

FASHION FOR JEWELS

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Fashion affects the antiques market greatly, and never more so than with jewellery, says *Vivienne Milburn*



IT IS NOT SO LONG AGO that yellow diamonds were extremely unfashionable and now quite the opposite is true. During a recent routine visit to value some inherited jewellery, where no piece was worth more than £200, I came across a large yellow stone ring. The lemon coloured square stone was surrounded by a band of white diamonds, clear stones that enhanced the lemon colour of the central stone. My client had just inherited this item and had no idea what it was.

After testing the stone I was delighted to be able to inform her that it was a yellow diamond surrounded by further smaller diamonds. Some years ago there was no demand for yellow diamonds and they were worth very little. Today the opposite is true and a yellow diamond will make more per carat than a diamond that is absolutely white. This client's ring subsequently made £7,000 in a specialist jewellery sale.

The value of a piece of jewellery derives from the intrinsic value of the materials, the precious metals and stones, and from the design of the article. Leading names in the jewellery design business are Cartier, Asprey, Tiffany, Giuliano, Van Clef and Arpels. Any one of these names can usually multiply the worth of a piece by four times more than one made by a less famous jeweller.

In the early 1900s Cartier was one of the most sought-after jewellers in smart society. Some of Cartier's designs were in the 'Garland Style', influenced by Neo-classical and Art Deco fashions that were popular at the time. The designs usually incorporate ribbons and bow motifs fashioned into swags. Popular pieces were dress clips, chokers, lavalieres (pendant necklaces) and festoon necklaces.

The innovations that Cartier introduced in the use of platinum enabled the jeweller to produce new designs that were light and flexible. Before this time, platinum was considered to be less useful in jewellery because the metal lacks the plasticity of silver. Cartier's response was to construct articulated jewellery with hinged elements that created easy movement. Cartier's designs were



This diamond necklace is a magnificent example of the "Garland Style" by Cartier. Representing the Belle Epoque period, both for the elegance of the design and the quality of the diamonds.

especially prominent in the years leading up to the First World War, the period known as La Belle Époque (the 'beautiful era' that faded with the onset of war and which did not return). The Belle Époque style was synonymous with elegance in fashion and jewellery.

Whilst Cartier drew on the classical influence in the Art Deco period, the jeweller also incorporated Indian influences and Indian jewels in designs. Jacques Cartier first grew interested with Indian jewels at the turn of the nineteenth century when, as the director of Cartier London, he saw the lavish jewels worn by the Indian princes who visited Britain.

He later travelled to India to establish Cartier's reputation amongst the Indian elite. It is an Indian tradition that gems are passed from generation to generation, constantly being reset as new items of jewellery are reinvented with old stones. Cartier gained the confidence of wealthy Indians and was commissioned to reset and transform their jewels into modern designs that contrived to retain the traditional motifs.

As travel between India and Europe improved European styles became more popular in India and Indian fashion and design became fashionable in Europe. Jewellers began to purchase precious gems in India, including emeralds, sapphires and rubies.

Emeralds, sapphires and rubies all appear in jewellery from the Art Deco period, usually in a baguette, or rectangular, cut. Sapphires, as with other precious gems, are measured by weight in carats. Obviously, it would be difficult to weigh a stone that is already mounted in a piece of jewellery and therefore gems of this sort are measured with a pair of callipers called a 'moe' gauge. The weight can be calculated from the diameter and the depth of the stone. Stones come in all colours, and sapphires with a nice lively blue colour are desirable. Some modern of sapphire rings are set with very dark, almost black, stones: it is sometimes difficult to see even have a hint of blue in them.

During a recent valuation I had some very interesting rings to look at, in particular a beautiful oval sapphire ring surrounded by ten brilliant cut diamonds. The sapphire was just under three carats and therefore quite a large stone. The other attractive feature was

that it was a pale blue colour and therefore more desirable than the darker sapphires. This example is expected to fetch £1,500 to £2,000.

Later, exciting jewellery designers include David Webb, who became popular in the 1960s. David created bold designs to be worn as statement pieces, reflecting the new independent culture that women were beginning to enjoy at this time. He is especially well-known for his modern designs that draw on Indian influences, using semi-precious stones and baroque pearls.

Antique jewellery, and rings in particular, tend to hold their value as they retain practical as well as decorative and acquisitive value. You can wear antique jewellery, unlike many other antique items. Therefore it is not surprising that in periods of economic uncertainty people find confidence in investments in fine arts, antiques, silver and gold and jewellery. All are selling at a premium in the current market.

If you have items of jewellery or fine arts I would be happy to appraise them on your behalf, whether for insurance or sale. ■

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This pair of cultured pearl and diamond earrings by Cartier made £5,400 in a recent sale. The earrings are marked Cartier, mounted in platinum and presented in a red leather jewellery box which is a trademark associated with Cartier.



The Rojman Diamond, illustrates how jewellery is refashioned and keeps its value. First seen in 1957, it was a yellow cushion-cut stone of 107.60 carats. It was recut to its present weight of 107.46 carats, and mounted it in an elaborate clip-pendant combination. Graff Diamonds Ltd of London bought the stone at Sotheby's in 2007 for \$1.92 million. It was then set in a ring of rose gold with 8.71 carats of pink and white diamonds. Its new value is, as yet, untested.



Fashion affects the jewellery auction prices, Vivienne Milburn studying an Art Deco ring.