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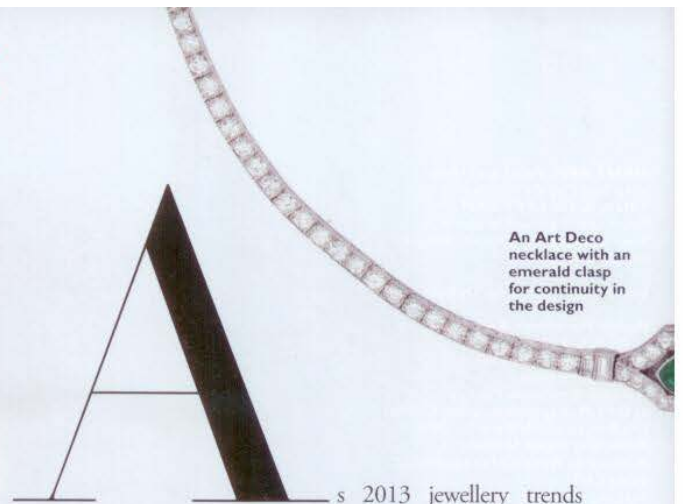


Long Live ART DECO

Transcending time, Art Deco was as contemporary then as it is timeless today. It's no wonder that almost a century on, this vintage jewellery style remains highly sought after. By Rebecca Yap



An Art Deco diamond and platinum bar brooch, circa 1925



An Art Deco necklace with an emerald clasp for continuity in the design

As 2013 jewellery trends would have it, old certainly is gold. For spring/summer 2013, Balmain sent enormous hoop earrings—reminiscent of the '80s—down the catwalk, while Jean Paul Gaultier accessorised his models in rosaries. More recently, Dolce&Gabbana's fall/winter 2013 jewellery series drew on the treasures of the Santa Maria Nuova in Monreale, Sicily, for Byzantine crosses crafted into earrings, necklaces and crowns. Ralph Lauren also showed Baroque chandelier earrings—a nod to the literary classics *Les Misérables* and *Anna Karenina*.

The most impactful, however, was the visual extravaganza that was Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* in May 2013. The cast burst onto the silver screen swathed in diamonds crafted in Art Deco style. Designed by Tiffany & Co., notable pieces included a diamond and pearl headband, and a cuff of clear gems with geometric straight lines and circles. There's nothing like a high-budget film to jolt our memory of the enduring worth of Art Deco jewellery and to boost its already steady demand in the auction market.

"Art Deco was the modern jewellery of that time and today, its structured design makes it functional and so easy to pair with something like a Prada dress," says Brenda Kang, owner of Revival Jewels—Singapore's first jewellery shop specialising in antique and vintage jewellery. Drawing on her 15-year experience as senior jewellery specialist at Christie's, this is Brenda's "passion project."

WAR AGAINST FUSS

Prior to the cleaner designs of the Art Deco period, Art Nouveau jewellery (1890 to 1910) was inspired by natural forms such as flowers, insects and female forms like dancers and nymphs. Belle Époque or Edwardian jewels (1895-1914) were delicate, romantic and lacy, with stars, ribbons and bows as popular themes. Then came World War I and a wave of change.

The disruption of WWI brought a halt to jewellery creation as frugality and practicality took over. With the men away at war, women were forced to enter the labour force—many started work in factories. This was a pivotal point in the role of women in society, marking an end to values, traditions and fashions of before. Gone were the corsets, bustles and long sleeves—clothing designs had to change to give women more freedom of movement.

With the end of the war came the Roaring Twenties and the lust for life. Women attended bridge parties, smoked in



Models pose in Tiffany & Co.'s designs for *The Great Gatsby* at the brand's dinner at Rockpool in Sydney in May 2013

public, cut their hair short, bared their skin, indulged in sport and partied at night. Naturally, clothing became more androgynous and trimmer.

Parisian designer Paul Poiret was the first couturier to embrace draping over the traditional techniques of tailoring and corsetry. However, it was really the rise of Coco Chanel that dealt the deathblow—and liberated women. With a look as different and novel as her creations, she blazed the trail for clothes that exuded youthful ease and unencumbered sportive confidence. She pioneered many innovative designs like the little black dress and the Chanel suit—the comfortable collarless wool jersey cardigan jacket and pleated skirt paired with a low-belted pullover top became the casual look for the rich.

