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Jewelry Education, Trends, and Tips

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Guide To Vintage Jewelry: Eras, Modern Takes, Glossary & Styling

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📁 Fashion & Style
🔖 Buying Guide, Jewelry Styling, Trends

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People have loved the beauty of jewelry for centuries, with iconic pieces adorning subjects in paintings and sitting on display in museums. We've previously shared some of our favorite recent vintage-inspired jewelry pieces that have come back into style, specifically with a focus on recent [vintage and retro jewelry styles that have found their way into today's most popular looks](#).

For jewelry lovers with an admiration for even older looks, accessorizing with vintage style jewelry involves earlier styles such as antique designs. But knowing where to start when it comes to buying antique and vintage jewelry requires a little bit of research.

Our guide to vintage jewelry outlines popular bygone eras, modern takes on these styles along with breakdowns of different construction for men's and women's vintage jewelry, antique pieces and older gems.

The Difference Between Antique And Vintage Jewelry

The terms antique jewelry and vintage jewelry are often used interchangeably, but they each refer to a different set of time. Vintage pieces are ones that are under 99 years old and antique jewelry pieces are ones that are over 100 years old.

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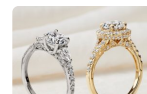
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In general, the term vintage jewelry is applied to pieces that are anywhere from 20-99 years old, though some sellers will only use the word vintage for items that are between 50-99 years old. All sellers are in agreement that for a piece of jewelry to be called antique, it must be 100 years or older.

Antique Jewelry Styles And Eras

Antique jewelry pieces are over 100 years old. This encompasses Georgian through earlier Art Deco jewelry. Each period has its own set years that encompass different styles, popular culture trends and crafting capabilities. There are hallmark jewelry trends that can be attributed to many of these antique jewelry eras with staying power through today.

Georgian Jewelry: 1714 To 1837

Though the name for this style era is hinged on English origins, there were many influences in Georgian design trends from France, Italy and Germany. Antique Georgian jewelry was largely handcrafted, with colorful gemstones and warm diamonds of unique cuts.

With handcrafting at its core, Georgian antique jewelry styles include scrollwork motifs and enameling. There are also sub-sections of Georgian styles, with designs reflecting archeological discoveries of the time such as motifs echoing ancient Rome, Greece and Egypt.

Due to limited capabilities in faceting and gemstone cutting, many Georgian jewelry items were formed to fit their specific gems. Many pieces featured additional foiling behind gems to enhance their appearance.

Georgian Jewelry Fast Facts

— Years
1714-1837
+ Notable Designs
+ Identification
+ Modern Counterparts





Victorian Jewelry: 1837-1901

When most people think of antique jewelry, they think of the Victorian period. Spanning 64 years, the Victorian period saw immense changes in manufacturing capabilities, popular culture and its namesake monarch's changing tastes. There are also many pieces from this period that have lasted into modern day, making them a great choice for antique and vintage jewelry collectors.

There are many antique jewelry styles encompassed in the Victorian jewelry era. Romantic sentimental pieces were incredibly popular, including acrostic [gemstone jewelry](#). Many items were made of low karat gold or they were gold plated, though later gold rushes enabled higher fineness in pieces. Mourning jewelry was also very popular during the Victorian period.

Popular antique jewelry materials for Victorian pieces include [silver](#), yellow [gold](#), turquoise, garnet, pearl, emerald, agate and amethyst. Styles include charm bracelets, gate bracelets, fobs, marcasite styles, slide chains and brooches.

When shopping for Victorian jewelry, you may find some pieces listed as American Victorian jewelry. This means that this jewelry was made during the Victorian period and likely encompasses one of the era's signature styles, but it was produced in America rather than in the United Kingdom.

Victorian Jewelry Fast Facts

— Years
1837-1901
+ Notable Designs
+ Identification
+ Modern Counterparts





Art Nouveau Jewelry: 1890-1910

As years went on, several antique and vintage jewelry styles began to exist at the same time. Art Nouveau jewelry existed at the same time as the style periods that came before and after it, encompassing its own genre of antique style. This jewelry was, in part, a backlash to the Industrial Revolution as it placed premium value on handmade crafting.

This jewelry was crafted by artisans with an emphasis on the natural world and celestial wonders. Designs were crafted with flowing lines in softer materials like copper, [opal](#) and even glass. Gemstones were used sparingly, instead focusing on the crafting capabilities of the skilled artisan.

Art Nouveau jewelry often features motifs such as flowers, celestial bodies, insects, fantasy animals and flowing designs.

Art Nouveau Jewelry Fast Facts

— Years
1890-1910
+ Notable Designs
+ Identification
+ Modern Counterparts

Edwardian Jewelry: 1901-1915

Ornate Edwardian jewelry was typically designed to reflect the regality of King Edward VII and his upper-crust admirers. This jewelry was often worn by high society members to indicate their social standings. The pieces featured ornate designs that were often in platinum. They included lacy designs, ribbons, bows and garlands.

