

The luxury jewelry house, Van Cleef & Arpels, invited its preferred customers along with the international media to discover its new collection "Treasure of Rubies" from March 13-15, 2019. This very exclusive event was held at the Peninsula Hotel in Bangkok, overlooking the Chao Phraya River. All but one of the 60 exceptional pieces unveiled for the occasion were sold during the first two days of the three-day event.

*By Marie Chabrol*

## Ruby, a Favorite *Pierre de Caractère*™

In 2006, for the celebration of its centenary, the French high jewelry house invited connoisseurs to discover a collection called *Pierre de Caractère*™, unveiling rare and exceptional gems that sometimes required many years to source. “Each stone has its own soul,” Claude Arpels liked to say. In keeping with this mantra, Van Cleef & Arpels seeks out some of the most beautiful gems in the world. While some can be used quickly, others wait patiently in the brand’s vaults for their time.

In 2016, the house displayed the collection *Emeraude en Majesté*, featuring jewelry set with emeralds from various origins such as Colombia, Afghanistan and Zambia. It took ten years to find the top-quality gems and then create the collection, with matching pairs taking several years to complete. Now, the house honors the *ruby* and offers more than 3000 carats of the highest quality and dazzling red gem.

The love story with this most precious corundum is not recent, but rather goes back to the company’s formation in 1896, and its establishment on the Place Vendôme in 1906.

In 1982, Jacques Arpels declared that the ruby is his favorite stone, and when delving into the brand’s archives, we realize that most of VCA’s technical innovations have been made around rubies. As an example, we cite the *Serti Mystérieux*™ (*Mystery Setting*) that was patented in 1934 by Van Cleef & Arpels. It was conceptualized in 1904 by Joseph Chaumet and then developed by Alfred Langlois (the exclusive VCA outside manufacturer before becoming the in-house workshop).

Among the magnificent examples of older pieces, we must mention the *Peony* brooch made in 1937 for Princess Faiza of Egypt. Composed of two peonies in a *Mystery Setting* of ruby in gold and platinum, accented by diamonds, the flowers form two distinct jewels. Currently, one of these jewels is in Van Cleef & Arpels’ own collection, while the second has yet to resurface. Manufacturing a brooch requires several hundred hours of work, which explains why the house does not produce a large quantity. In addition to the necessary *savoir-faire*, it also needs the stones. Ruby is one of the hardest stones to source and VCA only selects gems with ideal saturation and a minimum of inclusions.

The beautiful red stone is one of the stylistic signatures of Van Cleef & Arpels, as exemplified in the 1939 drawing by René-Sim Lacaze with the unforgettable setting featuring rubies. There is also the iconic clip made for Maria Calas with five Burmese rubies, totally 15.77 carats.

More recently, we must note the *Vermillion* earrings made in gold set with diamonds and Tanzanian rubies—13.83 and 13.33 carats. Now in a private collection, this piece dazzled visitors at the Biennale des Antiquaires in 2012. Today, with its offering of 60 new pieces featuring extraordinary rubies, the house affirms that it is not resting on its laurels.



Left to right: Claude, Jacques and Pierre Arpels in 1975.

*Peony* clip, 1937. In platinum, gold, mystery-set rubies, oval-cut rubies, diamonds. Formerly in the collection of Princess Faiza of Egypt, now Van Cleef & Arpels Collection.

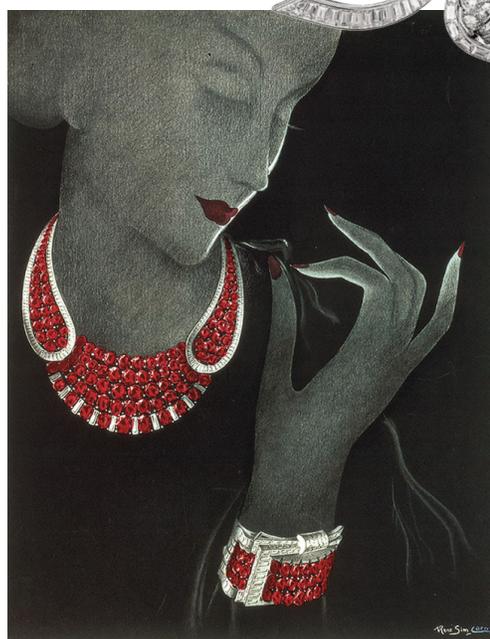
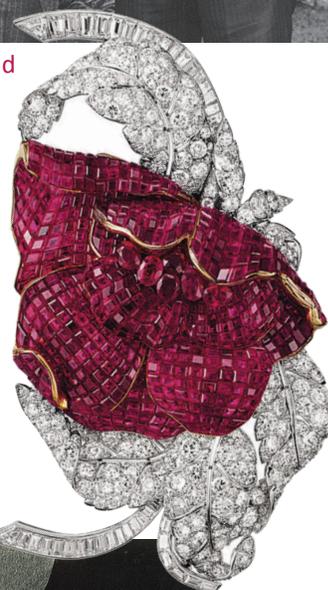


Illustration of a ruby necklace and bracelet by René-Sim Lacaze, 1939.

