



Sparkling stories

While Cartier, Bulgari, Harry Winston, Graff, Buccellati and Van Cleef & Arpels thrive on rich and colourful histories, each must stay relevant to ensure long and illustrious legacies live on. Jewellery journalist **Rachael Taylor** reports



A diamond is not just about aesthetic. The history locked in a stone, lain undisturbed for millions of years – while chaos and seismic change erupts on the surface – lends it a cool magic. And exactly the same allure is mastered by the world's most famous jewellery brands.

Bernard Arnault, French billionaire and chief executive of one of the world's most exclusive luxury conglomerate, LVMH, once said that "in the luxury business, you have to build on heritage".

CARTIER

In New York, Cartier's flagship store on Fifth Avenue is brimming with juicy narrative; the foremost being how Pierre Cartier, grandson to founder Louis-François Cartier, acquired the building in 1912. He fell in love with the neo-Renaissance-style mansion, which was, at the time, owned by financier Morton Plant. When Plant's wife, in turn, fell for a pricey Cartier natural pearl necklace, a deal was struck to swap the jewel, plus \$100, for the building.

Today, the store is a lesson in Cartier history. Salons are named after famous clients: Maisie Plant; the Grace Kelly bridal suite (after the starlet who accepted a Cartier engagement ring from Prince Rainier of Monaco in 1955); the masculine Gary Cooper watch hall that pays homage to the actor

whose contracts explicitly stated he would only wear his Cartier Tank watch on set; and a room emblazoned in Elizabeth Taylor photographs flaunting multiple Cartier purchases.

Also celebrated, is Cartier's design prowess. Its famous Panthère motif is honoured in lacquer, and one room exhibits the famous Romanov bracelet – by iconic designer Jeanne Toussaint – featuring a 197.8ct sapphire that once belonged to Tsarina Maria Feodorovna, mother of the last Tsar of Russia. (cartier.com)

HARRY WINSTON

The King of Diamonds, as Harry Winston is known, made his first gem deal at the age of 12. Looking through a tray of junk, Winston spotted a 2ct emerald. He casually handed over 25¢ and sold it two days later for \$800 (in 1908).

Winston started his eponymous brand in 1932 and

over the years, he acquired some of the world's most spectacular diamonds. His insurance company refused to insure the 726ct rough Jonker diamond, that he had cleaved into 12 separate stones – the largest of which was a 125.35ct emerald cut.

Then there was the Hope Diamond, an extraordinary 45.52ct deep blue diamond that some believe carries a curse (it is said to have been stolen from a sacred temple in Golconda, India). After passing through the hands of French and English royalty in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was bought in 1911 by superstitious socialite Evelyn Walsh McLean, before being bought on her death by Harry

Winston in 1949. After taking it on tour as part of his philanthropic travelling gemstone exhibition *The Court of Jewels* to raise funds for local charities, Winston donated this historic gem to The Smithsonian – simply posting it to the museum in the mail. (harrywinston.com)

Left: Cartier Magicien Magie Blanche necklace Above: Harry Winston diamond rings Below: Cartier New York Below right: Van Cleef & Arpels Colombe Mysterieuse brooch

VAN CLEEF & ARPELS

Parisian jeweller Van Cleef & Arpels was born out of a romance, when Estelle Arpels, daughter of a gem dealer, married Alfred Cleef, the son of a lapidary and diamond broker towards the end of the 19th century. Together, along with Van Cleef's brothers, they would create a world of fantasy and intrigue to complement the sweetest of fairytale moments.

One of Van Cleef & Arpel's most enduring motifs, first introduced in the 1940s, are its ballerinas and fairies, which can be found dancing on brooches. ➤





Craftsmanship is also at the heart of the brand's heritage and in 1933, its setters invented the Mystery setting, which allows gems to be secured in gold rails so that no metal is visible from above.

One of Van Cleef & Arpels' more wearable icons is the Alhambra collection, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, with precious cuts of gems like mother-of-pearl or onyx in the shape of four-leaf clovers, designed to bring luck.

For something with even more history, make an appointment to view the Heritage Collection of jewels once owned by famous names, including American socialites Brooke Astor and Barbara Hutton. Only five Van Cleef & Arpels stores in the world carry this collection, one of which is the ION Orchard boutique in Singapore. (vancleefarpels.com)

GRAFF

Another master of diamonds is Laurence Graff of British diamond house Graff. Though he is now more at home courting royals and bidding on the world's most famous diamonds – like the 1,109ct Lesedi La Rona (the world's largest rough diamond bought for \$53m in September 2017) – his beginnings were humble.

Graff masterminded his own rise from a tough working-class background in East London, learning the jewellery trade as an apprentice in Hatton Garden, before studying at what is now



the world-famous Central Saint Martins art school and setting up his own business.

His diamond purchases are the stuff of legend, and have earned him the moniker 'King of Bling'. The title was immortalised by a 1970 marketing campaign 'Hair & Jewel' in which he decorated a model's hair with more than \$1 million of gemstones. The iconic image was recreated in 2013 to celebrate Graff's 60th year in the industry – this time with \$500 million of jewels.

The cool-headed Graff has expanded his empire over the years, and now has rare diamonds around the world in stores across Asia, North America, Australia, Europe, South Africa and the Middle East. The latest offering is on the Place Vendôme in Paris, the spiritual heartland of haute joaillerie. The boutique is pure Parisian style, with its interiors a verdant blend of French limestone, grey damier floors, floor-to-ceiling mirrors and pale-green gaufraged velvet walls.

(graffdiamonds.com)

Left: Graff Eternal Twin earrings Right: Bulgari's necklace from the Festa collection celebrates the olive harvest Below: The prestigious Milan Buccellati flagship store

BULGARI

Since 1884, Italian jeweller Bulgari has been carving out a colourful history for itself. Aside from the famous chromatic jewels, set with trademark smooth, glossy cabochon gemstones, the brand is the diva of fine jewellery: playful, flashy and extravagant. As such, it has attracted synonymous clientele over the years – including Elizabeth Taylor, Gina Lollobrigida, Ingrid Bergman and Anita Ekberg. It also boasts relationships with stars of today, dressing Alicia Vikander, Bella Hadid and Naomi Campbell for red carpet events.

Men too have fallen under the spell of Bulgari, including artist Andy Warhol who offered to exchange paintings for the brand's jewels. Nicola Bulgari refused – a moment he later described as "the worst deal of my life".

The most famous symbol

to emerge from the house is Serpenti, a coiling serpent motif that wraps around the arm, its bejewelled head opening to reveal a watch dial. Its newest offering, Festa, is just as playful – a celebratory collection filled with precious balloons, cupcakes, lollipops and ice creams. To enter into the real Italian feste spirit, these jewels are best viewed at Bulgari's Milan flagship, which was painstakingly restored in 2014 to mark the brand's 130th anniversary. The marble temple includes a reinstated secret entrance for VIPs, which has been closed for decades – but once ushered in Elizabeth Taylor & Co. (bulgari.com)

BUCCELLATI

Italians are famed for their skill with gold, and Buccellati has been highlighting the best of its country's heritage since 1919, when Mario Buccellati opened his first jewellery boutique on Largo Santa Margherita in Milan. Current head of the family, Gianmaria Buccellati, describes techniques used to create its textured gold designs as "borrowed from five centuries of Italian art".

The Buccellati family archives are packed with creative gold jewels, decorated with pearls, diamonds and colourful gems. The majority of the business was sold to a Chinese investor in 2016 – which led to the opening of its first store in Shanghai's Plaza 66. (buccellati.com) ■

