

Stage DELIGHT

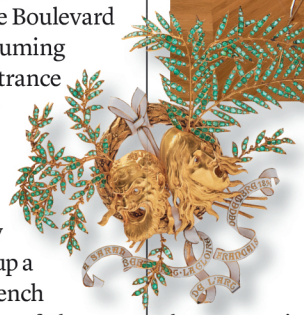
A new school to learn about jewellery arts has opened in Paris with the support of Van Cleef & Arpels—and it thrills, says *Kate Matthams*

AMONG THE PAVEMENT cafes, theatres and covered walkways of the Boulevard Montmartre, a pair of unassuming carriage doors marks the entrance into a glittering world. After opening two new campuses last year, in Shanghai and Dubai, L'École School of Jewellery Arts, supported by Van Cleef & Arpels, has set up a second, bigger hub in the French capital, bringing a small piece of Place Vendôme's jewellery history to a slightly less luxe part of the city.

The project involved the renovation of an 18th-century *hôtel particulier* mansion house by interior designer Constance Guisset. Cross the courtyard behind those carriage doors, and the jeweller's benches come into view, in a glass-walled atelier, where attendees learn jewellery arts at the bench: lapidary skills, enamelling, Japanese lacquer and the art of gouache, as well as jewellery-themed workshops for children. Upstairs, participants attend lectures on jewellery history and take practical gemmology courses beneath the gilded mouldings and 19th-century frescoes of this former private home. "We aim to provide access to the world of jewellery to the widest audience possible. Our world shouldn't intimidate or turn anyone away. The Boulevard Montmartre address feels more accessible than our established Place Vendôme location," says Nicolas Bos, president and CEO of Van Cleef & Arpels, referring to the 11,000 people who attended a course or conference at L'École in 2023.







From top: 19th-century star tiara; L'École School of Jewellery Arts; René Lalique brooch for Sarah Bernhardt; jewellery-making tuition.

A new exhibition space, inside a glass-roofed former reception room, has ceilings so extravagantly decorated, they were once attributed to Charles Garnier, who built the opulent Paris Opera. Today, the room houses the first of many free exhibitions: *Stage Jewels of the Comédie-Française*, fitting for a location in the heart of the city's theatre district. Despite being made from non-precious materials, with metal alloys standing in for gold, faux pearls and glass gemstones, the costume jewellery on show was produced using the same fine jewellery skills found in workshops today. The curation includes pieces from the 18th century, when the *Comédie-Française* provided only props and costumes essential to a play's narrative, leading to incongruous stage outfits as actors vied to outdo each other with their clothes and jewellery. Several pieces in the exhibition were once worn by Sarah Bernhardt, star of the *Comédie-Française* in the late 19th century, including a tiny pearl crown worn on stage, and a René Lalique brooch that was gifted to her by the jeweller himself.

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A library of jewellery and gemstone books and resources is also available to for on-site study, along with an inviting street-level bookshop. The gems inside may well entice passers-by further into the world of jewellery. ■

BENJAMIN CHELLY/L'ÉCOLE SCHOOL OF JEWELLERY ARTS.