

# Elegant Restraint

The final instalment in Cartier's high jewellery *En Équilibre* collection is a tour de force, both for technical prowess and true harmony

words TESS DEVIVE DE RÉGIE

**T**alk of high jewellery – the most rarefied and exclusive articulation of the artform – and images of showstopping, priceless stones in opulent, maximalist settings immediately come to mind. More can often be more, of course. But a pared-back approach, where every detail is considered and a composition's base elements have the space to shine without superfluous adornment, is a feat in itself.

It's a coup accomplished with finesse by Cartier across their *En Équilibre* (translating from French as “in balance”) high jewellery collection – little surprise from a maison that has continuously expanded the potential of *haute joaillerie* since its foundation almost 180 years ago by Louis-François Cartier.

*En Équilibre Chapitre I* arrived in May 2025 in Stockholm, followed by its second chapter in Beijing last November. Both presented a dialogue between high art and the natural world, fusing the polished discipline of Art Deco with the sumptuousness of Cartier's beloved big

cat, the panther, plus snow leopards, peacocks and cobras. This third and final chapter was unveiled in January at 13 Rue de la Paix, Cartier's Parisian flagship since 1899 and one of the house's three ‘temples’ worldwide, with their stores on London's Bond Street and New York's Fifth Avenue rounding out the trio. Later that evening, elsewhere in Paris, a gala was held in the collection's honour at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, attended by Belgian-French actor Virginie Efira and house ambassador Gemma Chan.

“I have long admired Cartier for the beauty, finesse and heritage of its creations, so I was truly delighted to join the maison as an ambassador in May 2025,” reflects Chan, fresh off the publicity circuit for her latest film, *Josephine*, which won a grand jury prize and an audience award at the Sundance Film Festival in January. “Cartier represents a unique balance of creativity, craftsmanship and timeless elegance and it feels very meaningful to now be part of that story.”

Chan continues: “Jewellery carries so much meaning – it can tell stories of history, love and personal milestones. High jewellery, particularly at Cartier, is rooted in extraordinary storytelling and craftsmanship. You can truly sense the countless hours and attention to detail that go into each piece, and that level of refinement is something I try to reflect in my own approach to personal style.”

The Euphonia necklace begins as a chain of square-, brilliant- and baguette-cut diamonds, cascading into an alternating series of diamonds and Mozambican rubies, united by their matching emerald cut. The necklace’s use of openwork, weaving negative space between the gems, is as integral an element to the composition as the priceless stones themselves. It’s a piece replete with Art Deco elegance (the emerald cut was particularly prized during this period) and boasts an electrifying dynamism, expressed via its rhythmic alternance of stones and cuts, sleek lines and geometric forms, all of which are echoed in a delicate matching ring.

How the necklace’s stones are brought together and arranged is particularly striking, notes Pierre Rainero, Cartier’s image, style and heritage director since 2003. “How do you articulate that collection of stones in one single piece? The progression from the top to the bottom is a good way to play with the intensity of red. You have a rhythm that is created. It gives it life.”

Creating a spectacular piece while restricting oneself to just one stone is an achievement that speaks to masterful craftsmanship. Such is the case with Splendea, a necklace built around 34 matching brilliant-cut diamonds – a remarkable feat of precision and testament to the technical skill of the maison’s artisans. With its singularity of stones, the allure of the necklace – which can be complemented by an accompanying pair of earrings – stems from how the small, round-cornered diamonds progress through rectangular stones and build to a dazzling crescendo: diamonds that finely modulate in size into an oval pendant.

“You have a strict geometrical composition through volume, which gives a sense of centrality,” shares Rainero.

A meditation on two precious stones, Parcae begins as a tumble of fancy-cut diamonds punctuated with shots of blue, the stones around which the necklace is anchored: three pear-shaped sapphires, the largest weighing a remarkable 16.59 carats.

Such is the necklace’s arresting beauty that it’s easy to overlook the simplicity of its design – but don’t read simplicity as lacking depth. There are three cuts of diamond present across a range of sizes, alternating between diamond, brilliant and kite, with each conscientiously placed to imbue the necklace with a sense of balance and harmony. The necklace is flanked by a matching ring that can be attached to a hand bracelet if desired and pendant earrings, accented with a pear-drop sapphire.

“[Parcae] is the epitome of what we call ‘essential design’ – all the lines are essential [to] the perception of the stones themselves,” explains Rainero, who also highlights the necklace’s fluidity and articulated form – the result

being, as he notes, that “each of the stones is in movement”.

“I am particularly drawn to the Parcae necklace for its simplicity and refinement,” says Chan. “Its precise lines and elegant drape are beautiful, and the pear-shaped sapphires draw the eye, giving the piece rhythm and structure.”

