Nizari Ismaili community in 1885, at the age of eight.





Above
The second wife of the Aga Khan III, Teresa Magliano, with her son, Prince Ali Khan.



and the third wedding of the Aga Khan III to Andrée Carron, mother of Prince Sadruddin

Opposite
The Aga Khan III with his fourth wife, Begum Yvette.

would go on to confer on the dynasty its legendary status.

All the hopes of the Nizari Ismaili community rested on the shoulders of this young boy. His mother, a Qajar princess, was wise enough to realize that although her son was the Imam to millions of the faithful, he stood no chance of surviving in a world of perpetual change unless he became familiar with its ways. Not without misgivings, she entrusted part of his education to European tutors. The young prince was allowed to learn English and certain standard subjects, but his mother refused to countenance his being examined by a Western doctor. Very shortsighted, he had to wait until he was eighteen before he was finally able to wear glasses. As he put them on for the first time, he exclaimed: "I feel I'm discovering the world."

Discovering the world was precisely his dream. He had the means at his

disposal, since—thanks to his mother's shrewd management—his fortune was estimated at £20 million. His income was larger than that of Queen Victoria, who was one of his idols, and he dreamed of spending a few weeks on the Riviera, where Victoria wintered every year. His mother agreed, on one condition: that he should marry a distant cousin, Shazada. The marriage appears to have been unconsummated and was a disaster, but for the young Aga Khan III it opened the way for his departure for Marseille in February 1897. This first journey to Europe made such a profound impression upon him that eventually he moved there permanently. In Europe he was to make three more marriages, firstly to an Italian dancer, Teresa Magliano (1888-1926), and then to two beautiful French women, Andrée Carron (1898-1976) and Yvette Labrousse (1906-2000). Sadruddin was his second son, born from his third marriage to Andrée Carron.



*Jewelry created by Van Cleef & Arpels
for Princess Salimah Aga Khan, sold at Christie's Geneva
on November 13, 1995*



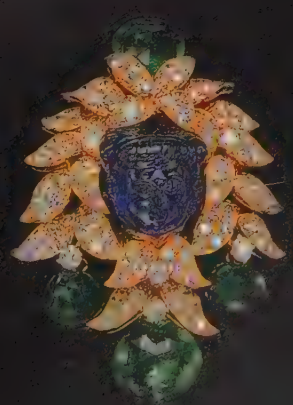
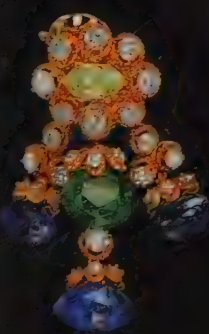
Above

The necklace is set with 100 diamonds and 10 emeralds. The earrings are set with 100 diamonds and 2 emeralds. The set is made of 18K gold.

Opposite

The necklace is set with 100 diamonds and 10 emeralds. The earrings are set with 100 diamonds and 2 emeralds. The set is made of 18K gold.

The necklace is set with 100 diamonds and 10 emeralds. The earrings are set with 100 diamonds and 2 emeralds. The set is made of 18K gold.





Above

Necklace of ribbed emeralds
and circular cut ruby boules.

created in October 1973
The earrings were made in
December of the same year



Opposite

Velázquez necklace in cabochon rubies and brilliant-cut

diamonds, bought by the Aga Khan for his wife in April 1971.





*Hotel Ritz
Place Vendôme
Paris*

Le 17 Septembre, 1949

Cher Monsieur Louis;

“Poor Little Rich Girl”

BARBARA HUTTON

Venice, Palazzo Labia,
September 3, 1951

The two priests looked a little out of place at this gala evening where everything, from the setting (a Venetian palazzo decorated with frescoes by Tiepolo) to the guests (a who's who of high society, Hollywood royalty, and millionaires) was the height of flamboyant extravagance. Only the white of their bands and powdered wigs relieved the somber black of their ecclesiastical robes. For nearly an hour, a procession of gondolas had been drawing up to the jetty of the Palazzo Labia, where they disgorged the select few who were fortunate enough to have received invitations to the “Ball of the Century.” And every time more guests arrived, the crowds lining the Grand Canal and the Cannaregio Canal, at the intersection of which the palazzo stands, burst into delighted applause.

The famous Paris couturier Jacques Fath had come as Louis XIV, a dazzling, bewigged Sun King. So vertiginous and precariously balanced was his ostrich-feather headdress that only his stick prevented him from toppling over as he edged forward. His costume was so tight that he had had to be sewn into it, and he had been obliged to make the journey from his hotel standing up in his gondola, to the great amazement of the assembled onlookers. The most snobbish of the guests,

Opposite

Barbara Hutton on the Venice Lido. Married seven times, she was one of Van Cleef & Arpels' best clients

Above

Letterhead of a note from Barbara Hutton to Louis Arpels

peevish that a couturier should have been invited, greeted his dramatic appearance with the muttered observation that he might have rather “over-egged the pudding.” Arturo Lopez-Willshaw, the Chilean millionaire, had come with his wife and his companion, Baron Alexis de Redé, all three dressed as an eighteenth-century Chinese embassy to Venice. The results were spectacular. Patricia Lopez-Willshaw wore an oriental mask, multiple rows of pearls, Chinese robes, and immensely long fingernail guards. Her husband was decked out in gold, with long tapering mustaches and a pointed hat. The Baron de Redé, meanwhile, looked less like a mandarin and more like a boyar at the court of Ivan the Terrible.

The most poetic vision was Lady Diana Cooper. The wife of the former British ambassador in Paris, daughter of the Duchess of Rutland and idol of the “bright young things” of 1920s’ London, came as Cleopatra. This was not an Egyptian queen, however, but a Cleopatra *à la* Tiepolo. Blonde ringlets tumbled to her shoulders, while her panniered gown, modeled on the costume in the frescoes of the Palazzo Labia, was festooned with gems, ribbons, and pearls. At her side, the Baron de Cabrol was her Mark Antony. So flamboyant were many of these creations that Gene Tierney and Orson Welles, both regulars on the magazine covers of the day, appeared quite modest in comparison. Even the Aga Khan, who loathed costume balls, had been persuaded to don a domino costume in order to attend. And it was indeed an occasion like no other.

That night, Charles de Beistegui, or “Don Carlos” as he was known in Venice, had decided to give an Oriental Ball. A French aesthete, collector and patron of the arts, from a family that had grown rich from the silver mines of Mexico, he had inherited a colossal fortune. Don Carlos had always loved Venice, and he longed to re-create some of the luster and glamour of La Serenissima before the war. After spending a number of years and a small fortune on the restoration of the Palazzo Labia, he had chosen Monday September 3, as the day on which to create an occasion of a scale and a splendor that had not been seen for decades.

For months, the city and the whole of European society had watched the preparations for this evening with fascination. Shrugging off the wrath of the international press, Don Carlos had barred entry to journalists. Even Elsa Maxwell, the most prominent gossip columnist of the period, was not invited. The result was unexpected. By condemning such flagrant, ostentatious opulence in this age of austerity, the newspapers imagined they were taking their revenge. But they were wrong. Even the Communist mayor of Venice was seduced. Conscious of the impact

Opposite

Two Indian-style bangles set with diamonds and rubies in yellow gold that belonged to Barbara Hutton. They doubtless inspired

the diamond bracelets in the same style that she commissioned from Van Cleef & Arpels.

Following pages

The sumptuous Bal Oriental given by Charles de Beistegui in his Venetian palazzo on September 3, 1961, at which Barbara Hutton was a guest of honor







that the ball would have on the city's tourist image all over the world, he placed the city's police and fire brigade at de Beistegui's disposal.

Invitations went out to 750 favored guests. An epidemic of illness and bereavements broke out among those who could not bear the humiliation of being "overlooked," as everyone made up their excuses for not being there. "The master of the house welcomed his guests on the steps of the grand staircase dressed as the Procurator of the Venetian Republic, wearing a scarlet robe and raised buskins that enabled him to see and be seen by his guests," recounted one of them, Prince Jean-Louis de Faucigny-Lucinge. "On his head he wore an immense white wig in the style of the time. [...] Buffets had been laid out everywhere, even in the piazza behind the palazzo, where a second band played; thus festivities were laid on for the local people at the same time, and the guests mingled with them. At around three o'clock there was a firework display, and in the early morning people formed circles with no distinction of either age or sex and danced throughout the palazzo and the piazza until it was time for morning coffee."⁷

The two priests in the courtyard, whose costumes evoked Casanova's early years in Venice, spent the evening together. They danced a great deal, and very soon their fellow guests recognized them, while the crowd of curious onlookers was kept guessing. One of them was a man, the celebrated English photographer Cecil Beaton. The other, however, was a woman, who, for nearly thirty years, had been one of the most famous women in the world. She was American, and her name was Barbara Hutton. A regular guest at all the best parties in London, Paris, New York, and Hollywood, she was also a millionairess many times over. That night, she opted for total simplicity: no jewels, no pearls, no diamonds. Yet she could boast—more than any other woman at the time bar the Maharani of Baroda—a jewelry collection that was worth an incalculable fortune.

Her relationship with Van Cleef & Arpels was long and faithful—in marked contrast to her relationships with her husbands, of whom she had seven. Her first special commission, of April 25, 1938, concerned a diamond, ruby, and emerald ring, and her purchases continued into the early 1970s. Every time she married again, she appeared in the books under her new married name. Thus in the early 1930s she made a few purchases in the name of her first husband, Prince Alexis Mdivani. But the special order of April 25, 1938 was given by Countess Haugwitz von Reventlow, as she was now known after her second marriage, during which she had her only child, a son called Lance. Just after World War II, it was Mrs. Cary Grant

Opposite

The Ludo bracelet in platinum and diamonds bought by Barbara Hutton at Van Cleef

& Arpels in 1935. It is now in the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection.



**Above**

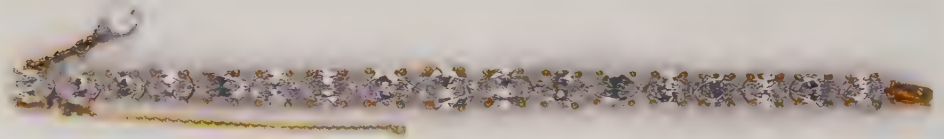
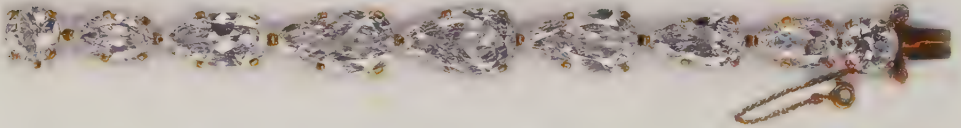
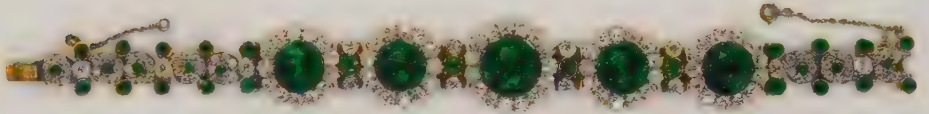
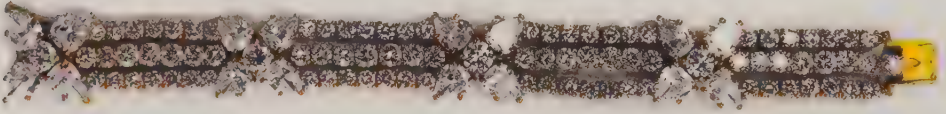
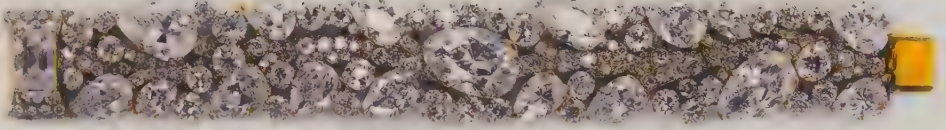
Some of Barbara Hutton's innumerable rings. The marquise-cut diamond in the center weighs

44.58 carats and was mounted for her by Van Cleef & Arpels in November 1964. The diamond on the right is undoubtedly the Pasha Diamond.

Opposite

Barbara Hutton with her third husband, the actor Cary Grant.





Above
Some of Barbara Hutton's
legendary bracelets

who bought a pair of gold and sapphire earrings, as by then she had married the world-famous star of *Arsenic and Old Lace*. He was also the only one of her husbands not to make any claims on her fortune when they divorced. In 1955, she appears as Princess Troubetzkoy. Then a letter to Louis Arpels in 1957 is signed by the Baroness von Cramm. And by the 1960s she was the Princess de Champassak. It was under this name that she made the largest number of purchases, a total of forty-seven in 1968 and 1969. The only name under which she does not appear in the archives is that of her fifth husband, the Dominican playboy Porfirio Rubirosa—a fact that may have something to do with the short-lived nature of their marriage, which lasted a mere fifty-three days.

