

# Qualitative Audit of Van Cleef & Arpels

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Luxury Branding



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# Van Cleef & Arpels

## *Introduction*

In this paper I will be doing a qualitative audit of Van Cleef & Arpels in the United States, focusing on New York specifically. I will begin with a brief history of the brand and its most recent product offerings in its different product categories. I will then go into the positioning of Van Cleef & Arpels using four different applications: the Communication Chessboard, the Iceberg Brand model, the Fingerprint method, and the Luxury Cursors. Since a brand is a system---open, moving, and complex. The aforementioned systemic tools are needed to better understand it. To conclude the paper, I will give a short term recommendation for the brand that can be used in the next three to five years.

## *History of Van Cleef & Arpels<sup>1</sup> &<sup>2</sup>*

Van Cleef & Arpels is a French luxury company founded in 1896 that sells jewelry, watches, and perfume. In 1906, the company was founded by Charles Arpels and Alfred Van Cleef who opened their first boutique at 22 place Vendôme, Paris. Van Cleef and Arpels were brothers in law, yet the company was acquired by the Swiss luxury conglomerate, Richemont, in 1999 and is no longer a private, family-run business.

From 1909 to 1939, Van Cleef & Arpels prospered and opened boutiques in upscale holiday resorts such as Deauville, Le Touquet, Nice and Monte-Carlo. In 1942, the Arpels family migrated to the United States and opened their first boutique on 5th Avenue in New York. It also started making timepieces, yet opened its Boutique de Heures in 1972. Van Cleef & Arpels became the first French jewelers to open boutiques in Japan and China. Van Cleef & Arpels are known for their expertise in precious stones and the development of the gem-setting procedure, *Mystery Setting*, which uses no

visible claws. This setting technique has been perfected over the years by the firm. The technique requires stone to be set one by one on an extremely fine gold or platinum net, and the quality of the Mystery-Set jewel depends on the clarity of the stones and evenness of its color.

The company's prestige stems from a long list of prominent commissions issued by royal and imperial courts, financiers and industrial magnates, which have enabled Van Cleef & Arpels to be active today not only in Europe and the United States, but also in Asia and the Middle East. Van Cleef & Arpels have been associated with events that have marked the lives of princely, royal and imperial families around the world. Each piece of Van Cleef & Arpels jewelry is designed to enhance the beauty of exceptional stones. They have brought rare stones, such as aquamarines, mandarin garnets and rubellites to light.

### *Recent product offerings*<sup>2&3</sup>

In 2012, a new timepiece collection which was not only beautiful, and playful, but also technical was unveiled--- the Poetic Wish collection.

In 2010, a new high-end jewelry collection called Les Voyages Extraodinaires de Jules Verne is launched.

In 2009, the company released a line of luxury perfumes called Collection Extraordinaire, comprising six fragrances which were a source of inspiration for its jewelry collections.

