

1. Perlée Secret Pendant Watch,
VAN CLEEF & ARPELS

CAN YOU KEEP A Secret?

Did you know that during the early 20th Century, it was considered a *social faux pas* for a lady to check the time in public? This *societal convention* ushered in the era of the *hidden watch*: timepieces designed as high jewellery pieces whose purpose was to conceal the face of father time. *L'Officiel Austria* on the long-awaited comeback of a true legend: the secret watch.

By ANNA ZNAMENSKY

Image provided by © Van Cleef & Arpels



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While the exact origin of the “secret” or “hidden” watch is unclear, it is said to be derived from the notion that it was rude for a lady to look at the time while in public as this would allude to the fact that she may find herself to be in dull company.

It was during the roaring twenties that the first secret watches began making their debuts on women’s wrists. Fast forward to the present day, and we find that, much to our delight, these truly hidden treasures are making quite the comeback within the collections of the world’s greatest high jewellery Maison’s: amongst them at Chanel, Van Cleef & Arpels and Harry Winston.

However, many other high jewellery houses have produced breathtaking secret watches over the decades and hidden them deep within their archives, such as Audemars Piguet, for example. Having been fortunate enough to visit the Musée Atelier Audemars Piguet in le Brassus quite recently, one particular hidden watch that was exhibited there, belonging to the brand’s Heritage Collection, caught my eye. A stunning, filigree, hidden watch housed in a platinum case and set with 261 brilliant cut diamonds, 12 leaf cut rubies, 35 baguette cut emeralds, 16 princess cut diamonds, and one marquise cut diamond by none other than American master jeweller Oscar Heyman. Its Caliber 8RP 15/12 movement was produced by Audemars Piguet in 1920. The watch was sold in 1921 to a client of Oscar Heyman’s and re-acquired by Audemars Piguet for its Heritage Collection exhibit.

From one American master jeweller to the next: Harry Winston, who founded his two eponymous brands in 1932, is renowned not only for their secret watches, pendants, necklaces and brooches but also for his signature Art Deco style that 3 proposed novel ways of wearing time. This year, as part of the brand’s “My Precious Time” high jewellery collection, and sparking with the intensity of 368 diamonds, we find that by pressing on a marquise-cut diamond just below the large cushion-cut diamond, an octagonal-shaped secret watch emerges, released by a trigger. In keeping with its identity as a secret watch, the case back is camouflaged in brilliant-cut, baguette-cut and marquise-cut diamonds.

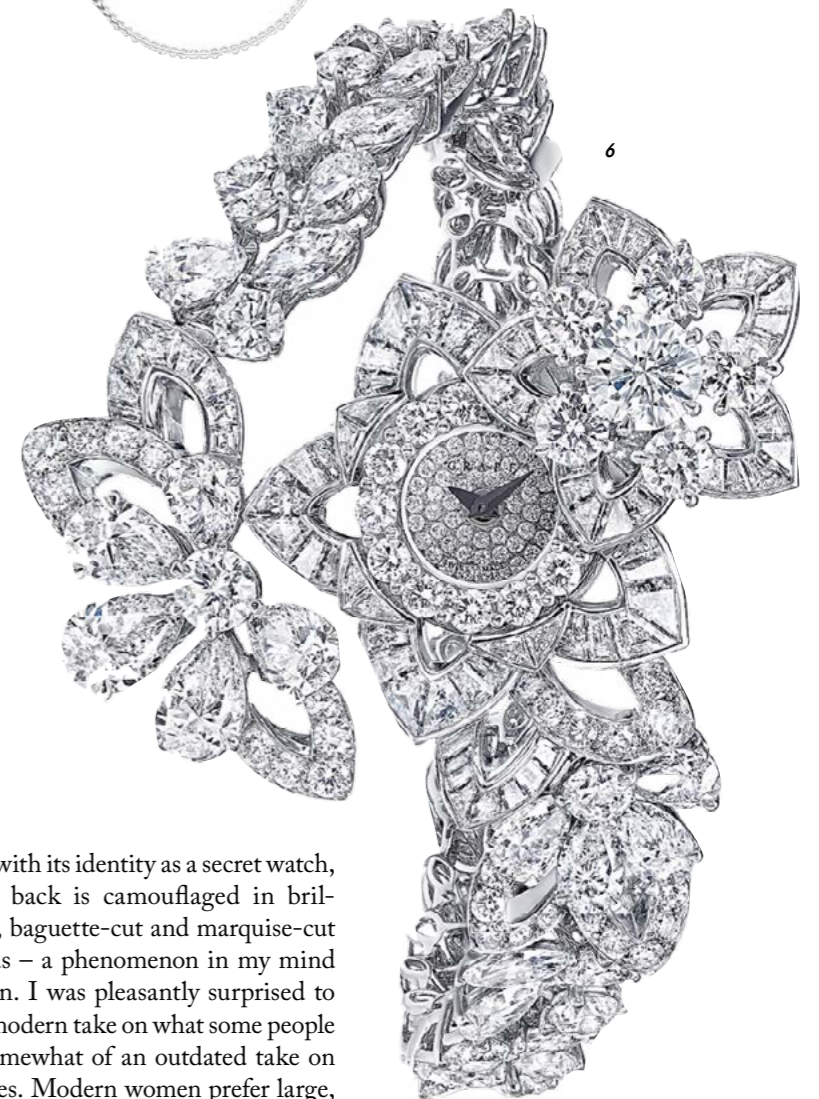
Images provided by: Left page, 2, & 3. © Chanel. Right page, 4, & 5. © Harry Winston, 6. © Graff Diamonds