But behind the lists of gemstones enumerated in the order books and correspondence, often written on the blue headed notepaper of the Paris Ritz, where she always stayed, lay a very different figure—a vulnerable woman who suffered many blows at the hands of fate, but who never lost her capacity for wonder or her youthful romanticism. Her quest for love lasted nearly forty years, and during all that time her jeweler was the confidant of her hopes and disappointments.

Her mother committed suicide when Barbara was only six years old. In 1917, she inherited \$28 million from her grandfather, the founder of the Woolworth five-and-dime stores. Shrewdly invested by her father, Franklin Laws Hutton, this inheritance not only escaped the economic crash of 1929, but within twelve years had doubled in value. In 1933, when she reached the age of twenty-one, Barbara found herself at the head of a fortune of over \$50 million, which made her one of the richest women in the world. She was also one of the most generous. In Tangier, where she spent every summer in her palace at Sidi Hosni, she set up a soup kitchen to distribute a thousand free meals every day to the needy. Also in Tangier, she paid for poor children to attend the American School, and financed the building of a dormitory for them. At the same time she threw lavish parties for her exceedingly wealthy friends, to which she also invited her far less well-off Moroccan neighbors. In France, the Palace of Versailles owed her so much that she was decorated with the Légion d'Honneur in recognition of her outstanding patronage. And she gave her sumptuous London residence to the American government, so that her country would have an embassy worthy of it.

In December every year she would go to Van Cleef & Arpels to choose Christmas presents for her close friends. The list for 1945 numbers twenty-three jewels and precious objects, the most expensive item being a pair of ruby cufflinks for one of her lawyers. For a friend she chose a pair of ballerina earrings in gold, sapphires, and diamonds. And for a Hollywood actor who was one of the best friends of Cary Grant (from whom she had just got divorced), she made the slightly surprising choice of a Mouse clip in gold and moonstones.



Above
The diamond tiara commissioned from Van Cleef & Arpels by Barbara Hutton in

November 1967. The central pear-shaped diamond weighs 54.12 carats.

Opposite
Barbara Hutton in Paris in the 1950s, accompanied by the Baron de Redé

The life of the richest woman in the world was punctuated by precious stones. She was sixteen when her father gave her her first ruby, a \$50,000 ring, in 1929. Four years later, as a gift for her first marriage to Alexis Mdivani, she received a magnificent pearl necklace that was said to have belonged to Marie-Antoinette. In the 1930s she indulged in her first extravagant purchase on her own account, spending a million dollars on the emeralds of Grand Duchess Vladimir of Russia. In 1966 she had them reset by Van Cleef & Arpels, before selling them to the Maison a year later.

It was in that same year, 1967, that she made her most important purchase, a collarette tiara set entirely with diamonds, with a central pear-shaped diamond weighing 54.12 carats. This stone alone represented half the value of the jewel, which at the time sold for several million francs. A second pear-shaped diamond set just below the first weighed 21.49 carats, while two more flanking it together weighed 21.62 carats. The piece was also set with 127 brilliant-cut diamonds, 36 navette-cut diamonds and a further 10 pear-shaped diamonds, making a total weight of 187 carats.

It is to Barbara Hutton and this tiara that Van Cleef & Arpels owes one of its best stories. One day in May 1968, Pierre Arpels had an appointment with her in her suite (number 43) at the Ritz, with windows overlooking place Vendôme.









She had asked him to visit her to discuss the details of a new commission. He was greeted by her faithful butler: “Madame is a little unwell. She will receive you in her bedroom.” Ushered into the room, Pierre Arpels could hardly believe the scene that greeted him. Barbara Hutton was stretched out on her bed, her head comfortably cushioned on lace-trimmed pillows, her face surrounded by a halo of enormous diamonds. For his amusement, she had decided to wear the tiara (which he had delivered to her a few months earlier) in bed.

The special commission they discussed that day concerned two of the loveliest pieces ever made for her. She was fascinated by Asia, China, Japan, and India. In May 1968, while Paris was being rocked by the revolutionary fervor to which the city is so susceptible, she had decided to commission a pair of Indian bangles in solid gold, pavé-set throughout with large pear-shaped diamonds, with a matching pair of earrings. These pieces were emblematic of the oriental influence that could be seen in an increasing number of the Maison’s creations at this time. The straight lines, white gold, classic color combinations of diamonds and rubies, diamonds and sapphires, and diamonds and emeralds, in vogue between 1930 and 1950, now belonged to the past. Van Cleef & Arpels was embarking on a process of artistic evolution that was to culminate in the 1970s with its long strings of precious stones of “flower power” inspiration.

This set was also to be Barbara Hutton’s last great extravagance in jewelry. Four years later, on July 22, 1972, the death of her only child Lance Rventlow in an air crash at the age of thirty-six dealt her a blow from which she never recovered. It was this, far more than her addictions to prescription drugs and alcohol, that sent her spiraling into a decline that was to prove fatal. Contrary to the rumors that circulated for so long, she was not ruined. Some of her properties, such as her Mexican residence and her Paris apartment, had been sold by her lawyer without her knowledge, but she still owned the Sidi Hosni Palace in Tangier. And, as attested by some of the guests who stayed there, it was crammed with rare furniture and paintings. Van Cleef & Arpels had also contributed to the decoration of this residence, and all of its thirty bedrooms boasted identical solid-gold clocks made by the Maison.

Yet it was at the luxury Hotel Wilshire in Los Angeles that she spent her final years. The only people who mattered to her by this stage were a few close friends such as Cary Grant and Gottfried von Cramm, who wrote to her, sent her flowers, and occasionally came to see her. Her jewelry collection remained intact,

Previous pages, left

Barbara Hutton’s natural pearl necklace is said to have belonged to Marie-Antoinette. Hutton had the two clasps altered by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1968.

Previous pages, right

In the late 1960s, Van Cleef & Arpels proposed a new setting for Barbara Hutton’s emerald and diamond necklace

Opposite

Barbara Hutton in the late 1960s with her seventh husband, the Prince of Champassak



Above and opposite
The Indian bangles and ear pendants created by Van Cleef & Arpels for Barbara Hutton in 1968



and every day she would spend hours in front of the mirror, trying on her finery. Occasionally she would wear pieces to go out to dinner at an expensive restaurant, decked out in great opulence.

Barbara Hutton died on May 11, 1979, aged sixty-seven. One of the close friends who were with her to the end immediately gathered up the many jewels that lay scattered around her suite, in order to put them in the bank. All that was left in her bank accounts was \$4,000, but the newspapers talked of tens of millions of dollars that had mysteriously disappeared. Curiously her will was put through probate in Bermuda, a tax haven where she had never lived.

The anonymous sales of furniture, paintings, and of course jewelry that succeeded each other in the years after her death offer an indication of the scope and scale of the treasures that remained in her possession. According to C. David Heymann, one of her biographers, her rubies were sold discreetly in the early 1980s for just under \$800,000. At a New York sale, the winning bid for a bureau that had belonged to Mme. de Pompadour was \$228,000. Five gold snuffboxes were sold in London for \$350,000.⁶ Marie-Antoinette's pearl necklace has come up for sale twice, firstly at Sotheby's Geneva in 1992, when it sold for \$580,000, and again at Christie's Geneva in 1999, when bidding reached \$1.47 million. The destiny of the fabulous diamond tiara created by Van Cleef & Arpels was both more romantic and more surprising: Barbara Hutton is said to have given it to her last husband at the time of their divorce.

Opposite

The Ballerina brooch bought
at Van Cleef & Arpels by

Barbara Hutton in 1944.
It is now in the Van Cleef
& Arpels Collection





Contessa de Brilla
de Camargo.

Cuba's Madame de Pompadour

*MARIA LUISA GÓMEZ MENA,
COUNTESS OF REVILLA DE CAMARGO*

**Paris, early
twentieth century**

The scene took place at Maxim's, a few years before World War I. A discreetly elegant couple had just sat down at a table a little apart from the rest. The man was unmistakably a dashing hidalgo of a certain age. The woman was much younger and very beautiful, it appeared, behind the veil that covered her face. Eugène Cornuché, the patron, noticed her straight away. She was not like the rather frivolous creatures normally to be seen in his restaurant. Small, dark, and slender as a reed, she had none of the swagger or pertness of the courtesans who were Maxim's customary clientele. Her appearance was immaculate, and almost too sober for evening dress. Her jewels, emeralds, and diamonds, were impressive, but were not worn in the ostentatious manner generally seen among the ladies of easy virtue in this chic nightspot.

A few yards away sat another couple to whom all eyes were drawn. She too was dark-haired, and poured into a corset that emphasized her perfect figure. Glittering at her throat were two strands of diamonds, highlighted by long pearl sautoirs. The expression in her dark eyes was direct and a little provocative. La Belle Otero liked to exercise her power not only over the man she was with

Opposite

The Countess of Revilla de Camargo at the ball given by Carlos de Beistegui.

Her emerald and diamond necklace and earrings are by Van Cleef & Arpels

at the time but also over the rest of the room. Maxim's was her favorite hunting ground, and she was one of its legends. Eugène Cornuché had even asked her permission to create a dish in her name, the famous "*selle d'agneau Belle Otero*." Her gentleman companion was no mere nobody either. Far from being put out by the flirtatious glances she bestowed upon every man in the room, he appeared to find them amusing. It was certainly a change from the stuffy protocol of balls at the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. He wasn't at all bothered if everyone knew that he was the official escort of this beauty who came with a price tag. He was a Russian grand duke, cousin of Tsar Nicholas II, and fabulously wealthy. In Paris, being a lover of La Belle Otero was a mark of style. In Russia, it was a claim to fame.

Half a century later, the veiled lady from Maxim's was to relate this story to her hairdresser, Alexandre de Paris. She had been in Paris on her honeymoon, Maxim remembered: "Her father's fortune, made from sugar in Cuba, brought with it a life of luxury and royal friendships. When she arrived in Europe she was very young, and people ventured to remark that she was as beautiful as La Belle Otero. At a time when society ladies did not go out, she insisted that her husband must take her to Maxim's, though with her face veiled. She ended the story: 'La Belle Otero was dining with a Grand Duke. I dined and left. I was the more beautiful.'"⁹

Maria Luisa Gómez Mena, Countess of Revilla de Camargo, is probably one of the most forgotten clients of Van Cleef & Arpels, and yet she was one of the most flamboyant. In her native Cuba, her name, emblematic of the capitalist wealth of the pre-Castro era, is only now beginning to be known again. The guides in the National Museum of Decorative Arts in Havana now and then point out rather diffidently that the building was her private palace until it was nationalized in the early 1960s. A handful of photographs of sophisticated parties, including notably the ball in 1948 at which guests included Leopold III, former King of the Belgians, his son Baudouin, his second wife Princess Lilian, and the Count and Countess of Barcelona, have been exhumed from the museum archives and hung on a wall. Amusingly, a drawing of a magnificent Van Cleef & Arpels emerald and diamond necklace that belonged to the countess is attributed to a different jeweler.¹⁰

Amid its exotic gardens and palm trees, the mansion is like a tropical Petit Trianon. The two-storey entrance hall is embellished with colored marbles, with Corinthian columns supporting the first-floor landing and its wrought-iron balustrade. At the foot of the staircase, torchères are held aloft by a pair of carved and gilded Moorish figures. Flanking the stairs are two magnificent Louis XVI commodes, beneath landscapes by Hubert Robert. The opulent decorations in the dining room recall the Salon de la Paix and the Salon de la Guerre at Versailles,



Above
The entrance hall of the
Countess de Camargo's

residence in Havana, a French-
style palace loosely inspired by
the Petit Trianon at Versailles.

while the reception rooms would not have been out of place in the private apartments of Mme. de Pompadour. The finest piece of furniture in the collection, a secretaire stamped by Riesener and made for Marie-Antoinette, stands in the countess's former bedroom.

Built in the French style in the early 1920s for José Gómez Mena, brother of the Countess of Revilla de Camargo and one of the richest sugar planters on the island, the house remains one of Cuba's loveliest buildings. It was still relatively new when José Gómez Mena decided to pass it on to his sister, and it was she who decided to turn it into a haven of French eighteenth-century culture.

Born in 1880, Maria Luisa Gómez Mena was twenty-two when she married a man who was seventeen years her senior, Agapito de la Cagiga y Aparicio, a Spaniard born in Santander in 1863. Very little is known about him, apart from the fact that his father's family came from Revilla de Camargo, a village a few miles outside Santander. Described as a businessman and industrialist, he was made Count of Revilla de Camargo by King Alfonso XIII in 1927. He died in 1938. The couple had no children.

