

A Brief History of Jewellery

How has jewellery evolved from one era to the next?

Follow the journey of jewellery through time, from the medieval era right through to the roaring 20s and beyond.



Early Modern Era 1100 - 1400

Gemstones were said to have supernatural properties, so much so that some stones were set in metal with the back of the jewel remaining open and in contact with the skin. That way, its magic could easily pass to the wearer.

Did you know?

Jewellers were not yet able to cut and shape gemstones, which meant that stones were larger but with a duller exterior, much closer to their natural shape and colour.



Did you know?

In the 14th century, laws were passed forcing people to only wear the jewellery that reflected the land they owned and their social status.

Medieval Era 1200 - 1500

Brooches, first used to pin cloaks, became more embellished and lavish. They featured religious iconography, coats of arms, and geometric shapes.



Renaissance 1400 - 1700

During the Renaissance, the pendant took many forms and fast became THE way to express the sensibility of the Renaissance. With large baroque pearls, goldsmiths created intricate ships and lizards, as well as mythical creatures.

Did you know?

With the rapid growth of fine art, technology and global exploration, the Renaissance brought new gemstones with it. The naval trade discovered diamonds and rubies in India, topaz in Brazil, and emeralds in Columbia, and brought them back to Europe.



Did you know?

Queen Victoria loved romantic jewellery such as cameo pendants, and was known to wear jewellery that contained a lock of hair from loved ones. This sentimental jewellery trend reached its peak in popularity after the death of Prince Albert when the Queen wore only black and continued to wear mourning jewellery for years afterwards.

The Victorian Era 1837 - 1901

Jewellery making began to benefit from mass production as a result of the Industrial Revolution, and machines were now used to create pieces of jewellery from sheet metal.

Fact: In the mid-19th century, 50 tons of human hair made its way to England every year to fulfil the need for mourning jewellery.



Did you know?

You can tell the difference between an arts and craft piece and an art nouveau piece by studying how the stones are set. An arts and craft piece heavily uses cabochon stones that are either bezel or collet set, whereas an art nouveau piece would more likely feature stones with a prong setting.

The Arts & Crafts Movement 1880 - 1910

The philosophy behind the Arts & Craft movement? In response to industrialisation, the movement was a backlash against machinery removing creativity from society. Jewellers began to create new techniques, placing the joy of craft back into the hands of artists.



Did you know?

Do you use the plique à jour enamelling technique? This technique, closely associated with Art Nouveau, was used to create a translucent effect for delicate organic features such as insect wings, or a mermaid's scales.

Art Nouveau 1895 - 1910

Insects, creatures and botany formed the main motifs of Art Nouveau jewellery, with enamelling becoming a popular technique to create an organic look to the designs.



Did you know?

Ever heard of millegraining? The use of sturdy platinum in Edwardian pieces made this new technique possible – it refers to the addition of a tiny beaded detail to the edge of a platinum piece.

Edwardian 1901 - 1915

Jewellers who strayed from the Art Nouveau movement created more delicate pieces known as the 'garland' style. Ribbons, wreaths, garlands and bows were created with a new, lighter touch due to new techniques of white platinum fabrication.



Did you know?

The term 'Art Deco' came from the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes - an exhibition largely dedicated to jewellery in Paris in 1925.

Art Deco 1920s

Geometric shapes and clean lines counteracted the fluid shapes of the Art Nouveau trend. And with gem cutters now able to achieve faceted gems with angular edges, new diamond cuts and shapes were featured in many pieces, from rings and watches, to headbands and cigarette cases.



Did you know?

Inspiration for modernist jewellery? Many modernist jewellers from the 30s and 40s took their inspiration from African masks and tribal cuffs, using clean lines and minimal gemstones to create neck cuffs and bangles that were simple but striking.

Modernist 1930s - 1950s

Gold found its place in the 1930s and 1940s, with yellow and pink gold being used to create softer lines that still originated from the angular lines of the Art Deco period.

Contemporary 1950s - Present

Jewellers from the 1950s to the present day have continued to look back at the history of jewellery to re-discover techniques and trends. By re-using and re-hashing these trends, they can create designs that hark back to a forgotten era while working with today's tools and modern techniques to create pieces that are completely unique.

And with jewellery making materials such as precious metals and gemstones now readily available to the masses, hobbyists can now take on more complex projects becoming craft experts in their own right.



Manufactured by Cooksongold. Designed by Joe Corden.

Future

With the introduction of the 3D printer, designers are starting to experiment with new possibilities when it comes to jewellery making. As technological tools enhance the traditional jeweller's trade, it's easy to see how the art of jewellery making will continue to evolve over time.

Visit The Bench for more jewellery inspiration, trends, and tool and technique advice.



Resources:

- <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/a-history-of-jewellery>
- <http://www.historyofjewelry.net/>
- <http://www.trumpetandhorn.com/learn-more/vintage-jewelry-eras.html>
- <https://historyofeuropeanfashion.wordpress.com/2011/11/29/jewelry-of-the-middle-ages/>
- <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1039&context=historydiss>
- <http://www.historyofjewelry.net/jewelry-history/renaissance-jewelry/>
- <http://www.collectorsweekly.com/fine-jewelry/mourning>
- <http://www.guyotbrothers.com/jewelry-history/jewelry-history-page17.htm>
- <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-arts-and-crafts-movement/>
- <http://jewelrynerd.org/blog/how-to-tell-arts-and-crafts-jewelry-from-art-nouveau-jewelry>
- http://www.langantiques.com/university/Edwardian_Jewelry:_1901-1915
- <https://www.beladora.com/2013/01/art-nouveau-jewelry>
- http://www.langantiques.com/university/Art_Deco_Era_Jewelry
- <http://www.collectorsweekly.com/fine-jewelry/modernist>