

# SPHERE



## Going green

Making strides towards a sustainable future in luxury



**Clockwise from top left:** Kate Bajic's Evernia cuff is a layered, organic jigsaw of smooth and textured gold; Boucheron's Ruban Diamants, based on an Art Deco design, is part of a highly flexible piece; Harry Winston's delicate Secret Combination splits into unequal portions so it can be worn as one piece or as two on one or both wrists; Chaumet's Ondulation cuff is an intricate lattice of tiny gold baguettes, with a matching watch version; Adler's Fan'tasia has an Art Deco-inspired fan motif

# ON THE CUFF

From ancient Greeks to It girls, cuffs have a long history rooted in power and protection – and are now enjoying a very modern moment

WORDS AVRIL GROOM



Nothing evokes power and protection like an assertive jewellery cuff. As British jeweller Boodles' head of design Rebecca Hawkins says: "Historically, the cuff carries a sense of empowerment and symbolism, which translates today into an opportunity for individual design, suggesting strength and boldness in the wearer." That appeals to the independent modern consumer, along with the aura of invincibility that a jewelled cuff creates and it is having a bigger moment than most in its long history.

The ancient Greeks wore battle cuffs on each arm while women expropriated the pair idea as pure adornment – items such as the 300BCE rock crystal pair finished with carved gold rams' heads in New York's Metropolitan Museum would still wow today. The Romans followed suit, turning the cuff into a symbol of power and wealth that still underlies the opulent jewelled and watch cuffs created by Roman jeweller Bulgari. In Victorian times, says Hawkins, "archaeologists unearthed decorated, wide gold bangles from Etruscan sites. These technical goldworking methods fuelled a revival in jewellery design."

The cuff roared back in the 1920s as emancipated women determined their own lifestyles and brought back jewellery from exotic travels, while the bold geometry of Art Deco set a modern aesthetic. The purity of diamonds in wide, sinuous bracelets from top Parisian houses such as Cartier (which favoured sculptural shapes in diamonds, platinum and rock crystal), Van Cleef and Arpels or Boucheron set a trend that still resonates, encouraged by the original It girls wearing bracelet stacks.

Art Deco morphed into the brighter, more streamlined Art Moderne, which led to the mid-century cuff explosion of textured yellow gold bracelets set with large, often cabochon, gems and colourful hardstones, originating in the optimism of America's post-war prosperity and promoted in Europe by Cartier's flamboyant creative director Jeanne Toussaint. By the mid 1960s, jewel and watch cuffs from brands such as Piaget or Bulgari were favoured by the international jet set and Hollywood stars, headlined by Elizabeth Taylor and Jacqueline Kennedy.

Today's mid-century design revival spurred the current resurgence, with its own mood. Now that jewellery and watches are serious investments, the combination of design creativity, craft technique and top quality stones is unparalleled, new collections awaited with an anticipation usually reserved for couture fashion shows. In the pecking order of trophy jewels, cuffs are up there with major necklaces and rings, and just as likely to feature large, valuable stones. Parisian designer Valérie Messika, who specialises in diamonds, says she is "always inspired by large necklaces when designing cuffs – both include big diamonds set together. A cuff like this is a great piece to wear if you are not a 'necklace woman'". She is inspired by the 1920s, "the beginning of modernity, full of clean lines, freedom of movement and worldly influences, ingredients that guide my approach to jewellery for the 2020s woman".

She is not alone. Art Deco influences many new cuff designs, from the fluid, floral geometry of the Be Boodles cuff or the fan motif of Adler's Fan'tasia, or David Morris's easygoing stacking Pirouette bracelets recalling the It girls, to the precise, gem-filled rectangles of Piaget's Sunlight Journey cuff, the sweeping elegance of Jaeger Lecoultré's Bangle 101 watch with its 1930s root and the ruby and antique pearl mosaic of Boghossian's Iznik Rouge cuff.



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The latter is based on ancient Islamic designs – today’s cuffs achieve new creativity by mixing influences, often pointedly reflecting the zeitgeist.

