

Et Pour Monsieur?

Van Cleef & Arpels caters for the gentleman with understated aplomb

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This spring, Van Cleef & Arpels unveiled a little something for monsieur. It was not a novel line of cufflinks or pinky-finger rings, but three new gentlemen's watches. Though it might seem unexpected coming from this bastion of *haute joaillerie*, Van Cleef & Arpels has been involved in watchmaking for close to 100 years. Any remaining doubters of the marque's horological reputation should finally be silenced by this robust collection of 'jewels that tell the time'.



(Left) The latest PA 49 model in steel, which still bears Pierre Arpels' classic 1949 lug design and graceful Roman numerals (quartz, £925; mechanical, JLC 899 movement, £1,200). Its ultra-thin profile contrasts with the Monsieur Arpels collection's heavy-set machismo.

(Centre) The Monsieur Arpels Dual Time (£5,150), with home time displayed on the subdial at 6 o'clock. The largest subdial displays the power reserve with an unusual triangular hand arrangement. A yellow gold variant is also available at £10,500.

(Right) The Dual Time's caseback features a 'generational calendar', which lasts 88 years, from 2004 to 2092. However, one can request Van Cleef & Arpels engrave the calendar to begin with the year of your choice.

It would be fair to say that Van Cleef & Arpels has not been widely known for its men's watches, yet universally applauded for their ladies' timepieces. As far back as 1918, at their Place Vendôme atelier, Estelle Arpels and Alfred van Cleef were creating chatelaines for waist-worn timepieces. A mere two years later, they produced their first wrist-mounted models date from 1920. The fact the jewellery house chose not to call its horological creations anything as vulgar as 'watches', rather 'jewels that tell the time', may have caused some confusion; but then again, these glittering creations were first and foremost ladies' gem-set bracelets, with the added bonus of telling the time.

But then came the PA 49 – designed in 1949 by second-generation scion, Pierre Arpels, hence the model's rather utilitarian name. This ultra-thin dress watch was originally created for Arpels himself, but as fortune would have it, everyone with a more than a few *sous* rattling around in his bank account wanted one. Thus, the Van Cleef & Arpels PA 49 was produced for sale, since becoming a 'timeless classic'.

Until now, this sober design, marked by its central hinged lugs, was the only men's watch at Van Cleef,

albeit with a few variations. In keeping with this tradition, the newest PA 49 comes in a 35 mm case with an automatic movement, and those instantly recognisable elongated Roman numerals.

At our meeting in the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) in Geneva this April, Philippe Belais, Director of the firm concedes: "We have made a few watches in the last 55 years," referring to the limited role of male horology at Van Cleef. Wasting no time in making amends, he places before me a plushly upholstered jeweller's tray and proudly introduces me to the "triumvirate of Monsieur Arpels watches" – the Alarm, Dual Time and Chronograph models. Three handsome, robust, yet classical, functional watches housed in large 39 mm diameter cases, faithful to the spirit of the PA 49's creator.

Eye catchers

Although the new watches follow the design cues of the PA 49, the change is dramatic. Unlike their predecessors, these watches are no longer *ultra-plat* time servants destined to remain discreetly under the cuff. These watches have a strong presence. Their bold size, handsome looks and, most importantly, usefulness all add up to a collection with practical and manly credentials that are proud to be on show.

With gentlemen catered for so handsomely *chez VCA*, its Harrods boutique and soon-to-open Bond Street outlet may well earn a deserved place on the London horological circuit.

These watches update the unique PA 49 fastening system between case and strap, yet maintain the trademark, refined Roman numerals and elegant, white-lacquered dial. In a distinctive 'doucine' shape, inspired by classical French architecture, warm double-curved bezels complete the picture.

Beauty is more than skin-deep in this case, though. To prove it, Van Cleef & Arpels has chosen to display the watches' inner selves – the miniature mechanics hard at work beneath the graceful sweep of hands. The result is rather like peering through the kitchen window of a stately home and catching a glimpse of the well-oiled labour toiling within. In creating this slice of voyeurism however, Van Cleef has not followed the crowd. While movements are more commonly viewed through an opening in the dial or a glass caseback, a horizontal opening in the side of both the Alarm and Dual Time's case offers an intriguing perspective on the mechanical worlds within. Another house adopting a similar approach is De Grisogono, whose watches also feature windows in this position.

Rise and shine

The charming buzz of the Monsieur Arpels Alarm function is achieved with a tuning fork mechanism,