Opposite page: *Jardin de Rubis* necklace with detachable clip, featuring an impressive 18.12-ct natural ruby.



*Rivières necklace featuring 43.70 cts of magnificent rubies.*



*Five-leaf clip, 1967. Platinum, rubies, diamonds. Formerly in the collection of the singer Maria Callas, now Van Cleef & Arpels Collection.*

## Treasure of Rubies

“The rubies are selected by Van Cleef & Arpels for the beauty of their color and their deep inner glow. These characteristics bring a flicker of life to the interior of a stone, endowing it with a unique personality and charm. The incandescent vivacity of rubies—ranging from pinkish to dark red—and their rarity make them exceptional gems among all precious stones,” explains the Resident Gem Expert at Van Cleef & Arpels.

While the brand regularly acquires stones for its inventory and future collections, some stones are harder to find than others. Nicolas Bos, CEO, recently confided to the French newspaper *Le Figaro* that while “the house likes exercises of style, I was not very confident” to find enough gems because sourcing rubies is extremely complicated as there is a lack of high-quality gems available. So, how did VCA achieve this exceptional *tour de force*? A decade was needed to collect all the stones, some of which, like the unheated 25+-carat Burmese ruby in the transformable necklace *Rubis Flamboyant* came from private collections. This stone, in particular, was owned by a family of merchants who kept the 50-carat rough as a treasure. When they decided to sell it, they approached only VCA, which acquired it and then faceted the red treasure into a cushion shape. Described as *perfect* by the brand’s experts, it was unveiled for the first time at the Bangkok event.

With its choice of ruby, Van Cleef & Arpels has been able to offer its iconic, classic and timeless designs. Everything was done to enhance the beauty of the gems that were patiently selected for the collection: mystery settings, cascades of colorless diamonds, sometimes the discreet presence of pink diamonds as in the *Jardin de Rubis* necklace, whose 18.12-carat center stone is particularly remarkable. Subtle pink under a white light, it becomes intensely red in the daylight, reminiscent of the atypical hue of a spinel.



*Zita ring in white and yellow gold, featuring rubies (3.81-ct center stone) and a 3.01-ct DVVS1 diamond.*



*Feuille de Rubis ring in white and yellow gold, featuring rubies and a 9.05-ct DIF Type IIA diamond.*



The *Rubis Flamboyant* transformable necklace features a rare 25+-ct unheated Burma ruby. Right: A close-up view of this impressive gemstone.



*Eventail Souverain* bracelet with 33.05 cts of perfect rubies. On the picture below, the 13 gemstones that compose this amazing jewel.



*Maha* ring in white and yellow gold, featuring rubies and a 8.03-ct DFL pear-cut diamond.

In some examples, the rubies are more discreet and enhance the diamonds selected for their remarkable inner quality. In this regard, the rings *Feuille de Rubis*, *Zita* and *Maha*, feature 9.05-carat DIF Type IIA, 3.01-carat DVVS1 (and a 3.81-carat ruby), and one 8.03-carat pear-shaped DFL diamond.

Among the major pieces, we must mention the *Rivières* necklace, set with 28 rubies, totaling 43.70 carats, which are all remarkably matched. There is also the daring design of the *Eventail Souverain* bracelet with 13 bright rubies (totaling 35.05 carats), suggesting that this number, sometimes considered unlucky in Europe, is not in Asia. These two pieces present stones with ideal saturation and prove that Nature always makes things right.

With this collection, the brand shows its passion for ruby. And, the selection of Bangkok for the event was not by chance. The capital of Thailand is an important trading center for gems and a key hub for the sapphire and ruby trade. To this is added a cultural specificity—the red color is venerated in Asia where it symbolizes luck and fidelity. Like jade, the ruby is extremely popular with Asian customers who are particularly aware of the gem's rarity. Bangkok was thus an excellent choice for the presentation of this collection, which showcases the living passion of Van Cleef & Arpels.

All photos are courtesy of Van Cleef & Arpels. ■