### *Communication Chessboard*

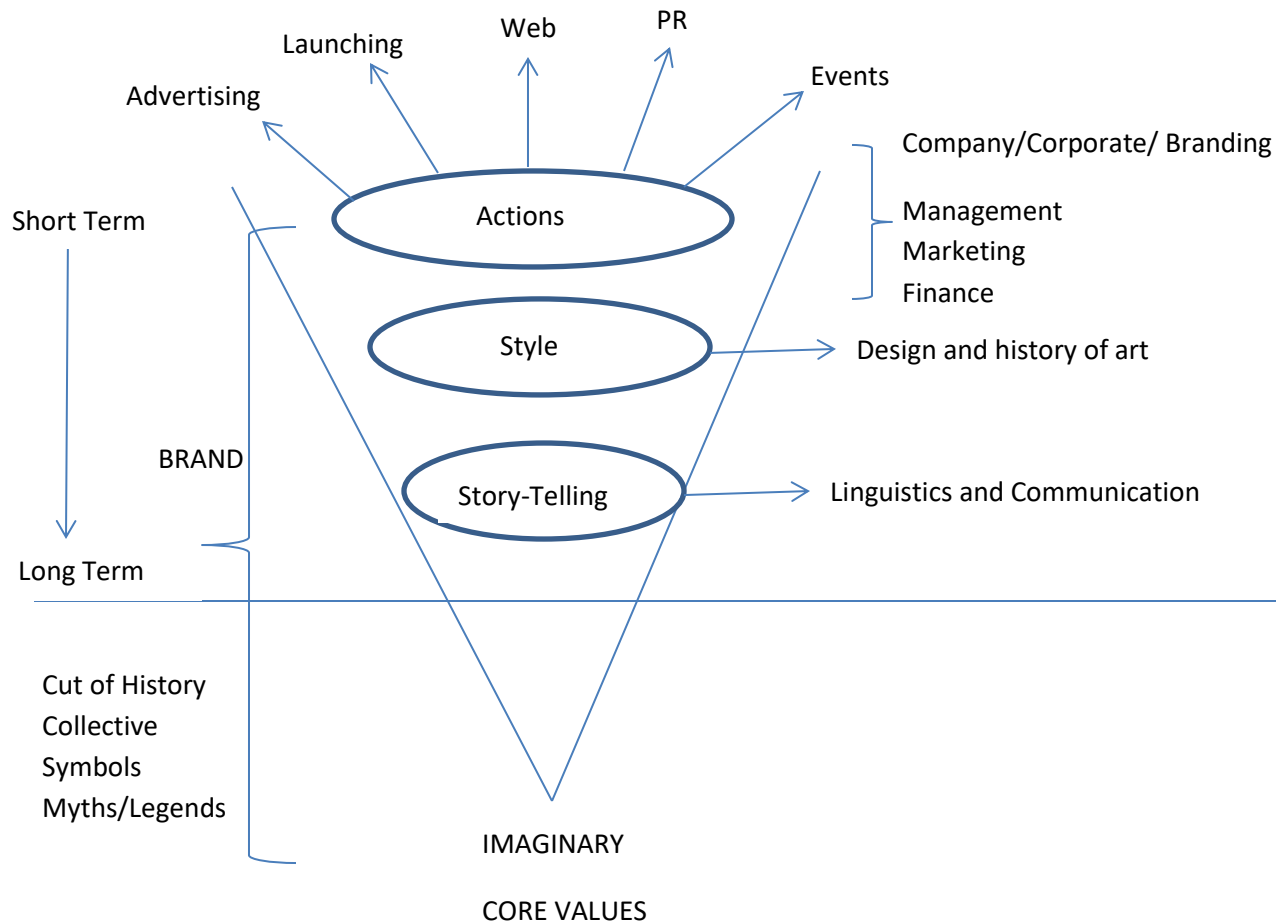
The communication chessboard shows the difference in contact, audience, and media for different aspects of Van Cleef & Arpels. Van Cleef and Arpels is the brand name, yet its company, corporate,

and product offerings are distinct in nature. However, they are part of a unifying message of the Van Cleef & Arpels iconic legacy.<sup>4</sup> Details of the distinctions of the aforementioned can be seen below.

<b>Titles</b>	<b>Van Cleef &amp; Arpels Titles</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Medias</b>
<b>The Company</b>	Compagnie Financière Richemont S.A.	Established in France in 1906. Headquarters: Van Cleef & Arpels 31 rue Danielle Casanova 75 001 PARIS France	Employees in corporate office, retail stores, artisans. Gemstone suppliers. Richemont shareholders	Richemont Annual Report
<b>The Corporate</b>	Van Cleef & Arpels	Femininity, glamour, refinement: for over than century, the distinctive Van Cleef & Arpels style has made its mark throughout the world. Van Cleef & Arpels shares with customers a certain philosophy of life dominated by respect for the past, love of beauty, passion for travel and a quest for harmony.	Students/ Sponsors of the Creative Academy. A foundation that Van Cleef and Arpels partners with	Statements from the CEO: Stanislas de QUERCIZE
<b>The Brand</b>	Van Cleef & Arpels	Nature captured in all its vitality, poetry of couture, history of Decorative Arts, magic of fairies and ballerinas: all have inspired astonishing pieces of fine jewelry.	People with an appreciation of jewelry and art	Official Van Cleef and Arpels website, YouTube, Facebook, Google +, Twitter, Ad Campaigns in fashion magazines: Vogue, Elle, Bazaar
<b>The Products/Services</b>	Fine Jewelry Timepieces Fragrances	Technical and artistic mastery, legendary craftsmanship and taste for innovation and transformations. Fine jewelry is analagous to a piece of art.	Wealthy Families, Art enthusiasts, Fine jewelry collectors, celebrities, Socialites	All media outlets: online, in-store, visual, events, phone apps, screensavers, downloadable images

### *Iceberg Approach*

Van Cleef & Arpels can be considered to follow a Baroque concept and subsequently a Baroque brand. There is a lot of asymmetry in their fine jewelry as they replicate nature, and actual imagery. This is done not only by the shapes of the jewelry, but its vibrant, bright, and rich colors. There are also illusions, emotions, and movement that can be seen in Van Cleef & Arpels jewelry and timepieces.