Many brands currently find customers making carefully considered choices, including seeking the value of multi-use pieces. One version of Fan’asia doubles as a hairclip; another triumph is Boucheron’s Ruban Diamants, based on an original Art Deco Boucheron design of diamond chevrons and baguettes and part of a highly flexible piece that can be a necklace, two cuffs, a hairband or a belt. Similarly, Harry Winston’s delicate yet impressive Secret Combination splits into unequal portions so it can be worn as one grand piece or as two on one or both wrists. Meanwhile independent designer Lydia Courteille’s beaded Topkapi cuff ingeniously turns into two long earrings. Lidded, “secret” watches are instant transformers; prime new examples include Van Cleef and Arpels’ Galaxie Secrète with a tiny watch case emerging from a whirl of diamonds and sapphires, and Bulgari’s coral and diamond Serpenti cuff entwined with a snake whose head conceals a watch.

A desire to escape further than you’ve ever been is understandable, hence jewellery’s current obsession with space and galaxies. Louis Vuitton’s Planète Bleue, from its Stellar Times collection, is both space age and Art Deco with its baguette diamonds and emerald-cut centre stone. The Ison cuff from Van Cleef and Arpels’ new Sous les Etoiles high jewellery blends its Art Deco heritage, and the geometric mystery setting from that era, with space in an asymmetric, galactic warrior cuff mixing rubies, diamond flashes and rose gold-pointed diamond stars. Chanel’s brand new Constellation Astrale, with its



**Left to right:** the Gem Dior cuff is a band of layers set with multi-coloured hardstones and diamonds that recall rock strata; Emefa Cole’s organic Igneous cuff is based on melting candlewax and made in gold-plated silver; Art Deco influences the fluid geometry of the Be Boodles cuff

**“The cuff reflects the need to affirm our identity. The body’s gestures animate the bracelet and the bracelet enhances it”**



**Left to right:** Louis Vuitton's Planète Bleue, from its Stellar Times collection, is both space age and Art Deco, with baguette diamonds and an emerald-cut centre stone; David Morris's stacking Pirouette bracelets recall the It girls of the 1920s; Bulgari's coral and diamond Serpenti cuff is entwined with a snake whose head conceals a watch; taking inspiration from 1970s engraved gold work, Piaget's Sunlight Journey is a burst of radiant pink sapphires

irregular geometry of lapis lazuli, yellow diamonds and gold has a 1970s lineage via Wonder Woman, but its stars and sense of power and precision are similar.

The mid-century passion for hardstones and gold, meanwhile, has been reinvented to focus on the geology and natural structure of crystals and strata. The brilliant new Gem Dior watch says it all. An open bracelet overcomes the problem of attaching a strap to both sides of a sharply asymmetric, mineral-like case with a hardstone dial, while the flexible, expanding band of random layers – set with multi-coloured hardstones and diamonds on the jewellery model – recalls rock strata.

The bold gold cuff has looked modern since the 1970s and is now even bigger and beautifully crafted. Piaget returns to its signature hand-textured gold for the latest Limelight cuffs, either with pink sapphires or as a diamond-scattered watch. Chaumet's architecture-inspired Ondulation cuff is an intricate lattice of tiny gold baguettes, its slanting asymmetric edge in graduated yellow sapphires, with a matching watch version. Bulgari's Tubogas cuff with glowing rubellite and tourmaline cabochons recalls its mid-century heritage but, with six coils, is expanded to armband size. Pomellato also references its 1960s origins with the Sabbia cuff of mesh links with discs of pavé white, brown and black diamonds.

Big brands have the resources for such complex craftwork, but independent designers painstakingly work the big cuff, too. Pippa Small's wide, matt gold versions are inlaid with squares or triangles of lapis lazuli, made by Afghan artisans. Hot young name Emefa Cole's organic looking Igneous cuff, based on melting candlewax, is made in vermeil – gold-plated silver. Kate Bajic's Evernia cuff, based on lichen, is a layered, organic jigsaw of smooth and textured gold recently shown through Design-Nation at the Craft Council-sponsored Collect exhibition, where designer-makers attract more attention each year.

As Pomellato's creative director Vincenzo Castaldo says: "The cuff reflects the need to affirm our identity. It's an intimate relationship – the body's gestures animate the bracelet and the bracelet enhances it, viewed by wearer and onlooker alike". It's hard to think of a better reason to make this the cuffing season.

