



Jewel personality

Jewellery adorns almost every woman on the planet, its main function to inspire desire. Jewellery has been intrinsically tied to beauty and the feminine for a long time, says **Jennifer Whitenor**, but are things changing as jewellery becomes more accessible?

Whether we are gazing in shop windows, flicking through magazines or following the fashion statements of A-list stars and European royalty, we are constantly aware of the presence of jewellery.

Far from simply being a pretty addition that will go well with a dress, jewellery has helped form our understanding and definition of beauty, as well as playing a part in forming the world in which we live, partly by creating a demand for rare metals and stones – and it even hurried along the French Revolution (see box overleaf).

Diamonds are a girl's best friend

A diamond necklace can accentuate and reflect a timeless beauty, a gold ring can suggest sophistication, and a pearl earring can lengthen the face, but each of these jewels can do much more if designed or worn differently.

'Jewellery is as popular as ever,' insists Keith Penton, Christie's London jewellery expert, adding that its role and our attitudes towards it have changed dramatically.

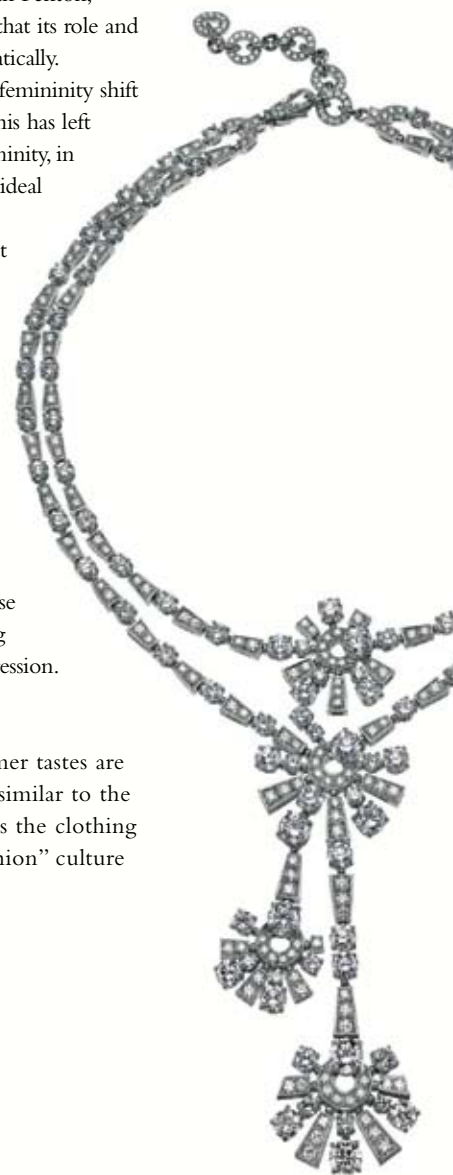
A cultural shift has seen the definition of femininity shift fundamentally over the last 100 years, and this has left women defining themselves, and their femininity, in very different ways. No longer is there one ideal of beauty or the feminine; women are freer now to represent themselves in any way that they feel comfortable with, encouraging innovation and adoption.

'You now have art jewellers who are striving to produce something for people who don't just want rocks,' says Penton. 'There are so many emerging new economies that treat jewellery in different ways. You only have to look at India; they do not approach jewellery in the same way as Europeans, favouring elaborate nose ornaments and upper arm bands.' These new influences and impressions are all being combined into new forms of taste and expression.

Shifting fashions

Fashion journalist Jodie Ball says consumer tastes are changing too, with jewellery becoming similar to the trend-following clothing industry. 'Just as the clothing industry moves more towards a "fast fashion" culture

Cartier and Bulgari (left and right, respectively) create jewellery and watches that make women feel feminine





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HEAD OVER HEELS

The Queen of France, Marie Antoinette, paid an extremely expensive price for one particular necklace she was interested in: her head.

The Diamond Necklace Affair was untimely to say the least, coming at a time when the French monarchy was at the lowest point of its popularity. Just three years later, during the French Revolution, Marie Antoinette was executed with her husband, King Louis XVI.

The scandal involved a countess, Jeanne de Saint Rémy de Valois, who very nearly pulled off a con job of magnificent proportions. Failing as a social climber, she pretended she knew the Queen well and convinced Cardinal Rohan that the Queen was in love with him. She encouraged him to buy the Queen one of the most expensive necklaces ever made, but instead of giving it to the Queen she gave it to her husband who rushed to London to sell it.

The ruse would have succeeded except for the fact that the necklace was so expensive that the Cardinal delayed paying and the jewellers went to the Queen for the money. She, understandably, knew nothing of the necklace but had Valois, Rohan and a few others arrested.

Rohan was later acquitted, but suffered humiliation for being duped, and Valois was whipped, branded and put in the prostitutes' prison. Unfortunately, the scandal stuck to the Queen and the people believed it all to have been her fault.





Photo credit:
Katel Riou
for Cartier

— focused on temporary, almost throw-away clothes — the jewellery market is also coming round to the idea of modern, quick-fix consumerism. As a result, we are seeing a significant rise in the demand for costume jewellery.'

Costume jewellery is made from less valuable materials, such as base metals, glass and plastic. It first reached widespread popularity when worn by Coco

Chanel, but has since spread to the wrists, necks and ears of almost everyone. It allows for greater innovation and more dramatic and colourful designs. However, it says something quite different from the high-end luxury jewellery.

Penton believes that at the top end of jewellery design, 'people often want perfection. In the 18th and 19th centuries people didn't grade diamonds as precisely as we do now.' These levels of perfection force the prices up, but that makes the statement all the bolder if you are wearing diamonds.

Men's attitudes are changing as well, although, as Charlotte Purssord from *Cosmopolitan* magazine points out, 'Contrary to popular belief, David Beckham was not the first man to wear jewellery and a skirt. We know

that men wore jewellery as far back as the 5th century.' However, in the past jewellery was a status symbol for men. Now it is becoming a decoration for men as well as women.

And that's what it is all about: looking good. No matter how you choose to define your femininity (or masculinity), jewellery can play a part in getting your message across. Whether it's diamonds that cost millions, glass beads from the local market or your grandmother's engagement ring, jewellery, used well, can help you be attractive within your definition of femininity. ■



Photo credits
for brooch and
necklace: ©
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Limited



(Top left) Rings and things: modern diamonds are graded more precisely, helping women make a bigger statement

(Top right) Swinging sixties: a topaz and diamond 'flower twist' necklace by Fulco di Verdura, circa 1966

(Bottom left) Green with envy: this emerald and diamond pendant brooch was made in England in 1829 using a Mughal emerald from the mid-17th century

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