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Within the 2019 archives of Graff Diamonds, a British high jewellery house that, throughout its rich history, has become the world leader for diamonds of rarity, magnitude and distinction, we present enchanting, secret diamond watch timepieces from the “The Peony Collection”. During a visit to Asia, Mr Graff repeatedly encountered the peony flower in ancient paintings engraved in antiquities and referenced throughout modern culture. A vibrant and dramatic bloom juxtaposed with delicate petals, the “King of Flowers” captivated Mr Graff. Featuring a Peony motif, the secret watch celebrates the romantic allure of this iconic bloom, with custom-cut diamonds set to mimic the lustrous petals of this iconic flower.

Discovering Chanel’s Mademoiselle Privé Bouton Lion range of secret watches at this year’s “Watches and Wonders” in 5 watches as opposition to dainty, filigree models (note that Rolex discontinued making 26 mm sized watches some years ago altogether – a clear indicator of where watch trends are heading when it comes to size). Chanel quite aptly solved the size six problem: while the watch itself is dainty, it is covered with an 18K yellow gold sculpted Geneva, which was what first put the wheels on the past and future of the secret watch nal-shaped secret watch emerges, released by a trigger. In

keeping with its identity as a secret watch, the case back is camouflaged in brilliant-cut, baguette-cut and marquise-cut diamonds – a phenomenon in my mind in motion. I was pleasantly surprised to see this modern take on what some people feel is somewhat of an outdated take on timepieces. Modern women prefer large, masculine watches to dainty, filigree models (note that Rolex discontinued making 26 mm sized watches some years ago – a clear indicator of where watch trends are heading regarding size). Chanel quite aptly solved the size six problem: while the watch itself is dainty, it is covered

2. & 3. Mademoiselle Privé Manchette Bouton, CHANEL
4. Pendant, HARRY WINSTON
5. My Precious Time high jewellery brooch, HARRY WINSTON
6. Peony diamond secret watch, GRAFF DIAMONDS



7. HPI00604 secret watch bracelet, **CARTIER**
 8. HPI00917 secret watch bracelet, **CARTIER**
 9. HPI01320 Desert Rose secret watch, **CARTIER**
 10. Caméléon secret watch, **CARTIER**

quartz and kite-shaped diamonds to the “Caméléon” secret watch made from white gold, one 16.18-carat roundshaped faceted green tourmaline, and cabochon-cut tourmalines, turquoise, onyx, triangular-shaped emerald, briolette-cut sapphire crystal, brilliant-cut diamonds with a quartz movement – Cartier has many a secret treasure buried amongst years of artisan creations.

Surprisingly, Omega, too, offers quite the arsenal of vintage secret watch creations that are to be found deep within its archives. Recently sighted during an exhibition in London as part of the launch of Omega’s new Seamaster models, Omega’s secret watch models date back to 1956 – as does the model created for the Montres et Bijoux Catalogue exhibition and designed by Jean Hauck of Geneva, featuring 21 triangular orange baguette cut topazes arranged in a fan shape. Thirty-one brilliant cut diamonds adorn the lid and the loop. Also, from the archives, the Omega “Moldavita”, created in 1964, is not a secret watch per se, as the watch is integrated into the side of the jewellery piece and yet no less captivating. This representative watch was designed for the World’s Fair in New York and combines a rare gem-quality moldavite formed by a meteorite impact with the smallest automatic movement of the time, made in 18-carat yellow gold and platinum.

an 18K yellow gold sculpted lion set with 252 brilliant-cut diamonds, eyes set with onyx and black-lacquered nose and ears and placed on a large, titanium cuff with black coating.

A number of dazzling, unique secret watch pieces can be found within the archives of Cartier, each with different coloured gemstones as its centrepiece, picked for your viewing pleasure. From a one 8.04-carat oval-shaped rose-cut diamond, surrounded with triangular diamonds and brilliant-cut diamonds from the 2019 archives to the Soreli Secret Watch from the “Magnitude Collection” made in white gold, one 83.34carat cabochon-cut rutilated



11. & 14. Vintage secret ladies watch N°14.618.478, **OMEGA**
 12. Oscar Heyman watch from the Heritage Collection, **AUDEMARS PIGUET**
 13. “Moldavita”, **OMEGA**
 15. Designed by Jean Hauck, **OMEGA**

Bouncing back to the present and the beautiful secret watch necklaces presented by Van Cleef & Arpels this year: the Perlée Secret Pendant Watches. Golden pearls unite in an enchanting ballet, complemented by nuances of precious and gemstones in adornment. Inspired by the pocket watches that appeared in Europe in the 17th century, these creations have the shape of round colourful pendants. True pieces of jewellery, they are worn as pendants on a long necklace.

Secret watches are a welcome blast from the past, especially when considering this year’s glistening interpretations presented by the high jewellery Maison’s for the modern era and the modern woman. A welcome trend we look forward to seeing more of in the coming years.