“Jewellery also changed to become more simple to suit the fashion. Art Deco jewellery was a lot less fussy than that during the Belle Époque,” says Brenda. The first use of the term Art Deco wasn’t coined until the ’60s, after the exhibition “Les Années 25: Art Déco/Bauhaus/Stijl Esprit Nouveau” at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. The exhibition celebrated the 1925 Paris World Fair of Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts). A wide range of



Mademoiselle Coco Chanel in her iconic Chanel suit with an elegant string of pearls no less.

decorative arts, architecture and jewellery created from 1920 to 1970 took on the Art Deco label thereon.

DECO DECODED

Unlike the excessive detailing of Art Nouveau and Belle Époque styles, Art Deco jewellery possessed geometric harmony, straight lines, swirls within rectangles, and with the opening of King Tutankhamen’s Tomb in 1922, Egyptian motifs in coloured stones.

Diamonds, often set in platinum, were inexhaustibly used, while coloured stones like coral, turquoise and lapis lazuli added dimension to the design. Enamel work was often in black, white, red or green. The natural state of Art Deco pieces adds to their beauty—unlike many gems mined today, Art Deco gems were never heated to even out their colour or cover up flaws.

Unlike jewellery from other design periods, Art Deco works reflect high-quality workmanship with exquisite finishing on the front and back of each piece. “It’s difficult to find jewellery of this quality of craftsmanship today as it is very labour intensive,” says Brenda. Technical innovations in gem cutting and metalwork, and the discovery of platinum alloys revolutionised the art of setting and designs. Its strength and malleability allowed stones to be set close together, keeping the artifice barely visible.

Adding an Art Deco piece to your collection is like owning a piece of history.

Long, lean earrings, flexible link bracelets, large cocktail rings and slim watches with diamond bracelets were the hallmarks of the period. “Bracelets were a must-have. Women then would stack them up one by one and wear them with evening wear. Art Deco earrings, on the other hand, are really hard to find today and are in demand, making them very valuable,” says Brenda.

It’s easy to see how the designs of Art Deco jewellery had their roots in architecture and art, notably Cubism, Futurism and Fauvism. The United States has many buildings constructed in Art Deco style—landmarks like the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building in New York reflect the style with their modern lines, simple looking facades, and geometric ornamentation.

It was also during this period that the first designer jewels surfaced. The French were the top designers of Art Deco jewellery. Many pieces of the ’20s and ’30s were numbered as well as signed. Leading Art Deco jewellery designers such as Cartier, and Van Cleef & Arpels can trace the original date of sale, price and owner through their archives. “Depending on the rarity, brand and design, something that is signed by a very well-known house that is very peak-of-their-time, like Cartier, could be more expensive than what you find in the market today,” said Brenda.

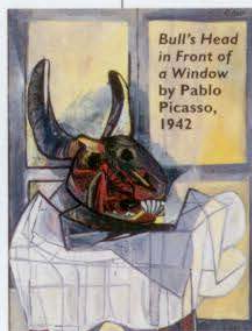
Adding an Art Deco piece to your collection is like owning a piece of history, a piece of wearable art that is classic yet relevant today. For nostalgia lovers, it’s the most graceful way to return to an age of elegance. ■ *Revival Jewels is at #12-09 International Building; 360 Orchard Road*



A pair of Art Deco emerald and diamond earrings, circa 1925

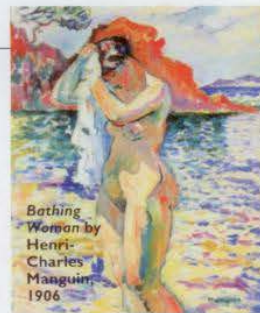
ART INFLUENCES ART

Art Deco jewellery has gained its signature look by drawing inspiration from a multitude of art movements. Here are some.



Bull's Head in Front of a Window by Pablo Picasso, 1942

CUBISM Initiated by artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braques, cubism is the reduction of natural forms to geometric forms. Influenced by cubism, Art Deco jewellery took on its signature geometric lines.



Bathing Woman by Henri-Charles Manguin, 1906

FAUVISM Derived from the French word fauve, which means “wild animals”, fauvist paintings were wild in terms of the strong and vivid colours used. Henri Matisse and Henri-Charles Manguin were some of the famous artists in this movement. Art Deco jewellery is often accented with brightly coloured stones.

FUTURISM An art and social movement which rejects the past and all things old in pursuit of a complete renewal of the human sensibility brought about by modern science, paintings often showed directional lines and movement. Key artists include Italian Giacomo Balla. Enabled by new technology, Art Deco jewellery designs were a clean break from the fussier designs and thus futuristic.



Girl with a Circle by Giacomo Balla, 1918