The countess placed her first orders with Van Cleef & Arpels in New York in 1941. On November 8, of that year, she bought a ring set with an aquamarine, rubies, and diamonds for \$857. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that she was introduced to the jeweler by the Duchess of Windsor, as the two women met at about this time. Appointed Governor-General of the Bahamas by his brother King George VI during World War II, the duke was living in the West Indies. He and the duchess made numerous trips to New York and to Cuba, where they were the guests of the Countess of Revilla de Camargo in her Havana palace.

As soon as the war ended, the countess was back in France where much of her highly spectacular jewelry collection was held. It featured largely emeralds and diamonds, transformed by Van Cleef & Arpels, to bring the collection up to date with changing fashions. In 1949, she had a diamond collarette altered. In 1953, a pair of Eglantine earrings was transformed into hatpins. A year later, a long diamond sautoir was turned into four identical bracelets. In 1955, she added a diamond rivi re to the 1949 collarette so that she could wear it as a tiara. Two years later, she commissioned a new diamond collarette.

As a titled and immensely wealthy widow, she could indulge her every whim, and spent six months of every year in Europe. But there was another side to the coin. "Despite it all she was absolutely impossible, and her poor bullied maid bore the brunt of it," recalled Alexandre.¹¹ Whenever she was in Paris she stayed at the Ritz, like Barbara Hutton. "One day when I was on duty," went on Alexandre, "she invited me to go with her to Venice in order to dress her hair, but only hers, for the ball given by M. de Beistegui. In Venice, she thus presented me with a ball from my favorite century."¹² For that one evening, the Countess of Revilla de Camargo was transformed into the Marquise de Pompadour: "Re-creating a period technique, I coated her hair and scattered it with diamonds."¹³ The only detail that was not of the period was the sumptuous collection of emeralds and diamonds sported by the countess. These were by Van Cleef & Arpels. The following day, alas, the eighteenth-century dream had melted away—but not the hair treatment. "At nine o'clock in the morning she called for me as she couldn't get the paste out of her hair. I remembered a recipe by Antoine, and I had some eggs brought which I broke over her head."¹⁴

"I went along with her in all her whims ... She loved etiquette and bows and curtsies. As she grew old, her sight faded. One day in my salon she saw an American woman who looked like the Comtesse de Paris, and she dropped a deep

Opposite

The diamond collarette adapted by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1955, using a second necklace to convert it into a tiara





Above
One of the emerald and
diamond necklaces created

by Van Cleef & Arpels for
the Countess of Revilla
de Camargo



Above
 The emerald and diamond
 necklace and earrings

worn by the Countess
 of Bessborough for the
 Ball at the Bessborough

**Above**

Collarette of pear-shaped pearls and diamonds created by Van Cleef & Arpels for the Countess of Revilla de Camargo.

Opposite

Pearl and diamond necklace bought at Van Cleef & Arpels in New York by the Countess of Revilla de Camargo.

The central pendants may be detached to be worn as earrings.

and respectful curtsey to her. The woman thought she was mad. But perhaps that was true greatness.¹⁵ Her vision might have lost its edge, but her business sense was as sharp as ever. When she left Cuba she took with her a fortune in jewels and precious stones, which Van Cleef & Arpels valued in New York in the early 1960s. Furthermore, she had insured her Havana palace with Lloyd's of London for the sum of a million dollars. Added to a few investments made in Europe and to the amounts raised from the discreet sale of certain jewels, this sum enabled her to live very comfortably in France and especially Spain, where she died on October 18, 1964. Realizing that the era of living in luxury in her Havana palace surrounded by some fifty servants was gone forever, she announced to Alexandre that she intended to adopt a more modest way of life, and went off to a convent with her maid and chauffeur. And she sold her Rolls and bought a Cadillac instead.





The Love Life of a Diva

MARIA CALLAS

La Scala, Milan, December 7, 1954

It is a venerable tradition in Milan. On December 7, every year, the feast of St. Ambrose, the city's patron saint, one of the world's most distinguished opera houses opens its season. It is the most popular evening of the season, and that night in 1954 the excitement was running even higher than usual. There was not an empty seat in the house. At the stage door, hundreds of aficionados of bel canto queued patiently for hours in the hope of getting the chance to buy a rare returned ticket. This was a first night that promised to be like no other. Everyone was waiting for that rare moment, an experience to be treasured for a lifetime, that you could look back on with pride, boasting, "I was there."

It was not just one star who was preparing that evening to give what might well be the performance of the century, but two. Maria Callas, already one of the most fêted divas in the world of opera, was to sing Spontini's *La Vestale*. And Luchino Visconti, the most talented and flamboyant of all Italian directors, had agreed to direct her. These two great *monstres sacrés* working together at last! It was a dream they had both shared for years. Callas knew that Visconti was simply the best in his field. With him, she could make a decisive step forward in the direction she wanted to give her art. Her voice was unique, but she wanted to go even

Opposite

Maria Callas at the pinnacle of her fame, complete with fur coat, orchids, photographers,

and crowds of admiring followers. Her appearances were always theatrical

further, to create an unforgettable moment in the history of opera, to bring to her singing the full power of her acting ability. To act and sing with equal intensity, to convey searing emotion in perfect musical harmony, this was what she wanted. Visconti's directing technique, his particular and sometimes brutal way of pushing his artists—whether in theater, cinema, or opera—to the very limits of their emotional endurance, would enable her at last to claim the accolade of “prima donna assoluta”, for which she had yearned for so long and which only her public could bestow.

The evening was a triumph. Never had the notoriously harsh critics of the Italian press been so fulsome in their praise. “Unique,” “divine,” and “sublime” were only some of the epithets peppering the adulatory reviews that appeared the morning after this historic performance. In addition to everything else, it was a physically transformed Callas the public discovered that night. In the space of two years, thanks to draconian dieting, she had shed nearly 66 pounds (30 kilos). In December 1952, when she sang the title role in Ponchielli's opera *La Gioconda* at La Scala, she weighed 200 pounds (92 kilos). A year later, in *Medea*, again at La Scala, she weighed 170 pounds (78 kilos). And for *La Vestale*, thanks to her iron will, drastic dieting, and Visconti's fierce encouragement, she had managed to slim down to a mere 138 pounds (63 kilos).

It was thus a sylph-like figure who appeared on stage that night, who was all the more unrecognizable as she had agreed to dye her hair blonde for the part. When her sublime voice emerged from this ethereal, almost worryingly thin form, the audience was enraptured. She had achieved her goal. Still today, the timbre of that extraordinary voice assures Callas a posthumous following like no other diva. A single note is sufficient to distinguish her voice from all others. In the wings that night stood two men who together had helped to bring about this miracle. One was Visconti; the other was Giovanni Battista Meneghini, an Italian businessman who for five years had been Callas's husband. More of a Pygmalion than a besotted lover, he was one of the first to grasp the extraordinary potential not only of her voice, but also of her dramatic sensibility and intensity. He provided her with an emotional and material security that allowed her to devote herself to her singing above all else. He even became her impresario, and he was the only person to divine the ambition of this hypersensitive young woman who had so many scores to settle with life.

Callas had not always been beautiful, wealthy, and admired, and her childhood and teenage years had left an indelible mark on her. She was born in New York, where her parents had emigrated a few months earlier. George Kalogeropoulos and Evangelia Dimitriadou came originally from Meligala, a small town in the southern Peloponnese, and were married during World War I. Their elder daughter, Yakinthi, was born in 1917, followed by their son Vassili in 1920. It was already

**Above**

At the peak of her art, Callas was a performer of dazzling

beauty who unleashed passions on all the world's greatest stages.

clear that the couple were ill-suited, and George was unfaithful. At the age of two, Vassili died of meningitis. Evangelia was overwhelmed by grief, and they decided to make a fresh start in America.

The death of her brother, whom she could never replace in her parents' eyes, doubtless cast a shadow over Maria's destiny even before she was born. Her father was remote, absent, and not very successful in business. Her mother cared only for her elder daughter, in whom she invested all the hopes of her own frustrated existence. Much later, Callas told the American journalist Norman Ross: "Children should have a wonderful childhood. I have not had it—I wish I had."¹⁶ Singing opened the way to her independence, and was to prove her salvation. When her parents separated in 1937, she went with her mother and sister to Athens. In the Greek capital, occupied by the Germans throughout World War II, she studied at the Conservatoire and gave her first concerts. In 1945, she returned to the States and to her father. But when her career failed to take off in America, she decided finally to go and live in Italy. It was there that she met Meneghini, and married him. He was thirty years her senior, and for her this was precisely where his attraction lay.

**Above and opposite**

Between 1952 and 1954, Cilla's shed some 65 pounds (30 kilos). The plump young woman

who had struggled to give dramatic life to her roles had become a svelte, tragic heroine.



He offered her affection of a reassuring kind that she had never known. Above all, he gave her confidence in herself. The young woman who described herself as an “ugly duckling” began to enjoy her first successes on stage. She began to believe that her dreams could come true. She became not only a diva but also a desirable and elegant woman.

Meneghini introduced her to style, luxury, and jewelry. From the start of her career, he made a habit of giving her a piece of jewelry for every first night. His first gift appears to have been a diamond waterfall clip by an unknown jeweler, probably Italian. He also had assembled for her, piece by piece, a ruby and diamond parure consisting of a necklace, earrings and bracelet, also created by an unknown Italian jeweler in the early 1950s, and very similar to the Van Cleef & Arpels style of this period. She also possessed an emerald necklace, with 24 pear-shaped emeralds surrounded by diamonds and a ring set with an enormous rectangular emerald weighing 37.56 carats.¹⁷

Her performance on December 7, 1954 sealed Callas’s reputation as a star on a global scale. Audiences worshipped her. The world’s greatest opera houses joined the waiting list of those that hoped one day to have the honor of seeing her sing on their stage. She was invited to every party, and it was at one of these that her future and her career were to be turned upside down. One evening at the Paris Lido in September 1957, her friend the society columnist Elsa Maxwell introduced her to Aristotle Onassis. Born into a wealthy Greek family in Smyrna in 1906, Onassis had had a miraculous escape from the massacres ordered by the Turkish government in September 1922. Not only did he rebuild his family’s fortune from nothing, but he also became one of the wealthiest shipping magnates of his time. In New York in 1946 he married Athina Livanos, an heiress to the oldest Greek shipping dynasty; together they had two children, Alexander and Christina.

By a strange coincidence, five months after this meeting, an incident in Rome gave the first indication of Callas’s vocal decline. After her voice gave way during the aria “Casta diva,” she canceled a gala performance of *Norma* at the end of the first act. The Roman public unleashed its fury on her, with one member of the audience shouting: “Go back to Milan, you cost us a million lira and you’re not worth it!” Now the adulation of her supporters was matched by the vituperation of her critics. A dead dog was left on the back seat of her car; excrement was left outside her door; she was bombarded with abusive phone calls, not to speak of the hate mail. The press began to describe her as “capricious.” At the same time her mother,

Opposite

Aristotle Onassis on board his yacht *Christina O.*, which was in fact his home. Behind him hangs a painting by El Greco





Above

Dress: Christian Dior
 Jewelry: Cartier
 Hair: Raymond Beaudry
 Makeup: Pauline
 Styling: [illegible]

Dress: [illegible]
 Jewelry: [illegible]
 Hair: [illegible]
 Makeup: [illegible]
 Styling: [illegible]

Opposite

Dress: [illegible]
 Jewelry: [illegible]
 Hair: [illegible]
 Makeup: [illegible]
 Styling: [illegible]





Above
Aristotle Onassis's fabled yacht,
the *Christina O*

who had returned to New York, shamelessly exploited her daughter's celebrity for her own financial ends, publishing an unsympathetic biography, appearing on television shows and giving interviews to the press.¹⁸

Onassis paid assiduous court to Callas for two years. His marriage was now no more than an empty shell. In January 1959, he went to Philadelphia to hear her sing, and in June they met again in Venice and London. He insisted that she and her husband should spend part of the summer on his yacht *Christina O*, which cruised the Mediterranean every June, July, and August. They were to join the boat at Monaco on July 22, 1959. It was probably on this cruise that they became lovers.

It was at this time too that Callas first crossed the threshold, officially at least, of Van Cleef & Arpels in Paris. For a gala evening, the Maison lent her a collettette set with a magnificent 49.13-carat pear-shaped diamond of a delicate cognac hue. This was complemented by a pair of ear pendants set with two more pear-shaped diamonds weighing a total of 50.61 carats, of exactly the same color, and cut from the same stone.

