



Living LEGEND

The evolution of the legendary Cartier Tank
BY KEITH *W.* STRANDBERG

THE LEGEND IS THAT THE CARTIER TANK was inspired by the Allied tanks that rolled through France during World War I. It was 1917; the original Tank watch was on the drawing board, and the Great War was on everyone's mind—presumably even Louis Cartier's. However, according to Pierre Rainero, director for image, style and heritage at Cartier, the legend can be neither categorically confirmed nor definitely denied.

Cartier Tank Américaine with
curved gold case, 1993



Above: Must de Cartier watch, 1977;
below: the Tank Anglaise Large in
rhodium-plated white gold



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timepieces designed to be worn on the wrist. It was modern at the time, and it still looks modern. It was sold for the first time in December 1919, and Cartier sold only six in the first year. It was sold to elegant, socially prominent men, we might say ‘dandies.’ The Tank was of great interest, because it became the watch of well-known people.”

Each of the Tank models named for a country or a culture is also inspired by it in a way that influences the design process. The latest Tank variation, the Tank Anglaise, introduced earlier this year, is no exception. “Cartier had English-market production in London after the war, and the common point among all those watches was a smoother and rounder shape,” Rainero details. “When we knew we were working on something rounder and smoother, even though it is still rectangular, we decided to call it the Tank Anglaise.”

“In America, we had the Curvex models first, and they inspired the Tank Americaine,” Rainero explains. “The Tank Française was designed after the square, which is a very important shape in the



Tank Anglaise
Medium, set
with brilliant-
cut diamonds
totaling
13.3 carats

“It’s difficult to prove that the watch was inspired by the Allied tanks, but there is a habit at Cartier to name something according to its evocation,” Rainero says. “The other possibility is that the shape was born from something else, like the Santos [Cartier’s first wristwatch]. In the archives, however, the watch is named the Tank right from the start.”

No matter how and why the name was chosen, the watch has been extremely successful and has become an icon for Cartier, throughout its history and in a host of iterations. The shape of the watch, a rectangle flanked by “tracks” on either side, seems to beg for variations, where the shapes are played with, stretched, compressed, twisted and turned.

There have been hundreds of variations on the Tank theme, from the original Tank Normale, to the Tank Française, the Tank Americaine, the Tank Chinoise, the Tank Divan, the Tank Allongée, the Tank Rectangle, the Tankissime, the Tank Asymetrique, the Tank Basculante, the Tank Louis Cartier, the Tank Cintrée and many more.

“Let’s not forget that the introduction of the Tank Normale in 1919 was very close to the invention of the first watch to be worn on the wrist,” Rainero points out. “The Tank was one of the first

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French culture. The continued success of this collection can only be explained by the strength of the design itself. People know the Tank, not because it has been worn by Jackie Kennedy, Princess Diana and so many others but because of its pure design. It's a watch that combines the purity and elegance of the materials with the purity and elegance of the design. You realize the strength of the design when there is something obvious about it."

Because it is so well known and well loved, designing new variations of the Tank requires care. "It's challenging to play with an iconic design," Rainero admits. "But with so many versions of the Tank, we know there are lots of possibilities. A design is strong when it can evolve yet still remain itself. With the Tank, we know that there are many more variations to be realized."

Relatively large in comparison with most previous Tanks, the new Tank Anglaise is offered in rose gold, yellow gold or white gold, and in three sizes. The largest version of the new watch uses Cartier's manufacture 1904 MC mechanical movement, which is visible through an exhibition caseback. A distinguishing feature is the watch's integration of the crown into the "tank treads" on the right side of the case. Characteristic Tank features—such as Roman numerals and blued steel hands—are also present. If the legendary past success of the Cartier Tank in all its many variations is any indicator, this latest offering from the house of Cartier certainly won't be the last. As the Allies' antagonists learned in World War I, it's hard to stop a Tank.

cartier.com

Tank Louis
Carter, 1944