

A sense of *nostalgia*

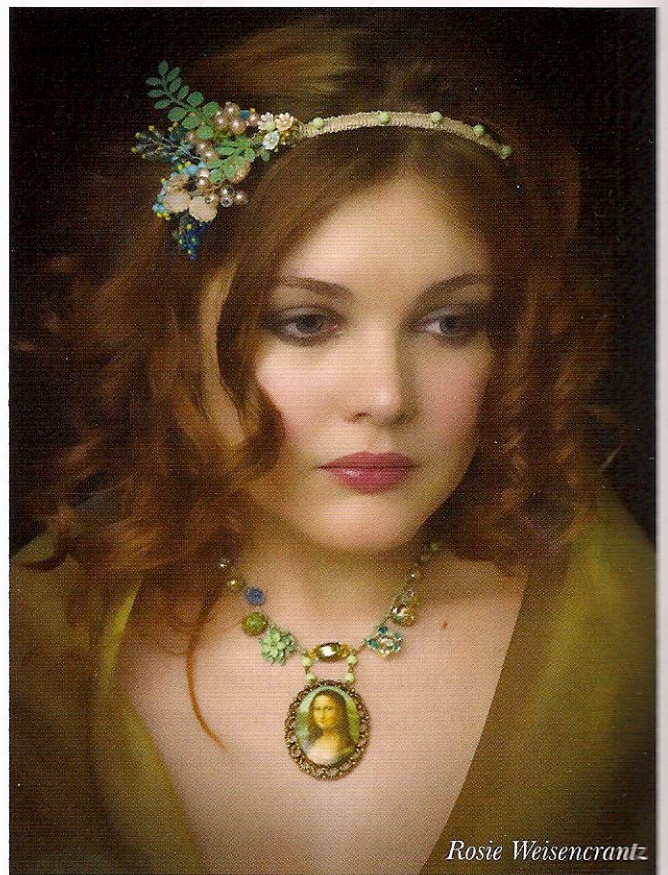
The vintage-inspired jewellery market is going from strength to strength, and to find out why, Laura Jane Johnson speaks with some of the designers working to this theme

An obsession with finding the perfect 'something old' is no longer the exclusive domain of panic-stricken brides. We're experiencing a vintage revival; being old-fashioned has never been so coveted. From the ladylike decorum of 1950s-inspired cupcakes and china tea services, to the pure opulence of the old school Hollywood glamour we're seeing back on the red carpet, vintage is back. And all signs suggest it's here to stay.

"If you look around at the kids in the street you see a hybrid of styles from the 1920s all the way through to the 1980s," says Kathy Dyton of designer jewellery boutique Pearl and Queenie. "I think vintage is not something new, it's always had its place, but it's never been as mainstream as it is now. Music, fashion, interiors and art we can plainly see have this huge vintage theme. I think this has a knock-on effect with jewellery."

As the popularity of vintage styling has grown, jewellery designers have responded by creating collections that celebrate the trends of past decades. Whether using genuine vintage components and heirlooms to create highly unique couture pieces or using the past purely as inspiration for their contemporary designs, vintage designers share a passion for preserving a sense of tradition and history in their work.

It's not hard to understand why vintage jewellery has become so popular. There is definitely something intriguing about it. It captivates you with its quirky charm and the promise of revisiting a bygone era. And it's this romantic sentiment that seems to be particularly



Rosie Weisencrantz

alluring right now. Exhausted by the chaotic, brash and shallow glamour exhibited by WAGs and the wannabe celebrities that dominate the tabloid news, we're yearning for something with a bit more grace and meaning. That's the gap that vintage is filling.

"Some say it's because of the recession," Kathy suggests. "The make do and mend attitude, recycling and romanticising about the past." Caroline Rose Dent, the designer behind the Rosie Weisencrantz vintage collections, echoes this sense of sentimentality: "We're in difficult times economically and spiritually; on all levels really," she says. "I think people are looking for things with meaning. It's the sense of nostalgia that's very strong now. I think it's because we don't know what's going to happen in the future anymore."

Everything about Caroline and her Rosie Weisencrantz creations encapsulates the charming eccentricity and sentimentality of the couture end of the vintage jewellery movement. Her work is unique, handmade and the centrepiece is always a piece of vintage treasure or an heirloom, giving her designs an inimitable sense of history and nostalgia. "There is a difference between the value of a material and the value of the uniqueness," she explains. "It's not about how much gold or silver there is in something, it's about the meaning that a piece of jewellery can have."

For designers sourcing vintage components to use in their own designs, it's often a labour of love, built from a passion for the work



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*Top: Magpie Vintage
Centre: Susie Warner
Bottom: Becca Hulbert*



of designers of previous decades. “I think everyone thinks they can do it,” says Lisa Harris of Magpie Vintage. “But it’s taken us years and we’re still learning now.” Lisa is one half of the duo behind Magpie Vintage. By bringing together her creative flair with the engineering genius of her business partner, Tania Borton, they create opulent masterpieces inspired by renowned designers of yesteryear such as Miriam Haskell and Coco Chanel. “It’s easy to find a brooch and make it into something,” she adds. “But we have pieces of jewellery that will sit there for years waiting for something to match them because we try to make sure all the stone settings, all the cuts of the crystal and rhinestones are all exactly the same. We have a studio packed floor to ceiling with pieces which are just waiting for partners to go with them.”

At the couture end of the market, vintage jewellery is bespoke and the results are truly one-offs. For bridal and memorial jewellery this has a strong appeal, but the limitations of creating these works of art conflict with the rising demand for vintage style jewellery from the fashion conscious buyer. “With people like Cath Kidston and Accessorize building collections around vintage and retro styles, the trend is certainly on an upward swing,” jewellery designer Susie Warner explains. “It has left the boutique market and is heading straight into the mass market.”

The mass market appeal of the vintage look means some designers are finding ways to create repeatable designs to capitalise on the business opportunity. “I was finding many people wanted certain designs but I only had a limited supply of objects,” Susie adds. “I wanted to be able to create ranges which were more widely available. So, for my new autumn/winter range, I started casting vintage objects that I already had in my collection.”

For many designers, creating vintage jewellery is neither about finding it or faking it. It’s more about their personal interpretation of the trend and bringing aspects of traditional and classic design into a contemporary context. Take the delicate details, enamelling and engraving in Becca Hulbert’s handmade jewellery that give her designs a distinctive, vintage-inspired look. Her inspiration may come from old photography, junk shops and interiors from the past, but she is not seeking to replicate other designers’ work. Her jewellery is her own unique take on the vintage trend. As she points out, “a good jeweller can fake anything, yet a good jeweller wouldn’t fake stuff; they’d want to create something of their own.”

So, when we say vintage is big news it doesn’t necessarily mean everyone is deserting the retail jewellers, dusting off their grandma’s favourite cameo and scouring their local charity shop for musty, hidden treasures. “Looking at it coldly, the vintage and retro style is a great marketing theme,” Susie Warner says. “Retailers have a ready-made story that customers are now familiar with, and it has mass market appeal.”

Information

Becca Hulbert: www.beccajewellery.com • Magpie Vintage: www.magpievintage.co.uk
 Pearl and Queenie: www.pearlandqueenie.com • Rosie Weisencrantz: www.rosieweisencrantz.com
 Susie Warner: www.susiewarner.com