**Above**

Onassis and Callas with Elsa Maxwell, who first introduced them

Onassis had been a faithful client of Van Cleef & Arpels for years, one of his finest purchases being the ruby and diamond necklace that he bought for his wife in 1956 for \$70,000. Perhaps it was he who introduced Callas to the Maison. It is impossible to know either the scale or the number of the gifts he gave her during their eight-year idyll. Only a few pieces, sold by the heirs to her estate, are known, including notably a parure of coral cabochons surrounded by brilliant-cut diamonds, pearls, and turquoises, bought by Onassis in the autumn of 1965. The set also comprises earrings, a clip, and a bracelet. Also at this time, he bought other diamond and platinum pieces, bracelets, earrings, brooches, a sapphire and diamond bracelet, and an “Indian” parure in gold set with cabochon emeralds and brilliant-cut diamonds, though we do not know for whom these were intended. For her part, Callas became a regular client. In 1967, she bought a brooch in the form of leaves set with diamonds and five rubies. This piece is now in the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection.

From the start of their romance, obstacles had been strewn in their path. Onassis’s wife had agreed to divorce without too much difficulty. Meneghini was





Opposite and above
 Maria Callas at Van Cleef
 & Arpels, probably in the late
 1950s. She's trying on a

diamond collarette set with
 a pear-shaped diamond
 of cognac hue weighing 49.13
 carats (above). The piece

was given to her on loan by
 the Maison, together with
 the ear pendants

**Above**

Callas and Onassis at a dinner in Paris in the mid 1960s. The romance attracted tremendous attention

from photographers and the press, and provoked the fury of the Onassis family

more reluctant, but eventually gave in. Onassis's family by contrast—his sister Artemis and above all his two children—would hear nothing of Callas. Rejected, Callas dug in her heels and retreated into the role of diva, adopting an attitude of rather lofty condescension toward the Onassis inner circle.

The newspapers seized eagerly on this romance that contained all the ingredients of success. He was rich. She was famous. Both were divorced and were happy to be seen together in public. An icon of the opera world, Callas now became, at Onassis's side, a queen of café society. The reasons behind this change were neither fortuitous nor romantic. The discipline that she had imposed on herself in order to become a star had become a burden to her. Mishaps became more and more frequent during her performances. Her voice and her acting were still unique, but her body was worn out. Meanwhile the public never stopped demanding more. "Over the last few years singing has become a form of torture," she admitted to the journalist Marlyse Schaeffer of *France Soir*. "People expect high Cs. They won't forgive a cold, a hoarse note. Sing? Yes, but only for myself, for the pleasure of it. The public is a monster."¹⁹

**Above**

Seated at the same table as Callas and Onassis are the French pop stars Johnny Hallyday and Sylvie Vartan.

Behind this display of weariness, there doubtless lay another motivation. Callas was in love, but not in the calm, reassuring way she had loved Meneghini. This time she was passionately in love. However public her relationship with Onassis was, it was still conducted in secrecy, to the point where it was surrounded by rumors, including sordid allegations of abortions, clandestine births, and a concealed child. But it was a love story that was to be shattered by the advent of the most famous woman in the world: Jackie Kennedy. Since the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963, her face had been known throughout the world. Dazzled by the aura of glamour, power, and tragedy that wreathed the image of “the world’s most famous widow,” Onassis was seduced. And all the more so as his sister Artemis welcomed Jackie sympathetically—if only to get rid of Callas. The marriage took place on the island of Skorpis on October 20, 1968, under the gaze of dozens of paparazzi from around the world.

From now on Callas lived in Paris. She had lost her voice and the man she loved, but despite it all she resolved to put a brave face on it. On April 20, 1969, she was the star of a glittering edition of the popular French television program *L'Invité du dimanche*. Wearing an evening gown and with immaculate hair and



Above and opposite

Maria Callas in the 1970s, with the celebrated dancer Jacques Chazot. She lived alone in Paris, but still went to soirées and gala dinners. She remained a faithful client of Van Cleef & Arpels. The turquoise and diamond necklace she is

wearing (above) is one of the Maison's classics, an interpretation of the Liberté necklace that is still in the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection. According to tradition, this eighteenth-century emerald and diamond necklace was given by its owner to the

American rebel forces in order to finance the War of Independence against the British. It was bought by Jacques Arpels and apparently copied on several occasions, notably for this version set with turquoises.



**Above**

Alone and abandoned by Onassis, Maria Callas forsook opera and withdrew into solitude and memories.

Opposite

On October 20, 1968, Aristotle Onassis married Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, widow of the American president, on the island of Skorpios

makeup, she was interviewed for over an hour by the famous French journalist Pierre Desgraupes. Her old singing teacher from Athens, Elvira de Hidalgo, and Luchino Visconti were among the guests she had chosen in order to bolster the only image she wanted to leave the public with: that of the twentieth century's greatest diva. She summed up her career in a single sentence: "To be worthy of what the public expects of us, we have to be almost sublime."

Surprisingly, she remained a client of Van Cleef & Arpels. She was fabulously wealthy, and could now buy herself anything she liked. In 1970, it was a pair of ear pendants set with pear-shaped emeralds and diamonds, with a matching ring, followed by a rivi re set with her own diamonds. Onassis's marriage to Jackie Kennedy was not a success. On March 15, 1975, he died at the American Hospital at Neuilly, where Callas went several times to visit him. She was to survive him by barely two years. On September 16, 1977, Maria Callas died of a pulmonary embolism. She was fifty-three. Giovanni Battista Meneghini, her mother, and her sister inherited her estate, and notably her fabulous jewels.



*The jewelry given to Jackie Kennedy
by Aristotle Onassis*



Above

Aristotle Onassis bought the jewelry he offered to Jackie Kennedy on their marriage from Van Cleef & Arpels. They included this emerald and diamond necklace, which also had matching earrings.

Opposite

Onassis also gave his wife this ruby and diamond necklace, as well as a third necklace set with sapphires, emeralds, rubies, and diamonds.



FANTÔMAS AT VAN CLEEF & ARPELS

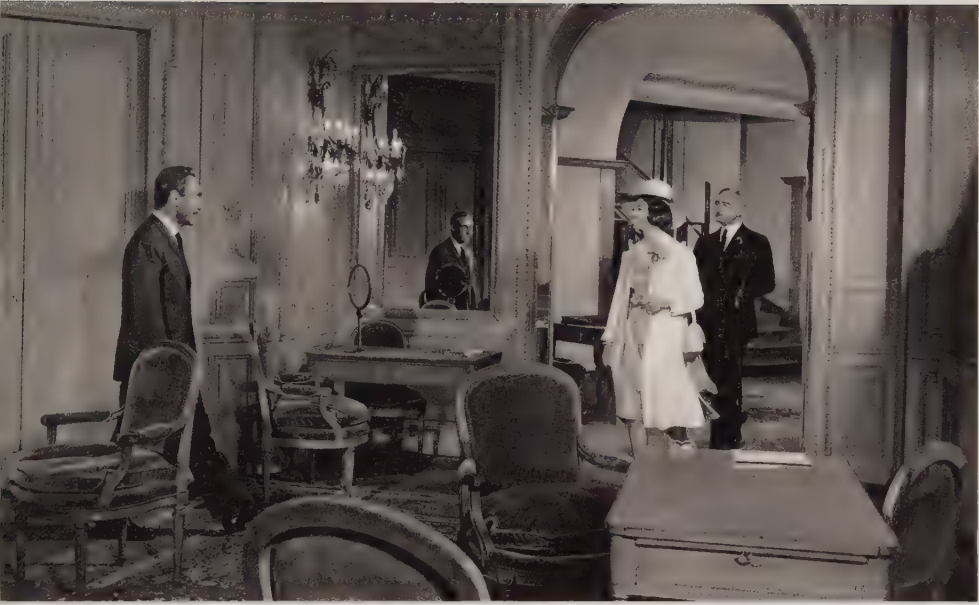
**Paris, Van Cleef & Arpels Boutique,
22 place Vendôme, 1964**

The Rolls purred to a halt in front of the arcades at 22 place Vendôme. Out got an elegantly dressed man, holding an umbrella and a bowler hat, and a beautiful woman. The doorman hastened to relieve the lady of her Pekinese, before holding open the door to Van Cleef & Arpels. The fact that they were welcomed by Pierre, the youngest of the three Arpels brothers, was an indication of this client's importance. After greeting the fabulously wealthy English aristocrat and kissing the hand of his lady companion, Pierre Arpels withdrew in order to allow his assistant plenty of time to present the jewels that he had already described to his illustrious visitor over the telephone. M. Royet presented six trays one by one: three ruby and diamond parures, one of them Mystery Set, a sapphire and diamond parure, a pearl and diamond parure, and a magnificent diamond collarette. The total cost? "Five and half million francs—new francs, naturally," announced M. Royet. Lord Shelton drew out his checkbook, wrote a check for the required amount and announced that he would take the jewels with him. For a check from a client of such importance, no verification would be necessary. As they left the boutique, the couple were handed back the

Pekinese, with a small package wrapped in cream paper containing the jewels. The Rolls purred away from place Vendôme.

Inside the boutique, M. Royet was congratulating himself on such a "handsome sale," gazing at the cheque for 5,500,000 new francs. Suddenly the signature of Lord Shelton faded away and another appeared: *Fantômas*. The famous jewel thief had just robbed the most famous jeweler's shop on place Vendôme.

But it was all for a film, a classic of French cinema, still given regular outings on French television. Jean Marais doubled as *Fantômas* and the journalist Fandor, while Louis de Funès played Superintendent Juve. The famous model Marie-Hélène Arnaud played *Fantômas*'s lady friend. And Pierre Arpels quite simply played himself. When the film's director, André Hunebelle, began to scout for locations for his 1963 film, he immediately had the idea of filming the robbery in a real jeweler's shop. Pierre Arpels, who was in charge of public relations for Van Cleef & Arpels, was amused by the idea, and in order to make the film more realistic agreed to take part in the filming. A correspondence between Pierre Arpels and André Hunebelle, preserved in the Maison's archives, commemorates this escapade, and one of the classic scenes of French cinema: a robbery at Van Cleef & Arpels.

**Above**

The opening scene from the celebrated French film *Fantômas*. Pierre Arpels, playing himself (top), greets

his wealthy clients in the place Vendôme boutique. In fact they are the notorious jewel thief *Fantômas*, played by Jean Marais, and his accomplice

Lady Beltham, played by Marie-Hélène Arnaud, with a plot to steal jewelry to the tune of several million francs



CHAPTER VII

THE CROWN

OF THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

This account of her parents' coronation is for Princess Leila Pahlavi (1970–2001), in memoriam.

Opposite

Empress Farah at her coronation in 1967, wearing the crown and jewelry designed for her by Van Cleef & Arpels.

Following pages

One of the vitrines devoted to emeralds in the imperial treasure in Iran. This was the treasure store from which

Van Cleef & Arpels selected the stones to be used for the coronation jewels







Empress

FARAH

Tehran, December 1966

Pierre Arpels could hardly believe his eyes. A story from his childhood had just come true, right there, in the vaults of the Bank Markazi, or Central Bank, in Tehran. Glittering behind the bulletproof glass of its thirty-seven vitrines lay the treasure of the *Thousand and One Nights*. "I stood there in wonder before such a hoard, such a profusion of gemstones that were so outstanding in both size and quality," he later recalled. "Some of these jewels had stories stretching back into history; others were, if not modern, at least contemporary; a collection of precious stones of a beauty and value that were utterly extraordinary. This museum houses what are known as the Iranian crown jewels, a collection amassed over the course of time and successive dynasties."¹

In vitrine number 37 of the Jewelry Museum of the Central Bank, he discovered a terrestrial globe some 2 feet (60 centimeters) in height. Not only was it made of solid gold, using over 66 pounds (30 kilos) of the precious metal, but all the continents and oceans were created using gemstones. The landmasses were composed of rubies and spinels, with the exception of Iran, Southeast Asia, France, and Britain, whose frontiers and surface were picked out in diamonds. The oceans were made of large cabochon emeralds claw-set in gold.

Opposite
Empress Farah in the early 1960s. She is wearing a diamant

tiara and an antique neckpiece in diamonds and spinels from the Iranian imperial treasury.

The Iranian jeweler Abraham Massih created the globe, probably in 1869, to a commission from Nasser-ud-Din Shah. He used 51,000 precious stones weighing 8 pounds (3.650 kilos). At that time, the royal treasure was kept at the Golestan Palace, the imperial residence in the center of Tehran. With the exception of a few stones mounted in jewelry and two crowns, the gems were stored in chests in the depths of one of the palace cellars. According to tradition, it was to preserve the beauty of this cornucopia of emeralds and rubies, spinels, and diamonds—which were sustaining damage from constantly rubbing against each other—that the shah conceived the notion of having a proportion of them set in everyday objects that could be distributed around his private apartments.