The boldest and most colourful of the necklaces, Ondora supplies a joyous dose of whimsy with its verdant chrysoprase beads and cabochons, rosy spinels and flashes of turquoise, all set among an assortment of square- and brilliant-cut diamonds.

The piece is inspired by the ethereal flow of a jellyfish, building on Cartier’s rich heritage of invoking flora and fauna through precious stones. Its focal points comprise two tassels, one at the front, the other the necklace’s adjustable clasp at the nape, adorning its wearer from all

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*– Gemma Chan*



*ABOVE* Gemma Chan in Panthère de Cartier. *OPPOSITE PAGE* Cartier High Jewellery Dinner at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

angles. Its bursts of saturated, vivid colour and riot of forms – sharp triangles, sleek lines and smooth spheres – provide plenty to enchant its beholder.

“I especially like this piece, because we should convince people that harmony and beauty are not automatically linked to symmetry,” says Rainero. “You can have a sense of pleasure through asymmetry.”

The Ciel Ipomée ring and earrings – whose name evokes the sunny prettiness of the morning glory flower – centres on an oval-cut sapphire and triangular diamond, from which extend curved bands of pavé diamonds set in platinum, recalling the unfurling of a leaf.

With its striking palette of white, green and black, and its sharp lines, where fluted strata of diamonds are edged with onyx and topped with a brilliant emerald, the Axialis cocktail ring and complementary earrings make a convincing case for embracing a bold geometric silhouette. Diamonds positioned at jaunty angles and scattered with bursts of coral flowers charge irresistible energy into the Moonga earrings, which are serenely rounded off with pear-shaped diamonds.

The maison’s signature panther crops up across two necklaces. The Blue Panthère Embrassée sees two big cats studded with diamonds, emeralds and onyx entwined in an embrace and suspended from a chain of sapphire beads.

The Panthère Algarrobo, whose name evokes an idyllic Chilean resort town

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–Pierre Rainero

that is home to the world’s largest crystalline water pool, has the panther perched on a mighty 48.62 carat cut-cornered rectangular aquamarine whose azure depths suggest water sparkling in the sunlight.

“The panther is a strong element, of course,” reflects Rainero. “But when you have a [large] stone like the aquamarine in terms of volume, you have to balance them. One shouldn’t be at the expense of the other – the two should be totally complementary.” An accompanying ring offers a more abstract vision of the creature, with its onyx spots set among diamonds and cabochon aquamarines.

The idea of balance extends to how a person might feel when wearing the pieces. “For us, jewellery is entirely at the service of a person, meaning that it shouldn’t be a constraint [or] overshadow [their] personality,” says Rainero. “That’s why the question of volume, of comfort, of fluidity is key to us. [People] should feel at ease, not only physically but also mentally.”

This philosophy of harmony holds deep roots within the house and has been frequently riffed on throughout its history, but how the concept is interpreted, explains Rainero, continues to metamorphose over time. “[With] everything we create, we try to find the possibility of an evolution, of variations,” he shares. “This is how the Cartier style was born – [Louis-François] Cartier had an openness to evolution and even more, I think, was [always] looking for change.”

Craftmanship is at the heart of all of Cartier’s creations, never more so than within the realm of high jewellery – for this collection alone, some 13,000 hours went into the creation of its 23 pieces. But the maison’s reverence for artistry reveals, in Rainero’s estimation, a paradox. “Everything should be mysterious – people shouldn’t see how [the piece] is actually made,” he observes.

“It’s a kind of challenge, because we [emphasise] the way we make things. But at the same time, this should disappear and should be at the service of the perception of the object itself. Elegance is conveyed by the total absence of constraint. [Jewellery] should accompany your movement, [with] the light playing with a piece and enhancing your intrinsic beauty.”

*En Équilibre* focuses on the interplay of opposing forces – the push-and-pull of the worlds of art and nature, brilliant stones interspersed with empty space, the contrast between bold hues and monochromatic colour palettes. It’s a collection dedicated to balance and precision, to duality, guided by an overarching credo of nothing in excess.

“It’s that notion of what we say in French, *rien de trop* – ‘nothing too much,’” expands Rainero. “How [do] we reach a point where we think it’s good and we don’t change anything anymore, you know?” Yet with *En Équilibre*, precision doesn’t come at the expense of pleasure. “In creating those pieces, we don’t have a feeling of constraint or a lack of freedom. There’s enjoyment that comes from the joy you feel with the result.”

Reflects Chan: “The collection is full of originality and exceptional craftsmanship, with each piece feeling like a true work of art. [It] is built around the idea of balance, whether in colour, volume or form, and that philosophy resonates with me. I am always striving to find balance in different areas of my life, and I love how beautifully that idea is expressed through the pieces.” HB



Photography: Pierre Mouton, courtesy of Cartier.