An image of the Iceberg Approach can be seen above. A detailed explanation of each area will be discussed below.

The Actions that Van Cleef & Arpels takes are print advertisements in fashion magazines: Vogue, Elle, Bazaar. From a digital/social media aspect, there is the official Van Cleef and Arpels website, YouTube, Facebook, Google +, Twitter, phone apps, screensavers, and downloadable versions of the brand’s story. From a brick and mortar aspect: the brand’s retail stores have a window displaying the beautiful jewelry and timepiece collections.

In 2011, there was a Van Cleef & Arpels exhibition in New York at the Cooper Hewitt Museum “Set In Style: the Jewelry of Van Cleef & Arpels.” This exhibition began in February 16, 2011 until June 5, 2011. Van Cleef & Arpels is also said to be hosting another exhibition this year in Shanghai’s Museum of Contemporary Art from May 20, 2012 until July 15, 2012. <sup>5</sup> Van Cleef &

Arpels often dresses celebrities for galas and red carpet events. This is a form of PR for the brand. It also is associated with events that have marked the lives of princely, royal and imperial families around the world, such as His Royal Highness DonInfante Antonio, Duke of Galliera and Grand Duke Dmitri in the 1920s and more recently Queen Sofia of Spain, Princess of Wales, Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco, the Aga Khan family.<sup>1</sup>

The style of Van Cleef & Arpels products---fragrances, timepieces, or jewelry, can be described as glamorous, refined, feminine, and inspired by nature. The brand has been around for over 110 years and has mastered the art of jewelry timepiece creations. Van Cleef & Arpels shares with customers a certain philosophy of life dominated by respect for the past, a quest for harmony, a passion for travel, and most importantly a love of beauty. These fundamental, timeless values have been continued by the brand since its inception until current day.

The brand's storytelling takes its inspiration by nature and passion for travel as can be seen by its newest timepiece and jewelry collections The Poetic Wish and Les Voyages Extraodinaires de Jules Verne respectively. Looking specifically at imagery of Les Voyages Extraodinaires de Jules Verne, it is comprised of four voyages: Five weeks in Balloon, Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea, A Journey to the Center of the Earth, and From the Earth to the Moon which convey the brand's message. The message of the voyages is to transport the customer from reality into a magical world of the poetry of couture.

The voyages collection is housed in a wooden cabinet decorated by a world map created with inlays of different woods outlining the five continents, the seas, the oceans and the huge ice caps. To highlight the plot of the story, there are four portholes fitted with a magnifying glass offering a glimpse of what awaits inside. This creates a sense of mystery and suspense for the customer, but also shows the attention to detail of all aspects of the product and the story. Not only are the timepieces

carefully created, but the box that houses them is a piece of art itself. The four watches are each inspired by one of the books in the series “Les Voyages Extraordinaires.” Although there is no aspect of conflict within the story, the characters of the story (which are the voyages) each are distinct yet fall under the uniform theme of Les Voyages Extraordinaires.

The storytelling of the brand is directly linked to the imaginary aspect and core values of Van Cleef & Arpels. The watches are made with such attention to detail, that their faces look more like a story than a simple watch face. Many different gems, and materials, for example mother of pearl, are used to create the appearance of a realistic nature scene. The casing and straps of the watch are also made of the finest materials: white gold and alligator leather respectively. The dials are also encrusted with gold or silver to complete the sophistication of the overall product. The watches are limited edition, and are made by specialists/ artisans who were hired by Van Cleef & Arpels, such as Dominique Baron. These astonishing pieces demonstrate the technical mastery, top tier craftsmanship, and taste for innovation that Van Cleef & Arpels prides itself on. Van Cleef & Arpels products combine timeless charm, creativity, and artistic prowess in an effortless manner. <sup>4</sup>

### *Fingerprint Method*

The Fingerprint method is used to study a brand’s identity. The communication theory which was established in the 60s states that you cannot NOT communicate. This theory has been divided into seven poles. Each pole sends the message that you cannot communicate without each pole. The seven poles are connected to each other, and everything done to one pole affects the others. Each pole is of equal importance. To determine the fingerprint of the brand, I will put data that relates to the brand and the appropriate pole. I will then circle the poles that are most critical to the brand. The poles that are circled are equivalent to the brand’s fingerprint.