Vitrine 33 of the museum contained a collection of candlesticks, ewers, dish covers, vases, mirrors, and rosewater bottles, all in solid gold encrusted with gems. The small illustrated guide for visitors explained that individual dish covers were a traditional feature of Iranian gastronomy, serving not only to protect but also to perfect the seasoning of the traditional Persian chelo kebabs, composed of rice and grilled lamb served with butter and an egg yolk and seasoned with sumac powder, which adds a lemony tang and a purple color. Traditionally, when the dish is brought to the table it is shaken lightly in order to distribute the flavors through the meat and rice, and only then is the cover removed. The handle of the dish covers made for the Shah of Persia in the nineteenth century consisted of a large round emerald, weighing around 100 carats and set in gold—naturally.

There were also *zarfs*, small holders for white porcelain coffee cups. Those made for the shah were of gold encrusted with precious stones. Others were of turquoise. The rarest—which held Pierre Arpels' gaze for a long time—was of Indian workmanship. Hundreds of rubies, square-cut or rectangular, were held in place by invisible gold rods in such a way as to create a surface on which no mountings were visible. The technique was clumsy, but it was not unlike the Mystery Setting technique created in the 1930s by Van Cleef & Arpels.

Unique in the world though it was, this peerless collection of gold paled in comparison with the most impressive part of the treasure: an astonishing accumulation of precious stones of enormous size, some of them with fabled origins. Vitrine 11, devoted to rubies, contained not only hundreds of spinels, the famous “balas rubies” of the Middle Ages, but also numerous oriental rubies. Two of the most fascinating gems were a Burmese ruby weighing over 100 carats, perhaps the largest in the world, and a spinel of over 500 carats. According to the official description in the guide, the latter is possibly biblical in origin. Known as the “Samaritan spinel,” it is reputed to have hung from the neck of the golden calf made by the Israelites soon after the flight from Egypt and destroyed as a pagan idol by the wrath of God, called down by Moses on his descent from Mount Sinai.



Above
The spine and diamond
necklace from the Shah an

imperial treasure made
by an Iranian jeweler, probably
in the nineteenth century.



Above

The crown of the Qajar dynasty, which was used by the rulers of the Qajar dynasty.

rulers of the Qajar dynasty
Weighing 10 pounds (4.5 kilos),
it is set with pearls, diamonds,
emeralds, and spinels.

THE IRANIAN CROWN JEWELS



Above
The Darya-i-Noor, or "Sea of Light" is the most celebrated stone in the Iranian crown jewels. This pink diamond, weighing 182 carats and measuring $1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ in. (4.1 x 2.9 cm),

is probably the larger section of the "Diamanta Grande Table" described by the celebrated French explorer Jean-Baptiste Tavernier on his travels in India in 1642. The other part, also preserved in the Iranian crown

jewels, where it is set in a tiara, is the Noor-al-Ein, or "Light of the Eye," weighing almost 60 carats. Mounted on an aigrette, the Darya-i-Noor was worn on a fur hat by the Shahs of Iran.



Above

The Imperial sword created in 1869 for Russia and Spain and used during the 1867 coronation is set with 214 emeralds, 4 rubies, 275 other precious stones, 12 sea diamonds, and 167 pearls.

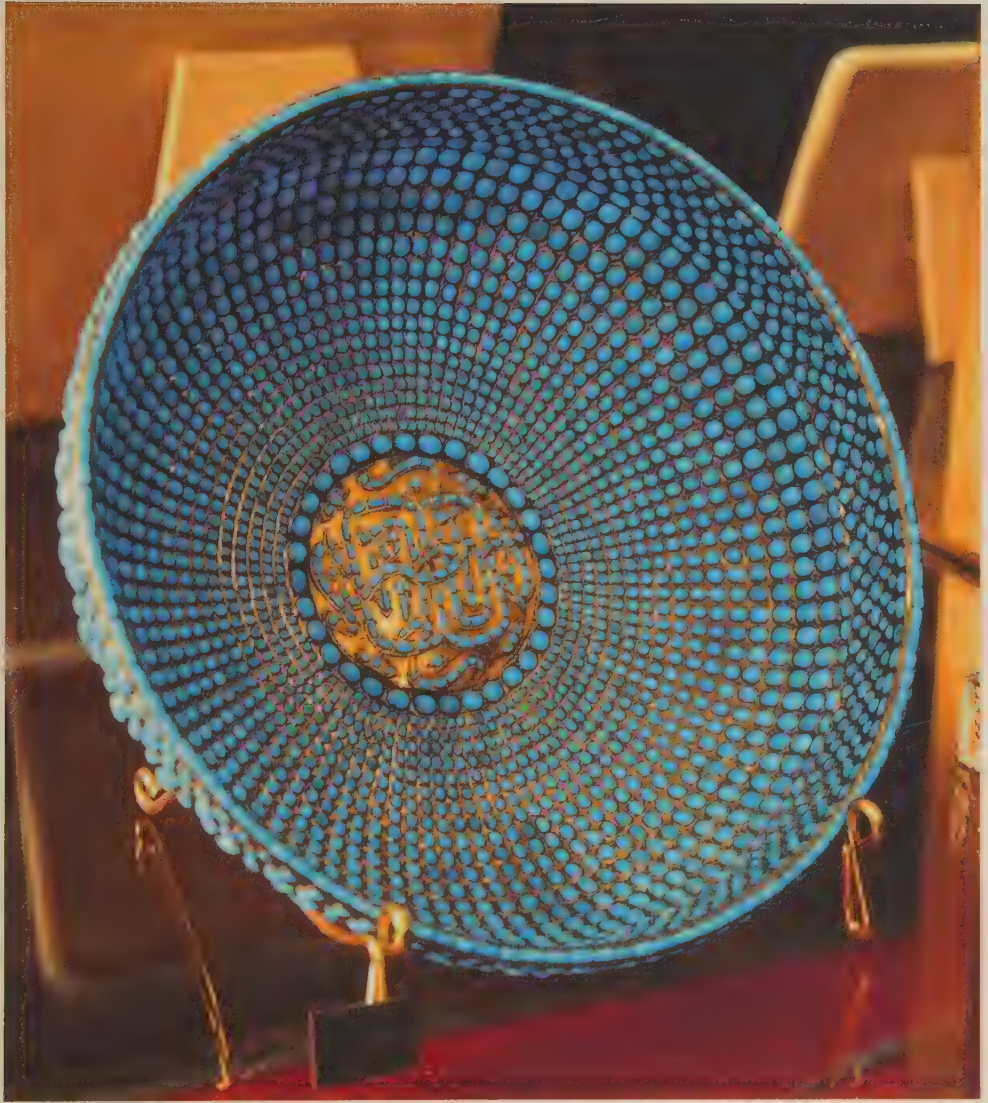
Opposite

Created in 1869 by a team of Iranian jewellers, the signet is studded with 51,366 precious stones, weighing 12.15 pounds (3.456 kilos). Iran, Southeast Asia, France, and Britain are picked out in diamonds,

the oceans are in emeralds, and the landmasses in rubies and spinels. Weighing 81 pounds (37 kilos) and with a diameter of 2 feet (66 cm), this sumptuous piece used to stand in the imperial apartments in the Golestan Palace







Opposite
Hookah and four *zarfs*,
or coffee-cup holders,
in gold set with turquoises

Above
Large bowl in gold set with
thousands of turquoises



Above

The imperial belt, worn by the Shah for his coronation in 1967, is set with an emerald of 175 carat.

Opposite

This box pavé set with emeralds, of peerless quality and impressive size, is—together with the two pink diamonds,

the Darya-i-Noor and the Noor-al-Ein—one of the finest objects in the crown jewels. It was made in Iran in the late nineteenth century.







Opposite

This flask and its stand, to the right, set with diamonds, pearls, spinels, and emeralds, are among the many items of tableware contained in the treasury. In the eighteenth century and throughout the reign of the Qajar dynasty, these utensils were in use

at the Golestan Palace.

It was Reza Shah who had them brought to the vaults of the Central Bank in the 1920s.

Above

The shield of Nader Shah, who conquered India in 1739. The central spinel weighs 225 carats, while the eight large emeralds weigh (clockwise from the square emerald at the top) 90 carats, 140 carats, 90 carats, 70 carats, 90 carats, 85 carats, 90 carats, and 75 carats.



Above
The Pahlavi Crown
was made for Reza Shah
from an Iranian Jeweler for

his coronation in 1926, the crown
is set with 3380 diamonds.
The central stone is a yellow
diamond of 60 carats.

It was last used in 1967, for
the coronation of Mohammad
Reza Pahlavi.



Above
The tiara of emerald, pearl,
ruby, diamond, and diamond
created by Van Cleef & Arpels
using stones from the treasury

for the coronation of Empress
Fereni, wife of the Emperor Isiah
in 1967. The center emerald
weighs 91 carats, and the
two other emeralds flanking

it are 36.4 and 36.2 carats.
The crown is encrusted with
1,402 diamonds, 175 pearls,
38 rubies, and 36 emeralds,
approximately.





Opposite

The emerald and diamond necklace created by Van Cleef & Arpels, using stones from the treasury, for Princess Shahnaz, the shah's eldest daughter, for the coronation of 1967.

Above

The emerald and diamond earrings created by Van Cleef & Arpels, using stones from the treasury, for Princess Shahnaz, the shah's eldest daughter, for the coronation in 1967.



Above

The emerald and diamond tiara created by Van Cleef & Arpels, using stones from the treasury, for Princess Shahnaz, the shah's eldest daughter, for the coronation of 1967

Opposite

The emerald and diamond necklace created by Van Cleef & Arpels, using stones from the treasury, for Princess Shams, the shah's elder sister, for the coronation of 1967





Above
The emerald and diamond tiara created by Van Cleef & Arpels, using stones from the treasury, for Princess Shams, the shah's elder sister, for the coronation of 1967.

Opposite
The emerald and diamond earrings created by Van Cleef & Arpels, using stones from the treasury, for Princess Shams, the shah's elder sister, for the coronation of 1967.





Above

The white and yellow diamond earrings created by Van Cleef & Arpels, using stones from the treasury, for Princess Fatemeh, the shah's half-sister, for the coronation of 1967. Subsequently they were worn principally by the shahbanou

Opposite

The white and yellow diamond necklace created by Van Cleef & Arpels, using stones from the treasury, for Princess Fatemeh, the shah's half-sister, for the coronation of 1967. Subsequently they were worn principally by the shahbanou.





Above
The Nader Shah Throne
Despite its name, this throne was not made for the famous Persian conqueror. It dates back to the late eighteenth century, when the first ruler to use

it was probably Fath Ali Shah (see opposite). It is composed of wooden panels lined with gold and set with precious stones that may have been taken from an older throne, which could explain its name. It is set with

26,733 rubies, diamonds, spinels, and emeralds. The five largest emeralds set in the backrest weigh 225, 170, 130, 125, and 100 carats. It was last used for the coronation of 1967





But the rarest of all these gems, the most precious and the richest in history, was the Darya-i-Noor or “Sea of Light,” a rectangular pink diamond measuring over 4 centimeters (1 1/2 inches) in length and 3 centimeters (1 1/4 inches) in width, and weighing 182 carats. It was set in the aigrette that traditionally embellished the royal headdress used at official ceremonies where the crown was not worn. The story of this diamond reflects the history of the whole collection. Over the last three centuries, the jewels of the royal treasure have been stolen, recovered, and dispersed several times. When the Afghan tribes invaded Persia in 1722, the treasure, then kept in Ispahan, was looted, and the most important pieces sent to India as gifts for the Great Mughal in Delhi.

In 1736, Nader Shah founded the Afsharid dynasty in Persia. Three years later he invaded India, seeking to repay the insult of the defeat of 1722. He took Delhi, looted it in his turn, and dispatched the treasure of the Great Mughal to Persia. To the riches stolen from Ispahan seventeen years earlier were added jewels plundered from the Indian rulers. Notable among these were two remarkable diamonds. The first weighed 186 carats and was the finest white in color. At his first sight of this unique stone, Nader Shah is said to have cried, “Koh-i-Noor,” meaning “mountain of light,” so giving the diamond its name. The Koh-i-Noor was not to stay in Persia for long. Recaptured by the Afghans, it was brought back to India in the early nineteenth century, where it entered the treasure of the Maharajas of the Punjab. “Given” to Queen Victoria by the last maharaja of this dynasty, it now forms part of the British crown jewels in the Tower of London. In 1852, to increase its purity, it was recut to a weight of 105 carats. According to tradition it should always be set in the crown of a queen, as it is believed to bring bad luck to male rulers.

