

# Buying Vintage Jewelry for the Holidays

## A guide to getting the most bling for your buck

By Kate Davidson Hudson

### Vintage Jewelry for the Holidays

**T**he vintage jewelry market, is, for many, unfamiliar territory. It's sometimes perceived as terrain riddled with esotericisms and studied references that are intimidating to broach (no pun intended). Yet, in an economy that is encouraging people to streamline their wardrobes; vintage jewelry companies are finding a ripe market for buying and selling vintage gems with everyday consumers rather than connoisseurs or other dealers. This means that the product is more accessible and the marketplace more transparent, so, you are bound to get a little more bling for your buck. (One of the first esotericisms to know is that vintage refers to pieces 30-70 years old, as opposed to antique, which means over 100 years old.)

Interest in vintage jewelry heightened in the last few years as greater attention focused on the investment-worth, and, design exclusivity offered by estate pieces. Estate jewelry, specifically fine pieces, tends to hold its value, or, even appreciate over time. The 18k yellow gold chain that you've held onto for the last decade is, in most cases, worth more today than the day you bought it; and if it's signed, you may have just bolstered the rate of return on your initial investment two-fold. High quality vintage is quickly becoming the delicacy of the jewelry world as rarity in quantity and design, make it an increasingly exclusive commodity.

In the world of vintage and antiques, it holds true that one man's trash can be revived as another man's treasure. But, in a more typical scenario, one man's trash really is just that, so there are a few fundamentals to the art of shopping for vintage jewelry to note when searching for your diamond in the haystack.

### Investment Pieces

**W**hen you do come across a piece that you love, or, if you're looking to make a considerable investment in a piece that will retain value in years to come, think, "rarity and salability,"



Photo: Courtesy of Robinkatz Vintage Jewels

says Gus Davis, partner in New-York-based estate jeweler Camilla Dietz Bergeron. "The pieces you have a better chance of buying for a long-term investment are: signed pieces of importance, rare or unusual, important diamonds [and] important colored stones (ie. rubies, sapphires, or emeralds)," advises Davis.

Nancy Revy, CEO of online estate jeweler Beladora.com, underscores the importance of buying iconic, labeled pieces. "Invest[ing] in signed jewelry that is representative of a specific jeweler," Revy says. This could mean important statement pieces such as the panther jewelry by Cartier or the animal motif jewelry by David Webb, or more reasonably priced Alhambra jewelry by Van Cleef & Arpels."

Central to the idea of spending on signed pieces is the understanding that you are buying into the charted history of the piece. This means that the course of manufacturing, the period design references, and the heritage of the house are inseparable from a signed piece and, in effect, part of the package at purchase.

### How To Identify Quality

**N**avigating through the estate jewelry marketplace successfully hinges on establishing three things: authenticity, age, and origin. Nancy Revy recommends sourcing pieces from "companies that guarantee the periods of manufacture, signatures, accurate description of gemstones, and that will identify any alterations to the original piece." Confirming that the original stones and settings are intact is critical to assessing the real-world value of a piece.

According to Davis, examining the condition of a vintage piece is the most important proactive step to take when shopping the market, "You want to make sure there have been no repairs done...the stones [are original] and have not been replaced with something modern and there have been no other modifications to the piece."

While it is always a good idea to refer to knowledgeable sales associates or an independent appraiser for a thorough read on a piece, taking some time to educate yourself can go a long way in helping to navigate through the myriad vintage of options out there. Robin Katz, founder of the eponymous vintage estate jewelry collection in Manhattan, asserts that there is “really no substitute for immersing yourself in a body of literature and reference materials...Ideally, you should be able to talk to merchants, see their wares and glean knowledge from the pieces on a firsthand basis.”

A savvy buyer will be familiar with the designers that appeal to them and can hone in on the time periods or materials that cater to their aesthetic. For the more engaged vintage consumer, Carrie Imberman of the premiere new York antique jeweler Kentshire, suggests learning all the collectible names in both fine and costume jewelry. Imberman also advocates learning how to use a loupe, “it can be an important tool for identifying those tiny maker’s marks and karat weights,” she says.

Once you’ve familiarized yourself with the basic jewelry marks, she suggests looking through the loupe and going through the following questions: are[the] closures are finely rendered? Do the stones look chipped or worn? Is there any visible damage to the piece beyond the usual ‘kiss of age’?

Signed pieces tend to demand a premium based on the confidence they instill with the craftsmanship inherent to a brand name. A signature, however, is not always the defining mark of quality. One should avoid blindly buying into the idea that it’s only good if it’s signed. As Imberman points out, “some signed jewelry is simply average in execution, while many unsigned antique pieces are of superior quality.” A careful examination of the workmanship behind a piece is the best testament to its quality and relative worth.

## Where to Buy Quality Vintage

The marketplace has rallied with a multitude of resources in shopping for, advising on, and even ‘buying-back’ vintage gems in the wake of renewed interest in the market. Top retailers have met heightened demand with the introduction of ecommerce sites that are, in many cases, cyber extensions of storied brick-and-mortar vintage establishments.

Beladora.com is the online face of Beverly Hills-based antique jeweler Kazanjian Brothers and Kentshire’s Madison Avenue storefront extends its retail platform online at Kentshire.com. Similarly up-scale operations rely predominantly on the web to conduct business. Robin Katz Vintage Jewels and Camilla Dietz Bergeron both supplement their online presence with trunk shows and trade events, but the most immediately accessible approach to their collections, for customers, is the web

**leading the front in estate jewelry ‘buy-backs’ is 2001 upstart CIRCA Jewels.**

**Founder and CEO Chris Del Gatto defines CIRCA’s role as the ‘only national buying house in the US that provides a truly liquid market for [estate] jewelry.’ CIRCA offers on-the-spot bids for estate pieces that private individuals bring in for appraisal to their Midtown offices. The company sells its acquisitions to a select group of international collectors, but has recently made efforts to interface with the general public via a newly launched CIRCA blog.**

**The blog provides a broad platform for the company to share its experience, product reference notes, and recent in-house acquisitions. Through this outlet, CIRCA aims to “dispel much of the misinformation out there regarding the value of jewelry.” By offering expert insights and analysis on vintage pieces, the blog provides valuable, free information about the industry while working to dispel the mystery shrouding the vintage market.**

## Key Things To Focus on Before Investing: Desirability, Quality, Authenticity

Industry experts concur, that when purchasing vintage, you should like it and want to wear it. As Carrie Imberman explains, “jewelry may appreciate in value, but it’s largely dependent on the market in general [which] is why you should buy what you love!” If you purchase a piece as an investment and it sits in the box for years without any functional use, there are more profitable arenas for your money. The beauty of vintage is the ability to tap into years of quality wear and unique design that has the ability to retain, or slightly appreciate, in value. The degree of return on your investment down the road is largely contingent upon the quality of craftsmanship and, when a signature is involved, authenticity. In the current market, pieces selling at a premium, and deemed highly collectible, are vintage works from designer names Tiffany, Cartier, Bvlgari, David Webb and Van Cleef, according to CIRCA’s Del Gatto.

Distinctive period pieces, he adds, particularly iconic motifs from the 1970’s, Art Deco pieces, and anything in gold are similarly in demand at the moment.

Buying vintage is a way to acquire one-of-a-kind design that is imbued with history, rare craftsmanship and, oftentimes, an aura of timeless style. We’ve hunted down a few of our ‘to-die-for’ favorites, to get you started just in time for the Holidays.