Discoveries of diamond deposits made the gemstone a popular choice for Edwardian jewelry, with accompanying gems such as pearls. Many pieces featured openwork designs or flowing [chains](#). White metals and gemstones were the most popular options for this antique jewelry, but some designs would feature a prominent colorful gem as well.

Edwardian Jewelry Fast Facts

— Years
1901–1915
+ Notable Designs
+ Identification
+ Modern Counterparts

Art Deco Jewelry: 1920s-1930s

This jewelry style saw its popularity soar with the skyscrapers and streamlined designs of the machine age. Its name hails from a 1925 Paris exhibition of decorative arts which included signature sleek, geometric jewelry pieces that celebrated the burgeoning industries of the time.

Art Deco jewelry fits right into the design trends of the 1920s and 30s, featuring sophisticated repeating geometric patterns. The Chrysler Building is emblematic of the Art Deco times, and many jewelry pieces of the era reflected similar geometric grandiosity.

Platinum and white gold were popular metals for Art Deco jewelry along with geometric cuts for [diamonds](#) and gemstones. Art Deco pieces include brooches, earrings, bracelets and long [pearl necklaces](#) that were often worn wrapped around several times.

Many vintage-style wedding jewelry pieces focus on Art Deco inspiration.

Art Deco Jewelry Fast Facts

— Years
1920s-1930s
+ Notable Designs
+ Identification
+ Modern Counterparts

Vintage Jewelry Styles And Eras

Art Deco currently sits on the cusp of both antique and vintage jewelry styles due to its date range. There are other jewelry looks that are more vintage than antique, with retro styles to more normal looks.

Retro Jewelry: 1930s-1950

Many women's vintage jewelry styles come from the retro era. It softened the geometric looks of Art Deco pieces and incorporated sculptural curves. Wartime efforts took [platinum](#) out of jewelry production, so most pieces were made in gold. This brought more color to jewelry, with bright gemstones such as topaz, citrine and aquamarine becoming trendy.

Old Hollywood glamour also found its way to retro jewelry styles, with more ornate looks becoming popular at the later end of this period. Beaded looks, such as those with pearl strands, also held onto their popularity in this era.

Retro Jewelry Fast Facts

— Years
1930s-1950
+ Notable Designs
+ Identification
+ Modern Counterparts

More Recent Vintage Jewelry Years

There are recent decades of jewelry style that fit the vintage definition, though they're not quite historic.

— 1960s
Vintage style jewelry from the 1960s incorporated some of the decade's brightest hallmarks: flower power, mod styles and space exploration. Pieces from this era were fun and funky, with costume jewelry styles shining alongside fine jewelry . Pieces mixed Art Deco's classic geometry with asymmetrical designs and textural experimentation.
+ 1970s

Antique Jewelry Glossary

With centuries of crafting, jewelry has seen major changes in its creation throughout history. Today, women's and [men's jewelry](#) is made with popular precious metals, costume designs, standardized bench jewelry practices, routine [external diamond grading](#) and machine precision to enhance human skill. But in the past, jewelry was entirely handmade with different techniques, materials and standards.

The old jewelry manufacturing methods involved many different materials that aren't common today. You can refer to our glossary below to learn more about antique and vintage jewelry materials, terms and styles.

— Acrostic
Gemstone jewelry in which the first letter of each gem spells out a secret message.
+ Albert Chain
+ Bakelite
+ Cabochon
+ Cameo
+ Dog Clip

+ Festoon
+ Filigree
+ Fob
+ Foiled Jewelry
+ Gilt
+ Gold Filled
+ Intaglio
+ Jet
+ Marcasite
+ Niello
+ Paste
+ Repoussé
+ Rolled Gold
+ Sautoir
+ T-Bar

Styling Antique And Vintage-Inspired Jewelry

Jewelry styles have changed greatly over the years, but other looks have come back around time and time again. We believe that jewelry is all about self-expression, and the same goes for incorporating authentic vintage pieces or modern designs that have been inspired by vintage looks.

Many antique and vintage jewelry pieces have been reworked in modern styles, giving them new energy alongside today's trends. Many vintage hat pins have been converted into rings, while Albert chains and fobs are now worn as necklaces instead of pocket watch accessories.

How Do You Style Antique And Vintage Jewelry?

It's easier than you may think to style vintage and antique jewelry. Pick pieces that feel authentic to you, and don't forget to have fun styling your selections! You can select similar metals or eras for a cohesive look, or you can choose items that contrast for a dramatic style.

About the Author

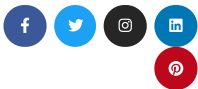
Elizabeth Hadden is a GIA AJP (Applied Jewelry Professional) and vintage jewelry hobbyist with a special admiration for Georgian-era pieces. In addition to a growing jewelry collection of odd charms and offbeat designs, she has a bachelor's in English. She combines her love of the history behind jewelry with an appreciation for modern takes on popular motifs.

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