

Flight of fancy

For 60 years, Tiffany & Co.'s Bird on a Rock has been one of the house's most beloved creations. Today, the bird is once again taking flight – to dazzling effect

words TESS DE VIVIE DE RÉGIE



Bird on a Rock by Tiffany Wings Wide Ring in Platinum with Diamonds, \$35,900, and Bird on a Rock by Tiffany Wings Rolo Pendant in Platinum with Diamonds, \$13,100.



Since 1965, Tiffany & Co.'s Bird on a Rock – a creature of exquisite beauty, cast not in feathers but diamonds and gemstones – has adorned the lapels and necklines of the likes of Rosie Huntington-Whiteley, Florence Pugh, Emily Blunt, Michael B. Jordan and Jeff Goldblum. The brainchild of French jewellery designer Jean Schlumberger, who helmed the house for two decades from 1956, the bird has now been reimagined under the stewardship of Tiffany & Co.'s chief artistic officer, Nathalie Verdeille. Its metamorphosis finds form in a collection of high and – for the first time in the motif's existence – fine jewellery.

“Bird on a Rock is a poetic high jewellery creation that brilliantly captures the cockatoo's whimsy, optimism and vibrant persona,” reflects Verdeille. “Today, with the [fine jewellery] collection, our bird is ready to take flight once again. Reinventing a legendary

design like Bird on a Rock is no small feat. We had to stay true to its spirit while giving it a contemporary [feel].”

To provide their birds with “the perfect sky to soar in” for the high jewellery settings, Verdeille explains that the house turned to two of its most beloved gemstones: tanzanite and turquoise. The first high jewellery suite centres around the former, a stone first presented to the world in jewellery form by Tiffany in 1968, one year after its discovery in Tanzania. A particular highlight comes in the form of a necklace featuring five diamond and yellow gold birds hovering above a megawatt tanzanite, with diamonds encircling the chain.

“Turquoise, a special stone to Tiffany, echoes our house's emblematic hue,” says Verdeille of the star of the second high jewellery suite; its unmistakable colour is purported to have inspired the blue of their jewellery boxes. “Each gem is shaped and polished like a robin's egg, an homage to our namesake Pantone

Photography: Luc Buchage, courtesy of Oak Spring Garden Foundation, Upperville, VA (Bunny Mellon); Fujio Emura (earrings); courtesy of Tiffany & Co.



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THIS PAGE, L-R Bunny Mellon and Jean Schlumberger; Bird on a Rock by Tiffany Earrings in Platinum and 18c Yellow Gold with Tanzanites, POA, photographed at the Basket House at Oak Spring.



‘1837 Blue’ and a poetic nod to the bird’s nest.” The suite’s crowning glory is a necklace where the bird, crafted of gold and diamonds with turquoise-inflected wings, is perched atop an impressive cabochon turquoise.

The motif’s first foray into fine jewellery features diamond-studded birds, fashioned from 18-carat gold and platinum, either by themselves or as a pair, alighting upon rings and necklaces. Then there is Bird on a Rock by Tiffany Wings, the more abstract designs from the fine jewellery collection, an exercise in, as Verdeille describes, “distilling [the bird] down to its essence – the wing. The wing became a graphic motif, repeated in visual rhythm like birds in flight.” Overlapping feathers decorate pendants and wind around the circumference of rings and hooped earrings; bright with diamonds, the designs hint at a bird’s glossy plumage.

“To me, wings are the ultimate symbol of freedom. When a bird takes flight, it carries us into a dreamlike state beyond the ordinary,” offers Verdeille. “At Tiffany, birds have long embodied this spirit of imagination and transformation. From historic creations to today’s Wings collection, these creatures inspire us to reach new creative heights and explore what it means to transcend.”

Available in both platinum and rose gold, the rings in the Wings collection are designed to stack – or, indeed, nest – with each feather fitting snugly into another in a riff on the classic eternity ring. Also in the range are earrings conceived to be styled in four separate ways, converting from studs to drop-down styles which can be worn at the front or back. “Our diamond-setting techniques created textural depth, much like pointillism, where each gem contributes to a greater whole,” notes Verdeille.

Since its introduction in 1965, Bird on a Rock – whose origins lie in a yellow cockatoo Schlumberger happened upon in his adopted home of Guadeloupe – has cemented itself as a signature of the house. It was Rachel Lambert “Bunny” Mellon, the famed gardener and great friend of Schlumberger, who owned the first Bird on a Rock – a white and yellow diamond bird sitting upon a cabochon lapis lazuli, which she would jauntily wear on her beret.

A self-trained gardener and passionate horticulturalist, Mrs Mellon redesigned the White House Rose Garden during the tenure as first lady of her friend, Jackie Kennedy. Her home and extensive gardens in Oak Spring, Virginia were a rich source of inspiration to Schlumberger and the pair maintained a close



decades-long friendship. At Oak Spring, Mellon compiled an impressive array of books and manuscripts pertaining to horticulture and landscape, which provided the basis for the Oak Spring Garden Foundation, created in 1993 to encourage scholarship and public engagement in the subject. It's also the location of a finely wrought finial portraying flowers in an urn that Schlumberger made to top Mellon's greenhouse. Mellon's collection of Schlumberger-signed objects – the world's largest – was donated on her passing in 2014 to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

"Bunny Mellon's relationship with Jean Schlumberger is a beautiful part of the Bird on a Rock story," says Verdeille. "Her refined eye and love of nature continue to inspire me. Her legacy helped shape my vision for this collection, alongside Schlumberger's surrealist imagination and sensitivity to form. Together, they remind me that jewellery can be both poetic and powerful."

Perhaps the bird's most striking setting came in 1995, at a retrospective of Schlumberger's oeuvre at Paris' Musée des Arts

Décoratifs. There, Tiffany & Co. revealed the bird with the Tiffany Diamond, the 128.54-carat showstopper of a yellow diamond that the house's founder, Charles Lewis Tiffany, purchased in 1878. (Schlumberger had previously mounted the stone into his Ribbon Rosette necklace, a legendary creation worn by Audrey Hepburn in 1961 to promote *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.)

"[It] endures because it evolves," says Verdeille of Bird on a Rock's continued transformation. "When I arrived at Tiffany & Co., I created a new design for the Tiffany Diamond inspired by our beloved bird. Then we unveiled the Rainbow Bird on a Rock collection [in 2024], where a kaleidoscope of colours and textures converge, resulting in bespoke high jewellery brooches, each with a vibrant personality."

"The magic of Bird on a Rock is that it continually reinvents itself. It resonates because it captures a sense of joy, lightness and individuality that speaks to people across generations. Its whimsical yet refined spirit invites a personal connection [and] each iteration feels both iconic and intimate, allowing wearers to see their own story reflected in its evolving form." HB

Photography: Adrian Martin (this page); Fujio Emura (opposite page); courtesy of Tiffany & Co.



OPPOSITE PAGE Bunny Mellon's residence, Oak Spring.
 CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The greenhouse at Oak Spring;
 Bird on a Rock by Tiffany Necklace in Platinum and 18c
 Yellow Gold with Tanzanite & Diamonds, POA; a letter from
 Jean Schlumberger as seen at the Oak Spring library; Bird
 on a Rock by Tiffany Wings Hoop Earrings in Platinum with
 Diamonds, \$17,100 and Bird on a Rock by Tiffany Wings Rolo
 Pendant in 18c Rose Gold with Diamonds, \$12,600.