The 7 poles:

1. The Body Pole encompasses everything which is tangible and makes the brand most recognizable, typically using our five senses. Van Cleef & Arpels products are gentle to touch, and beautiful to look at. The fragrances tantalize the nose with their aromatic scents; the timepieces are silent when the dials move within the casing. None of the products require the sense of taste.
2. The Space Pole says that a brand is a brand of here, elsewhere, or everywhere but nowhere. Since we are analyzing this brand in the United States, it qualifies as a brand of elsewhere.
3. The Position Pole says that the brand is either symmetric or complimentary. This brand is complimentary in my opinion, as the client and the company are in different positions. The brand is in a position of superiority though not in a chastising, oppressive manner. I believe that the brand presents to the consumer its visions and artistic beauty, and the consumer happily accepts this and is enamored by what it is presented.
4. The Project Pole says that one cannot communicate without having a project, whether knowingly or not. In my opinion, the project of the brand is to deliver beautiful products that draw from inspirations of beauty, passion for travel, and a quest for harmony.
5. The Relations Pole says that a brand is either friendly or not friendly with the consumer. It is either authoritative or submissive. I believe this is similar to the position pole and hence the brand is authoritative with regards to how it treats its customers.
6. The Norms Pole says that a brand cannot communicate in a void. Norms are not laws; they are not written anywhere but are well-known, such as cultural norms. Brands either respect norms, or establish new norms which are related to not respecting norms. Van Cleef & Arpels in my opinion

