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VACHERON CONSTANTIN

GENÈVE

Vacheron Constantin and women,
as time goes by

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Introduction

At the turn of the 18th century, the time was ripe for the first complications

At the turn of the 19th century, watches conquered ladies' wrists

The early 20th century brings effervescent creativity

A feminine take on Beautiful High Watchmaking

Sum-up

The Beautiful High Watchmaking according to Vacheron Constantin has been in existence every day for 265 years and is intended for both women and men. From the first ladies' pocket watches introduced around the turn of the 18th century to contemporary wristwatches, the heritage of the Maison testifies to its impressive ability to capture the spirit of its times while meeting women's expectations. Whether functional or ceremonial objects, jewellery or sports watches, Vacheron Constantin's feminine creations embody the evolution of artistic sensibilities, clothing trends as well as social codes and customs. Perpetually renewed aesthetic and technical creativity, inspired by women, for women.

Delving into Vacheron Constantin's archives reveals the production of one-of-a-kind models specially made for women, at their request, at the turn of the 18th century. At the time, various dignitaries of the European courts wore a watch as a functional attribute. Often worn on long chatelaine chains, it was also a topic of discussion, a ceremonial object testifying to a distinctive social status.



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Women such as the Countess of Luchapt and the Queen of Romania, Elisabeth Pauline Ottilie Louise de Wield, whose correspondence is faithfully preserved in the Maison's archives, certainly had a lot to say. The watch was perceived as a jewel that told the time, an example of gold- and silversmithing that matched and enhanced precious formal attire, as exemplified by an 1815 Vacheron Constantin yellow gold pocket watch of which the case middle is finely engraved with a floral motif enhanced with garnets.

These demanding clients were also very fond of useful complications such as striking mechanism, a field in which Vacheron Constantin's reputation was already well established. Among the oldest historical models from the Maison is a yellow gold 1838 watch that could be found in the pockets of the ladies' dresses or worn as a pendant: it is distinguished by its quarter-repeater complication and offset small seconds appearing on the *guilloché* dial, engraved with a flower motif.



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During the second half of the 19th century, hunter-type cases appeared in colourful versions adorned with translucent (generally monochrome) enamel to match the colour of a dress perfectly, such as this Vacheron Constantin piece from 1887. Case covers were embellished with precious stones and pearls, enamelled volutes, arabesque engravings, often inspired by floral motifs according to the tastes of the person placing the order. The watch left the pocket and could be worn as a pendant, a chatelaine necklace or as a brooch. At the end of the century, women's appearance was beginning to change and Vacheron Constantin was already keenly attuned to the times and to trends inspired by Parisian tailors.

Although it was not yet well accepted for women to wear a watch on the wrist in the early 20th century, dress sleeves were shorter and arms were increasingly left bare, meaning the time was ripe for the first wristwatches. It is worth noting that some very rare examples of feminine models fitted on bracelets already appeared in the late 19th century among Vacheron Constantin creations. Witness a model dating from 1889 and probably presented on the occasion of the World's Fair in Paris: it is the oldest wristwatch known to date in the history of Vacheron Constantin. Its finely engraved and diamond-set case is paired with a bangle-type bracelet featuring a sculpture of two winged goddesses. This timepiece features the subtly original feature of a movement wound via the notched rotating bezel. A characteristically feminine touch of daring!



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Pocket watch, 1887

Watch featuring a sculpture of two winged goddesses, 1889



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At the beginning of the 20th century, ladies' watches were naturally permeated by Parisian influences. Pearl motifs and lace-like engravings, mother-of-pearl combined with precious and semi-precious coloured stones, jade, as well as lacquer and multi-coloured enamels were used to adorn a number of Art Nouveau style pendant watches. Under the influence of Ferdinand Verger, the French agent with whom Vacheron Constantin had been working since 1879, watches were transformed into jewellery, featuring wonderful cameo paintings inspired by Asian art or Ancient Greece.

In the 1920s, Vacheron Constantin also embraced the codes of Art Deco. Watch shapes became increasingly varied, ranging from the pure and rigorous lines of cases that were now oval or rectangular, square or sculpted in asymmetrical shapes, generally set with stones of two different colours. Creativity was effervescent. The 1923 Vacheron Constantin watch offers a striking example of this trend with its white gold case and hexagonal dial highlighted with diamonds and sapphires. These jewellery watches were also complemented by more discreet models meeting the needs of women who wanted to be able to read the time in all circumstances, on a daily basis or for glamorous evenings. Vacheron Constantin thus continued to produce a few pocket watches, as illustrated by its 1929 "surprise" watch in white gold set with 18 cabochon-cut rubies.