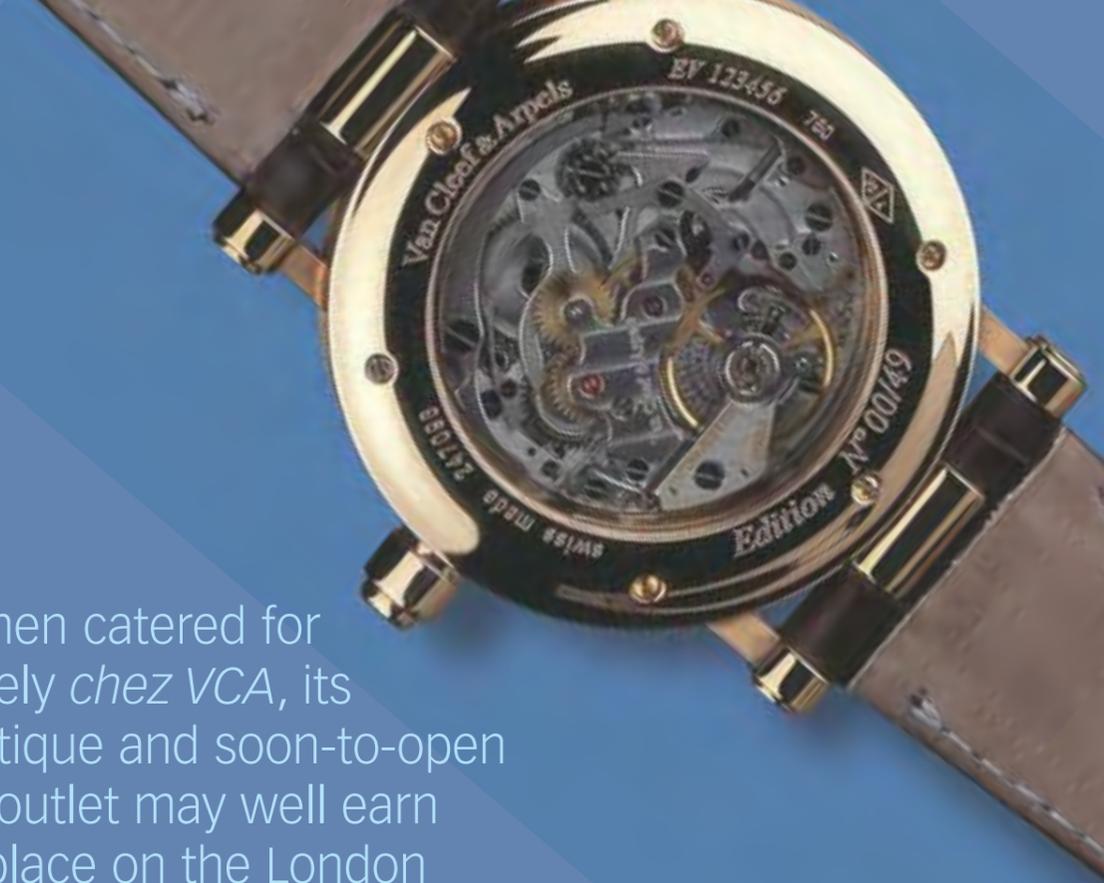
amplified through a vibrating caseback. Its effective yet unique tone is a far cry from the impersonal beeps of electronic alarms and allows the wearer to take a comfortingly familiar sound on their travels.

Gentlemen need not worry about setting their *reveille* unassisted, as the alarm is easily adjusted by moving the clear red arrow indicator on the dial. A mother-of-pearl inner disc offers a world time function for 24 cities – should monsieur have offices around the world. Two windows on either side of the case offer a glimpse of the movement, which – like the former PA 49 models – come courtesy of Jaeger-LeCoultre; in this case, an automatic JLC 918 calibre with 44-hour power reserve.

Multi-faceted

The Dual Time, or *Double Fuseau* is a very complete and ambitious timepiece. The three interlocking subdials pack in a second time-zone, a date disc and 40-hour power-reserve indicator. This elegant arrangement of dials reflects the position of the movement's whirring wheels within, and the power reserve's triangular 'hand' echoes the shape of the mechanical components of this particular function. A third crown at 10 o'clock makes setting the date a simple task.

Unlike the Alarm and Dual Time models, which offer a tantalising glimpse of their movements through a small window on the side of their cases, the Chronograph has a more conventional sapphire glass caseback, revealing the VCA (M47) movement in all its splendour.



(Left) The Monsieur Arpels Chronograph monopusher watch is limited to just 49 pieces, all encased in pink gold (£13,500).

(Right) Van Cleef & Arpels' new Monsieur Arpels Alarm in yellow gold (£9,650). A steel version is available too (£4,150). Based on the Jaeger-LeCoultre JLC 918 movement (visible through the side-window at 3 o'clock), this model features world time and alarm functions.



On this watch, every element has to prove its worth. Even the back of the watch features an 88-year 'generational' calendar, designed to see the majority of us through our days. Furthermore, the calendar can be customised to start on any date one desires, to commemorate a special event for example, so making it an 'inter-generational' watch. In this model, an opening in the side of the case at 9 o'clock reveals the Jaeger-LeCoultre 939 automatic movement.

Exclusive elegance

The single-button chronograph is an elegant interpretation of the most *sportif* of the three models. Despite this chronograph's functional nature, its styling and indulgent choice of metal suggests that it might be more at home behind the wheel of a vintage automobile than on a jogger's wrist. Reserved for the few, this pink-gold chronograph has been produced in a limited edition of 49 pieces, commemorating the year of the marque's first male

watch. Its luxurious, yet restrained design achieves an uncluttered look, with the seconds counter at 9 o'clock and 30-minute counter at 3 o'clock. A tachometer function is discreetly positioned on the outer edge of the dial. Turn the watch over and the resplendent manual winding VCA (M47) movement can be observed through the sapphire crystal back – a less intriguing but more instantly gratifying insight than that offered by the side window.

With this freshly minted trio of timepieces, Van Cleef & Arpels – a house whose priority has always been the aesthetic – is showing that watches can be both functional in a day-to-day manner, as well as refined. With gentlemen catered for so handsomely *chez VCA*, its Harrods boutique and soon-to-open Bond Street outlet may well earn a deserved place on the London horological circuit – *de rigueur* stops for those seeking a watch that is a gem in more ways than one. ●

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