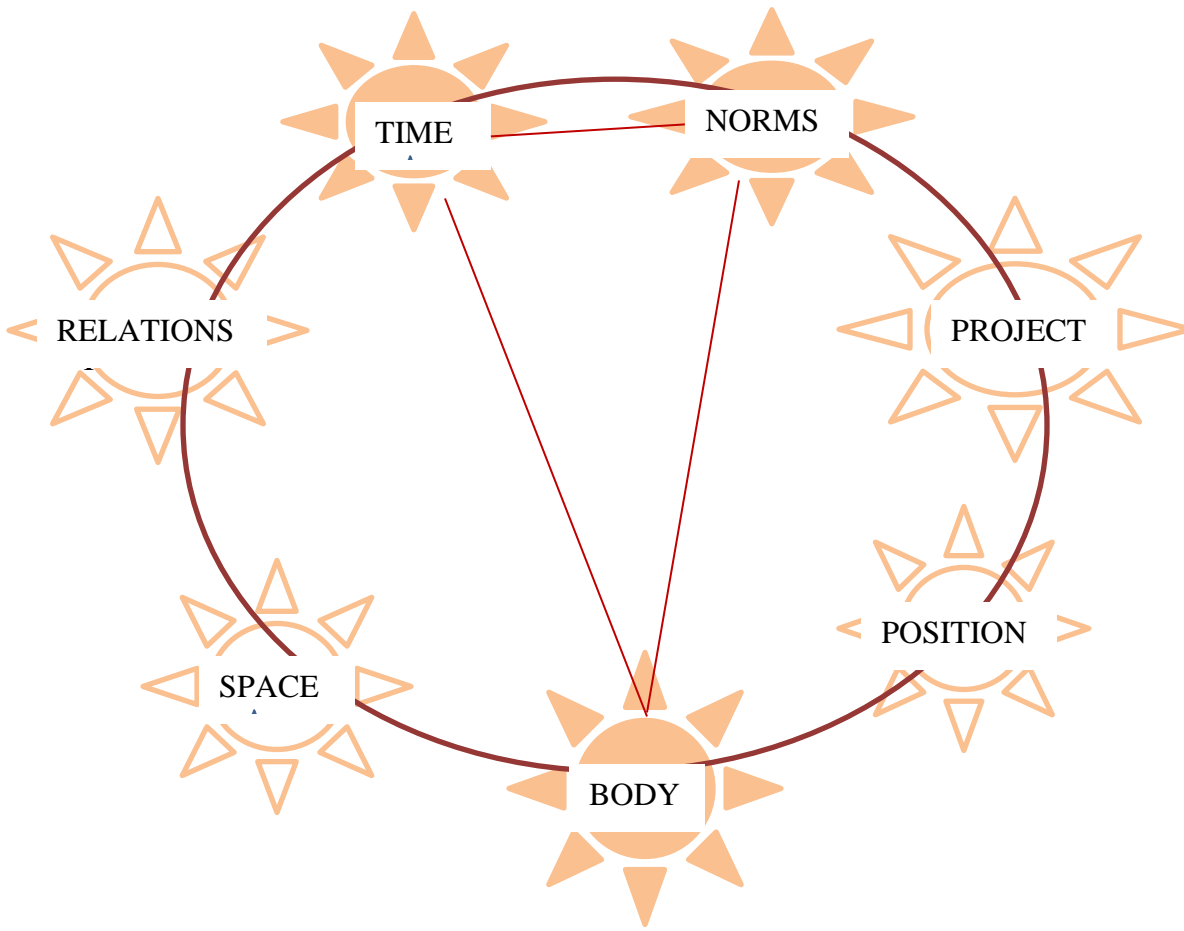


for the most part respects norms currently, but in the past they established new norms as they were trendsetters when they became the first French jewelers to open boutiques in Japan and China. Van Cleef & Arpels are known for their expertise in precious stones and the development of the gem-setting procedure, *Mystery Setting*, which was a breakthrough procedure when they launched it in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

7. The Time Pole says that a brand is either a brand of:

- The past
- The present
- The future
- Timeless

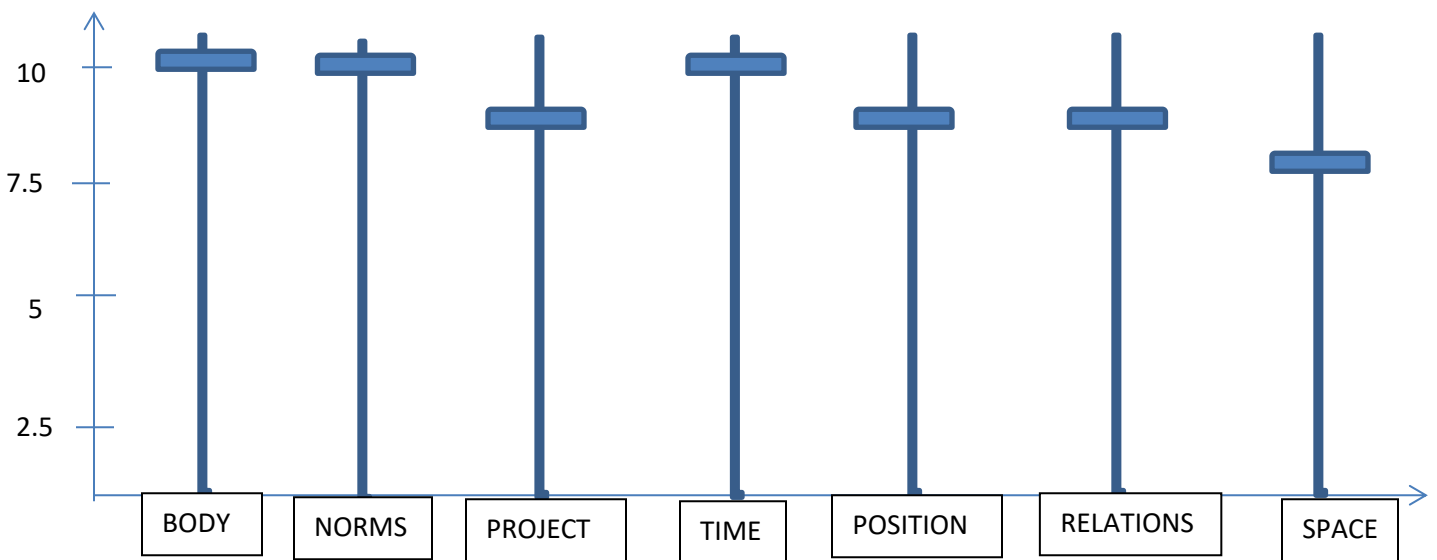
I believe that Van Cleef & Arpels is a timeless brand with an aspect of futurism to it. They create beautiful products that are so exquisite and innovative which in my opinion are so unique and ahead of its time. This causes them to be timeless as they are analogous to art investments as their beauty and value will unlikely decrease in the future. One is unlikely to lose appreciation of such craftsmanship and attention to detail in all aspects of Van Cleef & Arpels products.



An overall analysis of the aforementioned, I believe that the brand's strongest poles are its Body, Time, and Norms poles which henceforth create its fingerprint.

*The Luxury Cursors*

The Luxury Cursors translate the brand's fingerprint to a relative scale which compares the different poles/cursors to each other and also relative to its industry.



