The earliest costume jewelry was simply an imitation of precious jewelry and had little intrinsic value or original style of its own. However, once the French couturiers put their names to costume jewelry it became desirable, acceptable, and expensive. In the early 1910s, couturier Paul Poiret became a proponent of costume jewelry, accessorizing his models with necklaces of silk tassels and semiprecious stones designed by the artist Iribe.

Early Costume Jewelry Designers
Coco Chanel, Jean Patou, Drécoll, and Premet were also among the first famous couturiers to create costume jewelry along with clothing, which propelled its acceptance. By 1925, the Marshall Field's department store catalog described costume jewelry in positive terms, announcing, "The imitation is no longer a disgrace."

1920s Replicas
The most ubiquitous jewelry imitation in the 1920s was a pearl necklace. Strands of pearls or colored beads neatly circled the neck or swung to waist, hip, even kneelength, made to move with fast-paced dances like the Charleston. At the end of the period when the little black dress became a daytime standard, shorter strands of light-colored beads and pearls continued as the accessories of choice. Rhinestone jewelry also blazed into prominence, as it was the perfect foil for two fashion innovations: suntans and white evening gowns.
Influences on Costume Jewelry

Beginning in the 1920s and continuing throughout the 1930s, fashion and jewelry shared a multitude of influences including Art Deco, the Far East, North Africa, and India. Egyptian motifs were inspired by the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922. The Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931 and the New York World's Fair in 1939 expanded the vocabulary of foreign influences, and rough, raw, "barbaric" materials (real and imitation), including ivory (and faux versions), bone, amber, wood, and even cork, were used for over-scale jewelry. Chanel’s signature necklace in 1939 was a massive East Indian-inspired bib of faux pearls, uncut emeralds, ruby beads, and dangling metal pieces with a cord tie.

In the mid-1930s, fashion's palette turned Technicolor, as plastic was produced in bright colors for the first time and metal jewelry was hand-enameled to add color. Toy-like novelty accessories (both costume and precious jewelry) were wildly popular, inspired by the Surrealists, couturier Elsa Schiaparelli, and Walt Disney’s cartoons. The queen of whimsy, Schiaparelli put metal insects and caterpillars on necklaces, and her brooches ranged from miniature musical instruments, roller skates, harlequins, blackamoores, and ostriches. Influenced by the lively antics of cartoons, jewelry also had movable parts: Brooches and necklaces were adorned with "trembler" flowers, hanging plastic fruit, or charms. Clips could be deconstructed into separate pieces. This silly jewelry lightened up the lapels of the fashionable severe and sober, fitted suits.

At the same time, the romantic rococo and Victorian styles flourished, lingering into the 1940s. Rococo jewelry, associated with the Empress Eugenie, was typically frivolous bow-knots, swags and ribbon curves, sparingly ornamented with large, faux-semiprecious cut stones. It was usually plated with real gold (pink, white, yellow) or sterling silver. Victorian styles were copied directly from the originals: lockets, cameos, chokers, even hat pins. Black plastic was the substitute for nineteenth-century jet.

Wartime Materials

During World War II, imports from Europe were cut off, and many jewelry materials were also restricted. Desperate costume jewelers bought beaded sweaters, evening dresses, and even stage costumes, and harvested their beads, rhinestones, and pearls. They also fashioned jewelry from humble materials that were readily available during wartime: pumpkin seeds, nuts, shells, olive pits, clay, leather, felt, yarn, and even upholstery fabrics. Women wore hand-carved wooden brooches, necklaces of multicolored painted shells, cork, and bits of drift-wood. There was little difference between quirky, childish, commercially made jewelry and what the women made themselves following do-it-yourself instructions published in magazines.

Patriotic motifs flourished during wartime, ranging from red, white, and blue to all-American motifs related to California, Hawaii, Native American Indians, and cowboys. Costume jewelry also took on a militaristic theme, and miniature model tanks, airplanes, battleships, jeeps, soldiers, and even hand grenades were made up in metal or wood and worn as brooches, necklaces, and earrings. In the summer of 1940, "V" for victory was a popular design. As Mexico was America’s wartime ally, jewelry imported from that country and its imitations was highly fashionable. Two notable Mexican artisans who worked in silver, Rebajes and Spratling, had their sophisticated jewelry featured at top department stores across the country. Patriotic jewelry completely vanished during peacetime.