The other fabulous diamond was the Darya-i-Noor, which stayed in Iran. It was only in 1969, during research into the history of the royal treasure, that a team of Canadian scientists succeeded in establishing its true history. In their opinion, it was the largest portion of an extremely ancient stone of Indian origin, described by the French traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in the seventeenth century. In his list of the world’s largest diamonds, drawn up in 1676, he gave third place to the Darya-i-Noor, describing it as “a large diamond in the shape of a ‘table’ weighing 176 *mangelins*,” the equivalent of 246 carats today. He apparently tried in vain to buy the stone, for which the merchants of Golconda demanded 500,000 golden rupees, or 750,000 French *livres*.

Previous page

Fath Ali Shah (1771-1834), second ruler of the Qajar dynasty, wearing the Kiani

Crown. Some of the stones on his other jewels have undoubtedly been reused on more recent pieces.

Opposite

Vitrine 24 of the Iranian jewelry treasury is devoted exclusively to diamonds

This pink diamond is believed to have been acquired by the emissaries of the Mughal emperor in Delhi, and it was in the treasure of one of his descendants that Nader Shah discovered it in 1739. According to the Canadian team, the original stone was cut in two. The larger part formed the stone we know as the Darya-i-Noor, while the other section, much smaller despite weighing a respectable 59 carats, is the oval diamond known as Noor-ol-Ain, or “light of the eye.” This is now the central stone in an imposing tiara made for the wife of the Shah of Iran in 1959. Created by the famous American jeweler Harry Winston, it had been commissioned, along with a second tiara set with emeralds, in early 1958, when the shah was still married to his second wife, Queen Soraya. After the imperial couple’s divorce on April 6, 1958, the tiara remained in the vitrines of the treasury until the shah married Farah Diba on December 21, 1959. And it was precisely this marriage and its repercussions for the future of the Pahlavi dynasty that had brought Pierre Arpels to this Aladdin’s cave.

Born into a distinguished family of diplomats, soldiers, and architects, Farah Diba grew up in a milieu that was open-minded and cultured. Her father died when she was ten, but her mother insisted that she should still have a modern education. She went to the Jeanne d’Arc primary school in Tehran, run by French Catholic nuns, played sport and became a girl guide, and her French became as fluent as her Farsi. After gaining her baccalaureate at the lycée in Tehran, she decided to study architecture—a bold choice for a young Iranian girl. Her portfolio earned her a place at the Ecole Spéciale d’Architecture in Paris, where at the last minute she succeeded in finding a room in a residence for Dutch students. Every morning she would catch the metro to Boulevard Raspail to attend her courses.

In the summer of 1959, Farah went back to Iran for the first time in two years. Because she was still waiting to hear about a grant for which she had applied before she left, her uncle sought an audience with the shah’s son-in-law, Ardeshir Zahedi, who could speed up the process. This meeting was to seal her destiny. Ardeshir Zahedi invited her to a reception to be given by his wife Princess Shahnaz, daughter of the shah and his first wife, Princess Fawzia of Egypt (see Chapter III).

During the evening, the shah was announced. Divorced from Soraya for a year, he was clearly thinking of marrying again in order to assure the future of the Pahlavi dynasty. As Farah recalled, she “wasn’t stupid,” and when she saw the king arrive she was sure he was there to see whether he liked her or not.² (see page 416)

Opposite
Nader Shah (1688–1747),
founder of the Afsharid
dynasty. Often described as

a Persian Napoleon, he was
a great warrior who succeeded
in taking Delhi in 1739

शिवजी







Opposite and above

Two designs for tiaras in rubies and diamonds. Intended to be made using stones from the treasury, they were submitted

to Empress Farah by Van Cleef & Arpels in the 1970s, but never progressed beyond the design stage. Private collection.

THE DIAMOND FLOWERS OF PRINCESS SORAYA

Tehran, December 27, 1950

For weeks the court in Tehran and even the city had been following the bulletins on the health of the shah's fiancée. Daily the royal doctor delivered his verdict, which was immediately seized upon by a gossip mill that could inflate the most minor rumor into a major plot: "Mlle. Esfandieri is a little better this morning," "her health is growing stronger with each passing day," or "her fever is running higher again." By December 27, 1950, the day initially planned for the imperial wedding, the young woman seemed to be definitely on the mend, but typhoid had left its mark. After being confined to bed for nearly two months, she weighed barely 90 pounds (40 kilos). It was difficult to envisage a ceremony as demanding as a royal marriage before the end of the month of January.

Everything had gone too fast in this romance, moreover, conducted as it had been at a furious pace. It had been Princess Shams, the shah's elder sister, who had had the idea of introducing

Soraya to her brother. Born on June 22, 1932, to an Iranian diplomat and a young German woman, Soraya had spent most of her youth in Europe, at colleges in Switzerland. As a member of the powerful Baktiari tribe, who had been at odds with the Pahlavis since the latter had come to power in 1925, on the political level she was the ideal fiancée, neither too close to power—she knew no one at court—nor too far removed from the world into which she was to marry. At the age of eighteen, she was also docile enough to conform to the wishes of the imperial family. The shah's previous marriage with the elegant Princess Fawzia of Egypt had proved to be disastrous both personally and politically (see Chapter III). Fawzia had never managed to adapt to life in Tehran. After giving birth to a little girl, Princess Shahnaz, she had gone back to Cairo, never to return. Her brother King Farouk had announced her divorce in 1954. The court in Iran took three years to recognize this decision, on condition that Princess Shahnaz remained in the custody of her father.

Opposite

Princess Soraya, second wife of the Shah of Iran, in the early 1950s. The shah bought many of her personal jewels from

Van Cleef & Arpels. After her death in 2002 they were sold by Messieurs Beaussant et Lefèvre in Paris.



Barely had the divorce been announced than the shah started looking for a new wife, one who could give him the son of which the entire dynasty dreamed in order to secure the succession. Young, beautiful, and educated in Switzerland like the shah, who had spent his school years at Le Rosey, Soraya had all the necessary qualities, plus one significant bonus: the shah had fallen in love with her. A few photographs taken by a cousin in London, where she spent the month of September 1950, had piqued his interest. A pressing invitation to return to Tehran followed. Just a few days after her return, the young girl and her parents were invited to a reception given by the queen mother. The shah dropped in, as if by chance. A curtsy and a few smiles were all it took.

This lonely man, isolated and doubtless hurt by the failure of his first marriage, had succumbed to the gentle charms of this slightly awkward young girl. Soraya was dazzled. When that same evening her father told her of the shah's feelings and asked her if she would accept his marriage proposal, her answer was an unhesitating yes. Three days later, on October 11, their engagement was celebrated. But the celebrations were short-lived. By the end of the month, Soraya had been forced to take to her bed, struck down by the typhoid epidemic that was then raging through Tehran.

For weeks the young shah came every day to enquire after his fiancée's health. And every day he left a gift on her bedside table. Most of the boxes bore the name of Van Cleef & Arpels, and every one of them contained a jewel that was both sumptuous and delicate, appropriate for a young girl rather than the stately parure of a queen, which, in any case, the Iranian crown jewels possessed in abundance. Many took the form of flowers, such as a pair

of yellow gold and diamond Mimosa brooches with matching earrings, or a pair of Fleur ("Flower") brooches in yellow and white diamonds. Others took the form of fans, such as a pair of diamond earrings, or a pair of lapel clips also set with diamonds. One day the box left by the shah was slightly larger than usual: inside was a delicate garland of foliage in diamonds, with a central frond concealing a tiny watch.

After several weeks of raging fever, during which she drifted in and out of consciousness, Soraya awoke to discover the treasures that had been left beside her bed while she was ill. The wedding was finally announced for the end of January, before being put off once again. Barely recovered, Soraya had agreed to join the shah for a private lunch in the palace. As the weather was surprisingly mild for the time of year, they both had the idea of turning it into a picnic. Soraya came back from this with congestion on the lungs, and was forced to take to her bed again.

In the face of persistent rumors of the evil eye that were starting to spread from the city and above all from the bazaar, hotbed of all revolts and coups d'état for centuries past, the court decided to fix the ceremony for February 12, whatever the state of the bride's health. The gown, by Christian Dior, had arrived from Paris. A cape in white mink was added at the last minute. The official jewels, a diamond and emerald parure, had been removed from the treasury with all possible precautions. And it was a rather drawn Soraya, as thin as a rake, who arrived at the Marble Palace, the dynasty's official residence, on the afternoon of February 12, 1951.

As snow began to fall over the city, she walked through the first-floor salons, their walls covered with a mosaic of mirrors. Her gown, embroidered



Above
A pair of diamond fan clips
and a diamond bracelet, the
largest leaf of which conceals
a watch. All three pieces are

by Van Cleef & Arpels. Given
to Princess Soraya by the Shah
of Iran, they were sold in Paris
after her death by Messieurs
Beaussant et Lefèvre



Above
Princess Soraya's Fleur
jewels by Van Cleef & Arpels:
a diamond flower, with the
petals in white diamonds and
the center in yellow diamonds;
a carnation in rubies and



diamonds; and a flower
with the petals in yellow
diamonds and the center in
white diamonds. All were sold
after the princess's death
by Messieurs Beaussant
et Lefèvre.



Opposite
The Shah of Iran, Mohammad
Reza Pahlavi (1921-1980),
at the time of his marriage
to Princess Soraya.

with pearls and strass, weighed some 90 pounds (40 kilos). At the end of the ceremony, just after the queen mother had showered the couple with gold coins, the imperial family and their guests left the Marble Palace for the Golestan, the most ancient of the Tehran palaces, where the gala dinner was to take place. When she arrived, Soraya was so exhausted that one of the shah's aides-de-camp drew his saber and slashed the weight of her gown by slicing off several yards of fabric. For their official portrait photograph, instead of standing, as was traditional, the young couple were seated. Arranged on the cushions of a gilded sofa, the new Queen of Iran appears to be in a state of semi-collapse.

The rumors that had been emanating from the bazaar over the previous weeks were not wrong, in fact, but for reasons that nobody suspected. The marriage was ill-omened, but not because the bride was on her deathbed. In the seven years

of their marriage, she failed to provide her husband with the male heir awaited with such eagerness by the dynasty and by the country. In 1958, the shah resigned himself to a painful divorce. They never saw each other again. Soraya moved to Europe, where for forty-three years she led a rather sad and lonely existence. She died in Paris in 2001, twenty years after her former husband. Her sole heir, her younger brother Bijam, came to Paris for her funeral but died from a heart attack in his hotel room, just a few hours before the ceremony. Everything owned by Princess Soraya—the title officially granted to her by the shah—was sold at auction by the Paris law firm *Maîtres Beaussant et Lefevre* in 2002, raising the sum of €6.5 million. This sum and the rest of her estate were put at the disposal of the German nation, as her brother, who was of German nationality, had no heirs. It is said to have been used to upgrade the street lighting in the city of Bonn.







(continued from page 404) More meetings between the shah and Farah Diba took place throughout the months of September and October 1959: dinner at the palace, parties given by the queen mother, and even an airborne escapade that nearly ended in tragedy. The shah was at the controls of their plane when the automatic landing mechanism became jammed, just minutes before it approached the runway. It was Farah who, completely unaware of the danger, operated by hand the control that lowered the undercarriage.

The engagement was kept secret so that Farah could make the most of her freedom for a little longer. In late October, she went back to Paris to buy her trousseau for her future life as a sovereign. Contrary to all her expectations, the trip—which she had imagined as a discreet affair—was transformed into a media scrum, with packs of photographers on motorbikes following her car wherever it took her. Although nobody had been informed about her engagement to the shah, she later recalled that as soon as the plane touched down in Geneva the journalists knew. The airport was crammed with photographers. In Paris they followed her everywhere, ready to take pictures whatever she was doing.³ The windows of the shops she went into were hung with lengths of white fabric so that she could mull over her choices in peace. One photographer tried to bribe a maître d'hôtel to let him into the Hôtel du Crillon, where she was staying. On the Champs-Élysées there was such a scrum that some of the paparazzi jumped onto the bonnet of her car in the hope of getting the best pictures.

The wedding ceremony took place in the Marble Palace on December 21, 1959, with the wedding breakfast taking place at the Golestan Palace. Farah received many gifts, including notably a number of jewels. The shah gave her a ring set with an enormous diamond. One of her sisters-in-law, Princess Ashraf, chose a Van Cleef & Arpels Flocon de Neige (“Snowflake”) parure, brooch, and earrings in gold set with diamonds. Ten months later, on October 31, 1960, Farah gave birth to the son for whom the shah and the country had waited so long. They called him Reza, after the shah’s father Reza Shah, founder of the dynasty. Reza was followed by a sister, Farahnaz, on March 12, 1963, and by a little brother, Ali Reza, on April 28, 1965. The future of the dynasty was assured.

