



FELINE *FORCE*

*The evolution of Cartier's fascination
with the big cat, specifically through
the Panthère watch collection*

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ore than half a century ago, at a soiree, the Duchess of Windsor put her most stylish foot forward. Wallis Simpson's love for precious jewellery was no secret. From diamond-dripping neckpieces to emerald and ruby-studded bracelets, she had donned high jewellery on several occasions. But, what set the press agog during this appearance was unique. A feline figure in gold with black enamel spots, perched atop

a 116.74-carat emerald, sat magnificently as a brooch on her lapel. And, a year later, the royal fashion icon was spotted with a second "big cat" brooch, this time with diamond and sapphire spots, seated on a 152.35-carat cabochon sapphire. The panther craze had been officially unleashed, thanks to the French jewellery maison, Cartier.

According to some heritage experts, animal figurines in jewellery prior to the 1940s was mainly a preserve of actresses and wealthy escorts. But, they soon became a symbol of post-war emancipation of women, with freedom of expression being the new protocol. However, Cartier's tryst with the elusive cat dates back to almost a century ago, when it first made an appearance in 'Lady with a Panther', by French illustrator George Barbier. In a typical Art Deco style, the picture depicted a woman in jewels with a black panther at her feet, seated between two columns. "Louis Cartier liked the image so much that he soon commissioned it

to be used for advertising for the brand," says Pierre Rainero, image, style and heritage director at Cartier.

This set the ball rolling for bold creations from the maison; it crafted the first "spotted" bracelet watch in platinum with a round case in 1914. Replete with rose-cut diamonds and onyx, even though it was intended to tell the time, the larger acceptance as a jewelled accessory outweighed the purpose. It inspired a pendant watch a year later with the same 'peau de panthère' or 'panther-skin' decoration, using onyx motifs on a diamond-paved surface. Thus began Cartier's saga with high jewellery inspired by the wild cat, which surged under the leadership of Jeanne Toussaint, who took over as the creative director in 1933 and was at the helm for almost four decades. She ditched the Art Deco designs for figurative and playful forms, including flamingoes, parrots and ladybugs, which adorned brooches, hair clips, pendants, earrings and bracelets.

Though jewelled panther creations were on an all-time high, it wasn't until the 1980s that Cartier dedicated a watch collection to the exotic feline. "Originally introduced in 1983, the Panthère de Cartier collection was the ultimate representative of the signature panther motif," says Rainero. Crafted in 18-carat yellow gold, the unisex watch came in a square Santos-like case with screws on the bezel, black Roman numerals, and a tiny Cartier logo embossed on the X digit—to distinguish it from counterfeits. "Panthère de Cartier became an icon and a quintessential watch of that decade. It graced the wrist of singer Tina Turner and its popularity soared when actor Pierce Brosnan wore one as the charming private eye,



*CARTIER CRAFTED THE FIRST
"PANTHER MOTIF" BRACELET
WATCH IN PLATINUM WITH
A ROUND CASE IN 1914*



*Ronde de Cartier watch
uses flame gold technique
to create the panther
design on the dial*



Cartier introduced the Panthère Royale at SIHH this year



Film director Sofia Coppola features in the brand's new online campaign

Remington Steele, in the cult television series," says Rainero.

The watch was also distinguished by an octagonal crown with a blue sapphire, a Cartier trademark, and was powered by a quartz movement. It had a successful run and was in production till the early 2000s. And, this year, the brand relaunched the line at SIHH, leaving the wearer spoilt for choice with 17 variations. "It is a tribute to the unrivalled attitude of the Panther, which has been Cartier's most long-standing muse," he says. The new Panthère de Cartier collection's price ranges between \$4,000 and \$140,000. "It is instantly recognisable with its strong watchmaking codes and innovative design. With its Santos-like shape and link bracelet, it boasts a timeless style and we had repeated inquiries even after its discontinuation," he says.

The new watches are being targeted specifically at the fairer sex. According to Rainero, "The decision to relaunch Panthère de Cartier stems from a desire to see the icon being worn again by the women of today. The aesthetics resonate with her fierce attitude, strong sense of individuality, sophistication and elegance." Cartier's recent online relaunch campaign features the award-winning director Sofia Coppola, best known for the 2003 drama, *Lost in Translation*.



The new Panthère de Cartier watch

Cartier has also expanded its high-jewellery portfolio with the playful Panthère Royale watch, one of the biggest novelties this year. The 36mm piece is presented on a grey leather strap and is inspired by the Duchess of Windsor's sapphire brooch, created in 1949. According to Guillaume Alix, regional managing director, Cartier Middle East, India and Africa, the company has always been inspired by vintage designs. "Cartier has been a jeweller to kings and maharajas and the great pieces of yesteryear still serve as inspiration for the brand," he says.

The case is constructed entirely in white gold and is fully diamond-paved. The panther sculpture sits atop a round mini-dial, in a relaxed posture, with its head in the opposite direction. It is studded with diamonds and black lacquer to replicate the spots. Despite the complexity of forms and proportions, the work of the jeweller seduces with astonishing delicacy. "We aim to have timeless designs and our products are definitely not fashion driven. For example, the Tutti Frutti style created in the 1920s is still quite contemporary. Today's creations are tomorrow's treasure," he says.

Another notable timepiece celebrating the fierce cat is the Panthère Joueuse, driven by the Calibre 9918 MC. Here, the feline appears to mischievously pounce



Cartier Panthère Joueuse

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on a solitary diamond. The mechanical movement rotates with the body of the panther to bring this miniature automaton to life. The minutes are indicated by the head and paw of the figure, while the hours are marked by the diamond ball. Exhibiting exquisite craftsmanship in a display of diamonds, black lacquer and

emeralds, the 40mm piece is also a technical beauty. "Cartier has always been the manufacturer of uniquely-shaped watches, so the aesthetics are important and the movements have to serve the design. Technique is at the service of artistic expression and this is reflected in our watchmaking," says Alix. ○