

{STYLE}

Costume Jewellery Comes Full Circle

Be adorned. Pieces from the likes of Chanel, Gripoix and Miriam Haskell never go out of style.

By Mark Grischke | Photography by David Lewis Taylor



THE HISTORY OF COSTUME JEWELLERY BEGAN IN 1924, WHEN Gabrielle Chanel donned a pair of frankly fake pearl earrings and wore them in broad daylight. Imitation jewellery wasn't new, of course, but most pieces were gauche—paste stones masquerading as diamonds. Traditionally, women wore jewels to broadcast the wealth of husbands or lovers. Chanel rode roughshod over that notion by inventing costume jewellery (as opposed to mere imitation), which was designed to enhance fashionable ensembles. “Jewellery isn't meant to make you look rich; it's meant to adorn you,” Chanel said, “and that's not the same thing.”

Fortunately for 21st-century shoppers, some of the finest costume jewellers are still in business. The oldest is the French house of Gripoix, which dates from 1869 and specialises in *pâte de verre*, or poured glass. During the Belle Époque, Augustine Gripoix made items for theatrical productions and costume balls, but circumstances changed dramatically when Chanel sought help creating couture-worthy costume jewellery. At her request, Gripoix reproduced the clear green and red glow of emeralds and rubies, and the gleam of pearls—in glass. Now in the hands of owner and designer Marie Keslassy, it continues to turn out beautiful creations.

At the same time Chanel was revolutionising costume jewellery in Paris, an American girl, Miriam Haskell, was following fashion's siren call to New York. She opened a shop there in 1926, catering to theatre folk. Her work was lauded for its craftsmanship. During a buying trip to Paris, she even encountered Mlle Chanel and for years thereafter designed pieces for her couture collections and for the woman herself. The Great Depression kick-started Haskell's business in America, as many sold their fine jewellery and made do with faux. And even though the company's founder has long since passed away, her name lives on—the Miriam Haskell collection is still made, by hand, in its New York workshops, using materials such as Swarovski crystals and hand-dipped Japanese glass pearls.

As for the house Chanel built, it still produces some of today's wittiest and most forward-looking costume jewellery. As Caroline Rennolds Milbank writes in a preface to The Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2005 Costume Institute catalogue, Chanel's genius was “for producing items that seem incapable of ever going thoroughly out of style.”

Mark Grischke has for 20 years covered the world of luxury goods as an editor and writer.

Crowning Jewels

Beaded glass cross necklace and cuff bracelets by Gripoix; faux pearl necklace by Miriam Haskell; brooch by Chanel

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