Throughout this period, Iran was experiencing unprecedented growth thanks to its oil revenues. The shah took advantage of this to initiate reforms that had always been close to his heart. In 1963, women were given the right to vote. Also at this time, he launched the White Revolution, by which most of the agricultural lands belonging to the crown were distributed to rural dwellers to cultivate. This movement was the prelude to a larger agrarian reform program. Young Iranian graduates of both sexes now formed an “Army of Knowledge,” going out into rural areas in order to set up schools, in a movement that made considerable progress in the fight against illiteracy.



Previous pages

The Shah of Iran and his wife Princess Soraya, skiing in Iran in the 1950s

Above

Mountings of a necklace and earrings created by Van Cleef & Arpels for Empress Farah on her coronation. The mountings were made in Paris and

delivered to Tehran without their principal stones, which could not leave Iran. The pieces were set with their emeralds and pearls in the vaults of the Central Bank in Tehran.

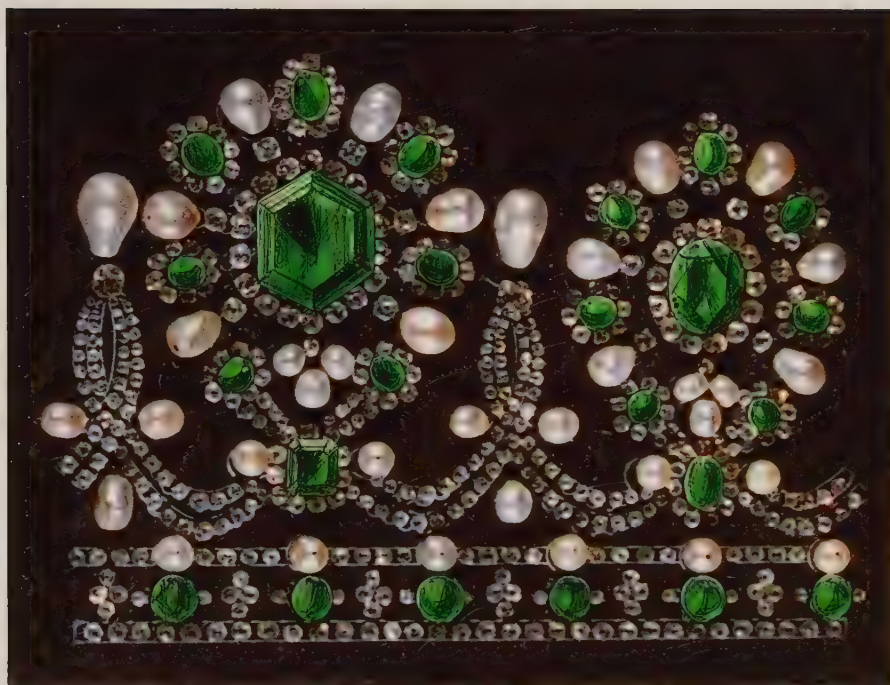


Above

Farah Diba's stool at the Ecole d'Architecture in Paris, where she was to spend only two years before marrying the Shah of Iran in 1959

Farah, meanwhile, devoted herself to medical and cultural projects, both of which were sorely needed. She particularly remembers her work for people with leprosy, at a time when leprosy was still very widespread in Iran: "It was one of the most horrifying diseases, as for centuries those who are affected have suffered not only from their illness, but also from the fear they arouse. When this organization was set up, very few doctors and nurses were prepared to treat them. Only a few Christian religious orders would do so, and the hospital conditions were appalling, unchanged since medieval times. The first time I went to visit a leper hospital, I had taken some cakes for the children; one of the people who was with me took them and threw them at the sick people. I shall never forget the scene; the people around me were terrified of touching someone with leprosy. I had dreams about it for nights afterward."²⁴

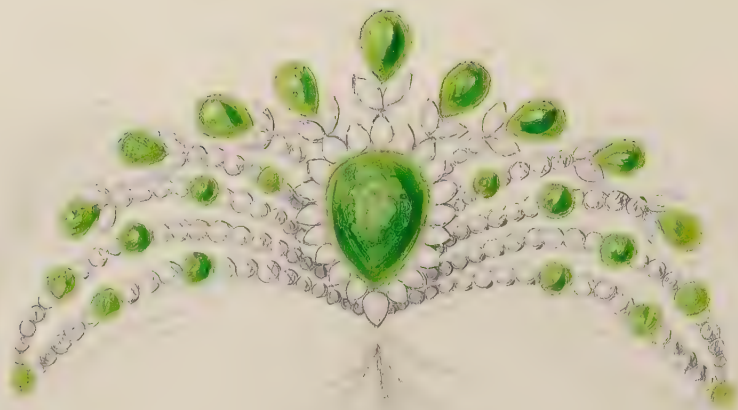
It was these advances—dynastic, social, economic, and political—that Mohammad Reza Pahlavi wished to celebrate when he planned his coronation in 1966. Having acceded to the throne in the middle of World War II he had never

**Above**

One of the crown designs submitted by Van Cleef & Arpels. This design comprised only pearls, diamonds, and emeralds.

been crowned, unlike his father and all the other Persian rulers before him. The coronation ceremony was to respect traditional protocol to the letter: the shah would wear the Pahlavi Crown, created for his father by the jeweler Haj Serajeddin, who had taken his inspiration from the crowns of the Sassanid dynasty, rulers of Iran from the second century to the sixth. He used a total of 3,755 gems from the royal treasure: 3,380 diamonds weighing a total of 1,144 carats, 368 pearls, five emeralds, and two sapphires.

The conspicuous—and significant—difference between this coronation and preceding ones was that on this occasion the shah's wife would be crowned with him. A change in the constitution had granted Farah a status that was almost equal to her husband's. She had been queen (*malekeh* in Farsi) since her marriage, but now she was officially shahbanou, meaning literally "the shah's lady." Henceforth the constitution stipulated that in the event of the shah's death before his heir reached the age of majority, she could rule as regent in her son's name.



Above and opposite

Two designs for tiaras in emeralds and diamonds. Intended to be made using stones from the treasury,

they were submitted to Empress Farah by Van Cleef & Arpels in the 1970s, but never progressed beyond the design stage. Private collection.



**Above**

Mounting for the crown of Shahbanou Farah Pahlavi just before it left the Van Cleef & Arpels workshops in Paris. The stones would be set in Tehran.

Opposite

Pierre Arpels in the vaults of the Central Bank of Iran in Tehran, holding Empress Farah's crown on a cushion. Two copies of the crown were made using

imitation stones: one is in the Van Cleef & Arpels Collection; the second was sold in Paris some years ago by Messieurs Beausant et Lefèvre

It remained to find a crown for the new shahbanou, and it was at this point that Van Cleef & Arpels entered the story. Pierre Arpels was in charge of the project: "In November 1966, we received a visit from the Governor of the Bank of Iran, who asked us if we could prepare some designs for the future creation of a crown. Which is what we did. We sent them through the Ambassador, who arranged for them to be delivered to the government in Iran. For several weeks we heard nothing. We later learned that three or four other jewelers had been sounded out, and each of them had supplied around fifteen drawings. For our part, we had sent some thirty drawings. Three designs were retained, two of them from our Maison. The final choice was left to the Shahbanou."⁵

The decision came on December 16, 1966. One of the two Van Cleef & Arpels designs had been accepted. There was no time for the Paris workshops





to celebrate this honor, however, as it quickly became clear that the making of the crown was to be something of an obstacle course. The budget was not an issue, as it was a question of making the armature alone, without supplying the gems, as these would come from the crown jewels. Nor was the choice of stones a problem, as the crown jewels contained thousands of unmounted gemstones of every possible shape and hue. The difficulty lay in the status of the stones.

“None of these gems, however small, was allowed (under the Iranian constitution) to leave the museum premises or Iranian territory,” explained Pierre Arpels. “So we had to have a gem-cutter on the ground to recut all the stones that we wanted to use. We had been informed that there was no question of finding such skills locally. Gem-cutters therefore had to be brought in from Europe. So it was a matter of going out there to see what was available, choosing the stones that we needed for the crown, sending the gem-cutters out for however long was needed to do the work, making the crown in Paris without the stones (a task that seemed an impossibility), and finally sending out a team of jewelers to finish, mount, and assemble the crown, and set it with the stones which would never have left Iranian soil.”⁶

Twenty-four trips to Iran were needed to complete this imperial commission. The task was made all the more delicate by the fact that in March 1967 the court added a second commission, this time for the mounting of three parures, two in emeralds and diamonds and the third in diamonds, for the shah’s eldest daughter Princess Shahnaz and two of his sisters, Princess Shams and Princess Fatemeh.

On his first trip to the treasure vaults, Pierre Arpels chose the central stones around which the whole structure of the crown would be laid out: “A very large shell-shaped emerald, together with another even larger emerald, hexagonal and engraved, like the shell. These two gems together offered the advantage of being extraordinary in size. The hexagonal emerald weighed 150 carats, the shell-shaped stone between 50 and 60 carats. After working for three ten-hour days, we finally managed to assemble all the essential stones for the crown. We classified them by quality, and numbered them on the various plans and frameworks that we had made. We were still hamstrung by the veto on re-cutting or even retouching the principal gemstones. We set off back to Paris with plans and numbers, but without the stones, which stayed behind in the bank vaults.”⁷

On his second trip, in late January 1967, Pierre Arpels took with him not only a larger team but also 130 pounds (60 kilos) of equipment, including tools,

Opposite

The Shah of Iran, Crown Prince Reza, and Shahbanou Farah in front of the Nader Shah Throne,

which was created for Fath Ali Shah in the late eighteenth century.

wax blocks, and plaster. The structure of the entire surface of the crown was copied in two dimensions on blocks of black wax, which were spread out on a table in a secluded area of the Bank Markazi vault. "All the stones, now in small paper packets, were placed on the wax blocks in the positions they had been given on the crown."⁸

The next stage involved making 143 plaster molds of the precise dimensions of the principal stones, which would be used to make accurate metal models of them. The models would enable the Paris workshops to create the crown's metal armature to accommodate the actual shapes of the gems. The same procedure was then followed for the jewelry for the princesses. The emerald and diamond parures were to consist of a tiara, necklace, and ear pendants. The diamond parure was designed to display eleven large cushion-cut jonquil diamonds, set in a necklace and a pair of earrings.

In September 1967, a new complication emerged. The Iranian court had decided to complement the empress's crown with a matching necklace and earrings, using some of the large stones remaining in the imperial treasure. This final challenge was met in record time. Technically speaking, it was admittedly the simplest, as the collarette and earrings were chiefly a highly spectacular collage of stones and pearls of cyclopean proportions. The central emerald alone weighed over 200 carats. The dress the empress was to wear, she recalls, could not be like those of Western queens. On the other hand, Persian miniatures offered no alternative models of authentically Iranian inspiration. So it was decided that it should be white and simple. The most important consideration was that the robe and its train should conform to Iranian traditions. They were to be of green velvet, the color of the descendants of the Prophet. The designs were drawn up to court requirements by Marc Bohan of Dior, but the dresses and robes were cut, sewn, and embroidered in Tehran by Iranian dressmakers, who had to work on the huge tables of the Officers' Club as the train was so long.⁹

The ceremony, on October 26, 1967, was televised throughout the world. At dawn, the shah, his bride, and the crown prince left the Niavaran Palace, overlooking the city, to fly by helicopter to the Marble Palace, the former residence of Reza Shah in central Tehran. From there, they were to drive in a carriage procession to the Golestan Palace. The day before, the imperial throne had been transferred from the vaults of the Bank Markazi to the Great Hall of the Marble Palace. Instead of the traditional Peacock Throne, a vast affair of Mughal inspiration so tall that it had its own steps for the sovereign to climb up to it, the shah had chosen to use

Opposite

Princess Farahnaz, elder daughter of the imperial couple, at their coronation in 1967. She is surrounded by her aunts

and, on her left, her elder sister Princess Shahnaz, daughter of the shah and his first wife, Princess Fawzia of Egypt.

Following pages

Empress Farah at her coronation, about to receive from her husband the crown specially created for her by Van Cleef & Arpels









Above

The imperial coronation at the Golestan Palace, 1967

the more classic Naderi Throne, consisting of an imposing seat with backrest and arms and a low footrest. Composed of twelve detachable wooden panels, it was sheathed throughout in sheets of gold set with 26,733 rubies, diamonds, emeralds, and spinels. The nine principal engraved emeralds set into the backrest weighed between 150 and 200 carats.