Postwar Style

Postwar fashion succumbed to couturier Christian Dior’s highly structured New Look, followed by a series of equally severe styles: the chemise, sheathe, trapeze, and sack dress. The transformation was radical. Clothing concealed most of a woman’s body, and only chokers, earrings, bracelets (notably charm bracelets), and brooches were visible. Dresses and suits in heavy, rough-textured fabrics were weighty enough to support the hunky, oversized circles, ovals, snowflake, or starburst-shaped brooches (associated with the atomic bomb), typically three-dimensional. Rhinestones were standard, produced in a rainbow of colors including white, black, pink, blue, yellow, and iridescent, which was an innovation.
Tailored jewelry was the most conservative accessory in the 1950s. Neat and small scale, it was made up in gold or silver metal with little ornamentation. Although clothing concealed their figures, women wore their hair upswept, in a ponytail, or cropped gamine short, to show off hoop, button, and neat pearl earrings. Later in the decade, metal jewelry was thicker, its surface scored, chiseled, or deeply etched, a treatment that lingered into the 1960s.

The distinction between accessories for day and night blurred as casual Italian sportswear became popular. For example, in 1959 actress Elizabeth Taylor was featured in *Life* magazine wearing Dior’s black jet choker with a low-cut black sweater. Entertaining at home also created another new fashion category. Theatrical, over-sized chandelier and girandole earrings complemented lounging pajamas, caftans, and floor-length skirts, which remained stylish hostess garb into the 1960s.

Chanel plundered the Renaissance for jewelry inspiration. With her signature suits, in 1957 she showed pendants (notably the Maltese cross), brooches, and chain sautoirs in heavy gold set with baroque pearls, lumpy glass rubies, and emeralds. This style still continues to be identified with Chanel today.

**Hippy Chic Jewelry**

In the 1960s, bold, pop-art graphic “flower power” motifs were fashion favorites. The ubiquitous daisy was produced in every material from plastic to enameled metal, and in a palette of neon bright colors. Daisies were linked into belts, pinned on hats and dresses, and suspended from chains around the neck. Even Chanel and Dior produced flower jewelry, although their brooches, necklaces, and earrings were petaled with fragile poured glass.

Hippies and the counterculture rejected this sophistication in favor of handmade and ethnic jewelry in humble materials: clay and glass beads, yarn, temple bells, papier-mâché, macramé, and feathers. Both men and women pierced their ears, crafted their own head-bands, ornamented their clothing with beads and embroidery, strung love beads, or hung a peace sign, ankh, or zodiac symbol on a strip of rawhide around their necks. Singer Janis Joplin typically performed while weighed down with a massive assortment of new and vintage necklaces and bracelets.

*Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar* also cultivated this theatrical style. Diana Vreeland, editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, commissioned wildly dramatic, oversized jewelry specifically for the magazine. Usually one of a kind, tenuously held together with wire, thread, and glue, these pieces were too fragile to be worn outside the photo studio. There were breastplates of rhinestones or tiny mirrors, golf-ball-size pearl rings, shoulder-sweeping feather earrings, wrist and armloads of painted papier-mâché bracelets.

Technology also contributed to this fantastical mode. In 1965, plastic pearls were produced for the first time in lightweight, gigantic sizes. They were strung together into multistrand necklaces, bibs, helmets, and even dresses.

**Designer Style, Costume Prices**

Style-wise, costume jewelry was a match for fine jewelry. The so-called beautiful people gleefully mixed costume jeweler Kenneth Jay Lane’s $30 rhinestone and enamel panther bracelets (inspired by the Duchess of Windsor’s original Cartier models) with their real ones. Lane was well known for his weighty pendant necklaces, shoulder-length chandelier earrings set with gaudy, multicolored fake stones, and enormous cocktail rings. His clients ranged from Babe Paley to Greta Garbo and the Velvet Underground.
Chanel continued to produce Renaissance-style jewelry, notably Maltese crosses and cuff bracelets embellished with large stones, which morphed into a more exaggerated version. Diana Vreeland chose this style as her signature, sporting a pair of jeweled enamel cuffs reportedly designed by Fulco di Verdura.

**Punk thru Pop**

At the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, "space age" style was an alternative to this ornate jewelry. Coolly modern, geometric, it was made up in industrial materials such as transparent plastic and metal hardware. This hard-edged jewelry was a match for clothing ornamented with oversized buckles, zippers, grommets, and nail heads.

Around the same time, punk ruled the streets. The devotees of this style favored leather jackets and jeans that were as aggressive and unisex as their accessories: dog collars and leather armbands bristling with nail heads and spikes, thick chains worn as chokers and around waists. The most notorious punk ornamentation was also the simplest: a safety pin stuck through an ear, nose, lip, or cheek.