- The brand can see that its cursors are at the highest points for Body, Norms and Time which correspond with its Fingerprint.
- Projects, Positioning, and Relations are at the second highest points as the brand has a consistent message which it translates to all of its products.
- Space was given the lowest cursor position since the brand in my opinion the brand is not explicitly French in how it portrays its images of nature. Although there was the collection Une Journee a Paris. The other collections are more applicable to nature which is not specific to France or place Vendome, which is where the brand originated.

*Short Term Recommendation for Van Cleef & Arpels that can be used in the next 3 - 5 years*

After careful analysis of the brand, and all components that encompass its structure. I believe that Van Cleef and Arpels can further improve its brand equity if it were to adopt the following. Per the communication chessboard, the corporate and the brand are the same which is beneficial as it allows a unified message to be conveyed, but can be even more effective if they were separate. An example of a corporate endeavour that Van Cleef & Arpels can undertake is the Art of Jewelry foundation, which could potentially spread awareness of jewelry pieces and their connection and appreciation of everyday beauty. They could also possibly take part in an initiative to preserve nature as much inspiration for the products stems from this source. Such foundations may take a while to find the most appropriate partners that will fit within the Van Cleef & Arpels core values. Hence I would consider this a project they should undertake to complete within three years.

Per the Iceberg Approach, the brand can try to add elements of conflict in its storytelling or characters. The imagery tells a story, but the focus is on the scenery and background, rather than the

characters that potentially could be included within the stories. Other aspects of the Iceberg Approach seemed very strong, particularly its actions and the strong link between storytelling and the imaginary. I would imagine that creating characters and conflict would require introductions of several collections that would show a new theme and style emerging from Van Cleef & Arpels. This may be ambitious to create within the next 5 years, although I do not know firsthand how long it takes to create a creation from inception to completion. However, if possible to be completed within the next 5 years, I believe that it is something that Van Cleef & Arpels should adopt.

Per the Fingerprint and Luxury Cursors, Van Cleef & Arpels is strongest within the cursors of Body, Time, and Norms. They are doing quite well within the cursors of Relation, Project, and Positions. The reason they did not get a perfect score in my opinion is since the cursors mentioned first are the strongest as they touch upon many different sub categories within their cursors. I cannot think of concrete ideas that they can implement to improve their positioning within the luxury cursors, as I believe for them to push the cursors of Relation, Project, and Positions, they run the risk of cannibalizing or lowering their positioning of the Body, Time, and Norms cursors. Those cursors are so well placed that the risk in them losing their position may not be worthwhile compared to the potential reward. The cursor of Space was the lowest and I believe this can be improved by the brand having more collections that are inherently French. However, if they were to do so, they would be deviating from their core philosophy of showing passion for travel, quest for harmony, and the inspiration by nature. As a compromise they could have collections that showed imagery of nature that was inherently French such as architecture or incorporate French sayings subtly on their products somehow. This development of collections with French architecture may take more than 5 years as discussed previously when looking at the brand form the Iceberg Approach.

Overall brand strategy for the brand is to keep its classic European pattern with products being the initial focus, top tier craftsmanship, following traditions, and allowing the brand to have a

creative personality. The brand should follow its Baroque style and further perfect its technical and artistic mastery. Similar to the Mystery Setting, if other breakthrough technologies could be developed that would help launch the brand to the status of an innovator which establishes new norms. For Van Cleef & Arpels to be considered as luxurious to clients, they must ensure that they are perceived as so due to their complimentary relationship and authoritative relation with the client. They must best leverage their strengths as seen by the Body, Time, and Norms poles to set themselves apart from other iconic brands similar in nature. Van Cleef & Arpels should be aware of its competitors and their strategies, but never lose sight of its core values as they are what differentiate the brand from others and keep them as one of the most globally sought after, luxury jewelry, timepiece and fragrance brands.



**Van Cleef & Arpels  
Poetic Wish Timepiece  
Collection, 2012**



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<sup>3</sup> “Van Cleef and Arpels: Poetic Wish.” January 31, 2012. Web. April 28, 2012 <<http://www.luxury-insider.com/luxury-news/2012/01/van-cleef-arpels-poetic-wish>>

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<sup>5</sup> Cooperman, Dori. “Dori’s World: Van Cleef & Arpels Exhibition Opening Gala at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum.” *Haute Living* (February 17, 2011). Web. April 29, 2012

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