The crown prince, then aged seven, was the first to enter the Great Hall, where he took his seat to the left of the Naderi Throne to await his parents. In the front row to the left, close to the empress's seat, sat Princess Shahnaz, Princess Farahnaz (then aged four), Princess Shams, and Princess Ashraf, with the other members of the imperial family behind them. "I came to kneel at the feet of the Shah," Empress Farah later remembered, "and when he placed the crown on my head, I felt as though he was crowning all the women of Iran." Until just four years earlier women had been viewed by the law on a par with the mentally disabled, and had not even had the right to vote. In the empress's view, the crown swept away centuries of humiliation, proclaiming more emphatically than any law that men and women were equal.¹⁰

**Above**

The empress's procession leaving the Golestan Palace after the ceremony

In 1977, the Iranian imperial treasury placed another commission with Van Cleef & Arpels, this time for a complete turquoise and diamond parure, consisting of a necklace, earrings, and a tiara. This set was joined by a second tiara designed to feature seven jonquil diamonds from the treasure, which would match the necklace and ear pendants created in 1967. "I believe I never wore the turquoises," the empress later remembered.¹¹ As for the tiara set with jonquil diamonds, she wore it only once, for an official portrait.

Two years later, the Islamic revolution swept away the Pahlavi dynasty. A section of the Iranian people had found themselves left behind by the country's prodigious advances, and was all the more strongly influenced by the religious extremists who could not forgive the shah for his reforms favoring women and the rural poor, which had deprived the clergy of a significant part of their income. The Savak, the hated secret police, were guilty of many excesses. The rise in petrol prices, largely initiated by the shah, had made him many enemies. And for two years, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had been fighting a secret battle with the cancer that would eventually kill him.



Farah Pahlavi's dream came to an end on the tarmac of Tehran airport on January 16, 1979, the day she left to go into exile. It was the end not just of the fairytale of a girl who had risen to become one of the most powerful women in the world that drew to an end that day, but also of a whole era, a period of relative openness not merely within Iran but also in the West and throughout the world. The forty years that followed were to see a rise in extremism of every kind.

From being courted and flattered for fifteen years by everyone who was anyone, the Pahlavis became pariahs. The American embassy in Tehran was stormed by the revolutionary forces and its staff were taken hostage. The American hostages were used as bargaining tools by the Iranian government in its attempts to secure the return of the shah and his wife. Negotiations stalled over points of procedure, and only a vigorous intervention with the American president by the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat—"I want the Shah now, and I want him alive"—enabled the couple to escape extradition to Tehran, and with it certain death by either hanging or stoning. The shah died of cancer in Cairo on July 27, 1980. The Egyptian people and government gave him a magnificent funeral. Farah never remarried.

She has now been in exile for over thirty years, and losses even more painful than that of the shah—the deaths of her younger daughter Leila on June 10, 2001, and her younger son Ali Reza in January 2011—have marked the life of the only crowned Empress of Iran with further tragedy.

She would like one day, perhaps, to return to Iran—however unrealistic that may seem today. She is still under sentence of death from the Iranian fundamentalists. But none of that has any great importance for her now, any more than the splendors of the past, which she now regards with a certain distance. She recalls that people have said all manner of things about her jewels, about the crown jewels, about the crown itself. She dismisses claims that she sold the crown to Saddam Hussein's wife as absurd, as anyone can see the crown in vitrine 35 of the National Jewelry Treasury in the Central Bank of the Republic of Iran. She took only some of her personal jewelry with her into exile. In her private capacity she owned only a single diamond and turquoise tiara, which she left behind in the safe in the apartments in the Niavarin Palace: "I remember very clearly saying to myself: I won't need it any more, in any case." She gave her pearl necklace to her secretary just before they left, as she thought she would need money after they had gone. The crown jewels stayed in the bank. The empress was not entitled to remove them

Opposite

Necklace set with turquoises and diamonds from the Iranian treasury, made by Van Cleef & Arpels for Shahbanou Farah in 1977

**Above**

The turquoise and diamond tiara created by Van Cleef & Arpels for the Iranian treasury in 1977. This tiara is different from the one in the shahbanou's personal jewels.

Opposite

The earrings that complete the set. All these pieces are preserved in National Jewelry Treasury in Tehran.







Opposite and above

Two designs for tiaras in diamonds and turquoises, and yellow and white diamonds.

Intended to be made using stones from the treasury, they were submitted to Empress Farah by Van Cleef & Arpels in the 1970s.

Both were made in 1977 and are now in the National Jewelry Treasury in Tehran Private collection.



Above

Mounting for the tiara in white and yellow diamonds created by Van Cleef & Arpels in 1927 for the Iranian imperial treasure. The large yellow

diamonds that were the principal stones could not leave Iran. They were set in the tiara after the mounting was delivered to Tehran. It is shown here set with imitation stones in their place.

from the vitrines or from the vaults. Whenever she wanted to wear them, she had to give notice to the authorities and the official receipt had to be authorized by seven different people.¹²

In a telephone conversations, Farah Pahlavi sometimes says that she has “lived for nearly two hundred years,” so rich has her life been in joys and tragedies. Strangely, her life mirrors the fate of the world’s most beautiful royal treasure, which slumbers still in the vaults of the Central Bank—a saga of splendor and strife, of revolutions and wars, and of fabled love stories.

**Above**

The imperial family in 1977: Princess Farahnaz, Prince Ali Reza, Shah Mohammad Reza, Empress Farah wearing the yellow diamond tiara, Crown Prince Reza, and Princess Leila.

Following pages

The imperial family at a reception at the Niavaran Palace. From left to right: Princess Shams, Shahbanou Farah, Shah Mohammad Reza, Queen Mother Tadj el Molouk.

Princess Shams is wearing a Dodecanese long necklace in gold, amethysts, brilliant-cut diamonds, and pearls, and a pair of Papirus earrings set with the same stones, all by Van Cleef & Arpels.







Above
The necklace of sapphires
and brilliant-cut diamonds
created by Van Cleef & Arpels

for Florence Jay Gould.
The central stone,
the Blue Princess, weighs
114 carats.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. Discovered in 2011, this treasure is currently being inventoried and is believed to be worth several billion dollars.
2. As related to the author by a friend of the Maharani of Baroda.
3. Inventory of the jewels of the Maharani of Baroda, Van Cleef & Arpels Archives.
4. These 1950 prices have been multiplied by a coefficient of 8.33 to give the dollar equivalent in 2012. This sum has then been converted into euros.
5. Interview with the author.
6. Louis Finot, *Les Lapidaires indiens*, Paris, Librairie Emile Buillon Editeur, 1896.
7. His aunt, Rajkumari Indira Devi (1892-1968) had been more or less forced to leave Baroda, after breaking off her engagement to the Maharaja of Gwalior without informing her parents and threatening to run away if she were not allowed to marry the Maharaja of Cooh Behar.
8. Louis Rousselet, *L'Inde des rajahs*, Paris, Hachette, 1875.
9. These diamonds and other historic treasures were still in the possession of the house of Baroda at the beginning of the twenty-first century, at the time of the death of Maharani Shanta Devi (1914-2002), first wife of Maharaja Pratap Singh.
10. José Luis de Vilallonga, interview, Paris, 1961.

11. Hugo Vickers (ed.), *Alexis, Memoirs of the Baron de Redé*, Wimborne Minster, Dovecote Press, 2005.
12. Vitold de Golish, *L'Inde impudique des maharajahs*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1973.
13. Crédit immobilier de Monaco, sale by auction of jewels and gemstones of exceptional quality, Saturday November 16, 1974.
14. Alexandre with Etienne de Monpezat, *Sous le casque d'Alexandre: 30 ans de coiffure*, Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1972.

CHAPTER II

1. It would appear that she reproached the duchess with shortening the life of her husband, who as George VI became a much-loved wartime monarch before dying in 1952 at the age of only fifty-seven. As Queen Mother she was to outlive her husband by half a century, dying at the age of 101.
2. The Duchess of Windsor was probably to exchange this necklace at Harry Winston for a large pear-shaped 48.95-carat emerald from the collections of King Alfonso XIII of Spain, lot 79 in the Jewels of the Duchess of Windsor sale, Sotheby's Geneva, April 2 and 3, 1987.
3. Catalog for the Jewels of the Duchess of Windsor sale, Sotheby's Geneva, April 2 and 3, 1987.
4. Hugo Vickers, *Behind Closed Doors: The Tragic, Untold Story of the Duchess of Windsor*, Hutchinson, New York, 2011.
5. Hugo Vickers, *The Oldie Literary Club*, June 7, 2011.
6. Lot 80 in the Jewels of the Duchess of Windsor sale, Sotheby's Geneva, April 2, 1987.
7. These two diamonds, plus two pear-shaped diamonds of the same color, were included in lot 90 of the Jewels of the Duchess of Windsor sale, April 2, 1987, Sotheby's Geneva.
8. Lot 128, Jewels of the Duchess of Windsor sale, Sotheby's Geneva, April 3, 1987.
9. *Fit for a Princess* sale, Sotheby's London, May 19, 2003.
10. Catalog for the furniture from Argenteuil sale, Sotheby's Amsterdam, September 22 and 23, 2003.
11. Alexandre with Etienne de Monpezat, *op. cit.*
12. This piece was among the jewels offered for sale to Sotheby's in 2006, for an auction that was canceled after protests from the people of Luxembourg. The current whereabouts of these jewels are unknown.

CHAPTER III

1. Joseph Sève (1788-1860), an officer in Napoleon's Grande Armée. Recruited into the Egyptian army, he became a generalissimo in 1833 and converted to Islam.
2. Born to Albanian parents in Kavala, Macedonia, in 1769, Muhammad or Mehmet A I became Viceroy of Egypt. His descendants—successively viceroys, khedives, sultans, and kings—ruled the country until the fall of King Farouk in 1952.
3. "Crown Prince" in Farsi.
4. Adel Sabet, *Farouk, un roi trahi*, Paris, Balland, 1990.
5. Mahmoud Fakhry Pasha was the son-in-law of King Fuad and husband of Princess Fawkia, the king's daughter by Princess Shwikar. He was to be ambassador to Paris for over twenty years and a minister.
6. Emine Foat Tugay, *Three Centuries: Family Chronicles of Turkey and Egypt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1963.
7. Adel Sabet, *op. cit.*
8. Opened in 1925 in what was formerly rue Soliman Pacha, now rue Talaat Harb, Groppi was the salon de thé in Cairo at this time, and was the official supplier of pâtisserie to the royal court.
9. Adel Sabet, *op. cit.*
10. *idem.*
11. Alexandre with Etienne de Monpezat, *op. cit.*
12. Richard Hornsby, "Obituary: Princess Faiza Rauf," *Independent*, July 16, 1994.
13. Robert Lacey, *Grace*, London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1994.
14. Peggy Kelly, interview with Gwen Robyns



Above

The necklace of sapphires and brilliant-cut diamonds created by Van Cleef & Arpels for Comtesse Guy du Boisrouvray.

The five sapphires together weigh nearly 130 carats. The central stone weighs 36 carats. The four others are from Kashmir, provenance of

the world's finest sapphires. The necklace was sold at Sotheby's New York with the rest of the Boisrouvray collection.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The world of jewelry is one of privacy and confidentiality; I am therefore all the more grateful to:

Her Imperial Majesty The Shahbanou of Iran;
His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco;
Her Highness Princess Nesrine Toussoun, to whom I am indebted for many photographs and mementoes of the Egyptian court;
all the members of the Arpels family, who have answered all my questions and to whom this book owes so much;
Florence Grinda, who shared with me her memories of the Maharani de Baroda;
Jean-Luc and Cyril Martin du Daffoy, for being faithful friends and for having accomplished a miracle;
Sophie Dufresne of Sotheby's, for her friendship and support;
Carine Decroi of Christie's, for the same reasons;
Messieurs Beaussant et Lefèvre for their assistance concerning the jewels of Princess Soraya;
and finally, all the many people who have preferred to remain anonymous.

Opposite

Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall, wife of Charles, Prince of Wales, wearing a

vintage Van Cleef & Arpels Ballerina brooch in gold, diamonds, rubies, and sapphires.

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Vincent Meylan writes the history and royalty pages for the French women's weekly Point de Vue. He is also a specialist in precious stones and high jewelry, and the author of several biographies and works on the history of precious stones, including Queens' Jewels and Boucheron: The Secret Archives. He has rare access to the secrets of the highly confidential world of 22 Place Vendôme, home to Van Cleef & Arpels.

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