In the 1930s, despite a difficult economic situation and the gloomy atmosphere prevailing in the wake of the 1929 stock market crash, Vacheron Constantin continued to bring superb jewellery watches to life, such as the 1937 model. Set with brilliant-, baguette- or lozenge-cut diamonds, its case and bracelet are crafted in platinum, a material greatly appreciated for its modern appearance. The hours and minutes hands were driven by a tiny oval movement. During this period, faced with strong demand for watches of various shapes, Vacheron Constantin developed miniaturised calibres, better adapted to the dainty dimensions of the cases. The Maison introduced the so-called "baguette" calibre 7^{mm} (21.5 x 6.5 mm), mainly used for jewellery watches. This baton-type movement was equipped with a patented system designed to protect the balance from impacts and make it more robust.



Jewellery watch in platinum,
set with diamonds, 1937

"Surprise" watch in white gold set
with 18 cabochon-cut rubies, 1929

Watch with hexagonal dial, 1923



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From the 1940s onwards, women wore watches almost exclusively on their wrists. The geometric lines of the Art Deco period had gradually given way to more voluptuous shapes. Designed as jewellery that tells the time, "secret" watches were particularly in favour and Vacheron Constantin strove to deploy formidable stylistic inventiveness through its designs vividly illustrating the modern era. Watches became more voluminous and the case was generally seamlessly integrated with the bracelet thanks to the meticulous attention devoted to designing the lugs. Several pieces presented from 1942 onwards at the *Montres et Bijoux* show in Geneva illustrate this creative audacity through generous bracelets with wide gold links, such as those of the model unveiled in 1946.

In the wake of these bold and original shapes, the wild 1970s also represented a tremendous source of inspiration for the Maison and one of its creations won the Prestige de la France prize in 1972, intended to reward design-related innovation in several industrial fields. This watch, which was christened "1972", is distinguished not only by the asymmetrical shape of its case but also by its gold bracelet integrated into the case middle. It perfectly epitomises the aesthetic codes of this period when ladies' watches tended to feature complex diamond, trapeze-shaped and oval geometrical effects. During this same decade, colours were vibrant and gemsetting was the order of the day. At the end of the 1970s, Vacheron Constantin introduced the incredible Kallista (Greek for "the most beautiful") watch – set with 118 emerald-cut diamonds, each weighing between 1.2 and 4 carats – born from a collaboration with designer Raymond Moretti.

In the course of the following decades, Vacheron Constantin's flagship collections were created and became rapidly dual gender. An invitation to travel, the sporty design of the Overseas collection was interpreted in feminine versions featuring case diameters adapted to the slimmest wrists. The technical sophistication and aesthetic refinement of the Traditionnelle and Patrimony collections also appeared in precious and delicate guises: highlighted with mother-of-pearl or diamonds, equipped with hand-wound or self-winding Haute Horlogerie movements, including a moon phase complication much appreciated by women, these models are imbued with a distinctively feminine aura of elegance. This means that each of these timepieces illustrates the Maison's desire to accompany women to the best of its ability through a blend of style and precision. A desire now expressed through the new *Égérie* collection. Inspired by the world of Haute Couture and the aesthetic codes embedded in the history of Vacheron Constantin, it is an anthem to the "one of not many" woman, charismatic and fascinated by horological expertise. Exactly like each of the feminine creations from the Maison over the past two centuries and more



Watch named "1972", 1976
18K yellow gold watch, 1946
Kallista, 1979
"222", 1981

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Summary

Over the years, Vacheron Constantin has always devoted great importance to meeting women's expectations by remaining fully attuned to aesthetic sensibilities and trends. Custom-made at the turn of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century, they were issued in small limited editions during the 20th century. Whether sporty, elegant or jewellery models, the ladies' watches created ever since by the Maison illustrate its desire to continue accompanying women to the best of its ability through a blend of style and precision. Exactly like the *Égérie* collection launched in 2020, which epitomises the new face of watchmaking femininity according to Vacheron Constantin. Inspired by the world of Haute Couture, imagined for women, it captures the spirit of its time, as indeed has each of the Maison's feminine creations for more than 200 years.



Pendant watch, 1914



Founded in 1755, Vacheron Constantin is the world's oldest watch Manufacture in continuous production for over 265 years, faithfully perpetuating a proud heritage of watchmaking excellence and stylistic sophistication through generations of master craftsmen.

At the pinnacle of Haute Horlogerie and understated elegance, the Maison creates timepieces with unique technical and aesthetic signatures, and an extremely high level of finishing touches.

Vacheron Constantin brings to life unparalleled heritage and a spirit of innovation through its key collections: Patrimony, Traditionnelle, Métiers d'Art, Overseas, Fiftysix and Historiques. It also offers its discerning clientele of connoisseurs the rare opportunity to acquire unique and bespoke timepieces by means of its "Les Cabinotiers" department.

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