Two designers, Elsa Peretti and Robert Lee Morris, heavily influenced costume jewelry during this period. Peretti began designing for Tiffany in 1974, and costume jewelers immediately copied her small-scale, streamlined "lima bean" and "teardrop" pendants, and "diamonds by the yard" of cut stones strung on slender chains.

In New York City, Robert Lee Morris set up his own boutique, Artwear, as a showcase for his handmade gold-bead necklaces, gladiator-size cuffs, metal breastplates, and hefty belt buckles. Fashion designer Donna Karan accessorized her line with Morris's bold and simple creations for several seasons.

In the 1980s, entertainers Cyndi Lauper and Madonna were the female forces that drove style through the new media of music videos, and both mixed lingerie with vintage clothing, and vintage jewelry with cheap new baubles. Madonna wore armloads of rubber bracelets with religious-cross pendants and rosaries. Hip hop and rap music stars sported jewelry in heavy gold or gold-plated look-alikes: nameplate pendants, knuckle rings, ID bracelets. A gold-covered front tooth was a more permanent and extreme ornament.

**Modern Age of Costume Adornment**

As the simplified styles of designers Giorgio Armani and Calvin Klein became popular, jewelry gradually shrank in scale until it disappeared. As minimalism ruled fashion, the jewelry business was abysmal. However, costume jewelry came back to glitzy glory in the early 1990s, propelled by the whimsical accessories of Christian Lacroix and Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel. Lagerfeld successfully revived and restyled many of Chanel's signatures, including multistrand pearl necklaces, and Renaissance-style jewelry. He used the "CC" logo as decoration on everything from earrings to pocketbooks.

Entertainers and movie stars steered fashion in 2000, and they wore the real thing, not costume jewelry. Pop music figures Jennifer Lopez and Lil' Kim flashed enormous precious stones on their fingers. Impresario Sean Combs (a.k.a Puff Daddy, P. Diddy) flaunted enormous diamond-stud earrings and monster diamond rings. A long line of movie stars, including Nicole Kidman and Charlize Theron, borrowed jewelry, usually fine antique pieces, from established jewelers such as Harry Winston and Fred Leighton. It was a sign of the times when Chanel launched a line of precious jewelry, and Prada installed precious jewelry from Fred Leighton in their Soho store. Once again, the cycle had turned, and costume jewelry imitated precious jewelry, or "bling bling" as the blinding real thing was called in 2003.

*See also Bracelets; Brooches and Pins; Earrings; Jewelry; Necklaces and Pendants.*

**Bibliography**


Was this page useful?  ✔ Yes  ✗ No

---

**Trending in fashion history**

1. **Theories of Fashion**
   - By Marilyn Revell DeLong
   - 101K views

2. **Japanese Textiles**
   - By John S. Major
   - 29K views

3. **Hip-Hop Fashion**
   - By Van Dyk Lewis
   - 25K views

4. **Appliqué**
   - By Nan H. Mutnick
   - 22K views

5. **Fashion and Identity**
   - By Susan B. Kaiser
   - 22K views

---

**fashion history Categories**

Alphabetical Index of Fashion and Clothing History

- Body Fashions
- Clothing Around the World
- Clothing Closures and Embellishments
- Clothing Types and Styles
- Fabrics and Fibers
- Fashion Accessories
- Fashion and Clothing Industry
- Fashion History and Eras

---

**I vetoknow**

Advice you can trust.

**FEATURED ARTICLES**

- Valentine Cookie Decorating Ideas
- How to Fly Solo on Valentine's Day and Love Every Minute
- Inspiring and Romantic Valentine Message Ideas
- Valentine's Nail Art Ideas
- Affordable Romantic Weekend Getaways
White jewelry was popularized by Dior in the 1950s, and other designers and manufacturers followed suit. Value: $58 (eBay 7/06). Continue to 35 of 59 below. This piece is an example of Trifari's prime work. It is considered a rarity in the costume jewelry world and is highly sought by avid collectors. In spite of this brooch being incorrectly labeled as a "jelly belly" in the online auction description and having a few minor condition issues, this piece brought top dollar on eBay. #costume jewelry #classism #all that glitters #jody shields #max vadukul #alison houtte #jewelry #fashion. 117 notes. laulaunyc. Want to see more posts tagged #costume jewelry? Sign up for Tumblr.