



LEFT
Robert Bonfils
 "Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes"
 Two-color lithograph poster, Paris, 1925
 Estimate \$ 3 000 – \$ 4 000
 At auction in NY on 21 April 2005
 Swann Galleries

RIGHT
George Barbier
 "Bal des Petits Lits Blancs," Lille, 1922
 Color lithograph poster
 Estimate \$ 4 000 – \$ 6 000
 At auction in New York 21 April 2005
 Swann Galleries



Vanity case, Cartier Paris, 1923
 Gold, platinum, coral, onyx, rose-cut diamonds, cabochon emeralds, black enameled "Pékin" pattern. The sleek 1920s look would not have been complete without dramatic, kohl-rimmed eyes, white powder and bright red lipstick. Jewelers were quick to recognize the trend and created an infinite variety of chic accessories like this vanity case, which is a particularly fine example of Asian-inspired design.
 Made for Mrs. William Kissam Vanderbilt.
 Photograph by Nick Welsh, © Cartier

Jazz Age

Jewels

by Toby Alleyne-Gee

Fashions come and go.
 The most revolutionary are often the most short-lived.

Yet one retro jewelry trend has remained consistently popular with collectors for decades, and is more sought-after than ever at auction: Art Deco.

The *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in Paris in 1925 was to lend its name to a stylistic phenomenon that is probably unique in the 20th century. The Art Deco style is a synthesis of exotic influences ranging from Asia to India, Egypt to Africa and South America, combined with a fascination with a newly dynamic, industrialized lifestyle expressed by linear, geometric designs in vivid colors. Despite the disparity of these characteristics, the distinctive Art Deco style is always instantly recognizable.

Art Deco (circa 1925–1935) was intimately linked to radical changes in society, due in particular to the First World War (1914–1918). With men away at the front, women had to fend for themselves: working in munitions factories, driving trucks, running businesses. Once the war was over, the post-1918 woman was not about to give up her new-found independence. After years of priva-

tion and hard work, however, the mood was buoyant, and the Bright Young Things of the Roaring Twenties were determined to enjoy themselves – from Hollywood to Berlin, from Shanghai to Paris. The Jazz Age had begun: the motorcar, silent movies, aviation, the Fauvists and the Ballets Russes, as well as a fascination for exotic civilizations, all found expression in the Art Deco style.

Eton crop and Charleston

The clearest manifestation of women's new status was the transformation of their wardrobes. Corsets, long skirts and elaborate hairdos were replaced by "à la garçon" or "Eton crop" hairstyles and practical, shorter dresses that allowed women unencumbered movement in their new, emancipated role. The ideal 1920s woman was slim, flat-chested, almost boyish, and favored trousers, severely tailored short dresses or tweed suits for daywear.

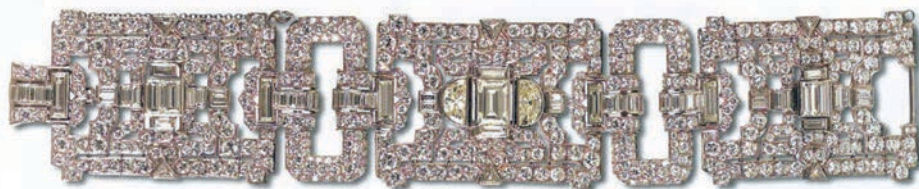
Geometrical day dresses were replaced in the evening by fluid, sleeveless tunics that disguised feminine curves but plunged low at the back, with the waistline at hip level and accentuated by a sash decorated with a brooch, while the slit skirt was short enough to accommodate the new dance steps of the Charleston, tango and foxtrot.

Paradoxically, while she revealed large expanses of skin, the fashionable 1920s siren – epitomized by the hard-edged, angular chic of early screen stars like Louise Brooks and Gloria Swanson – loved to cover herself in jewels. Several bracelets were worn at the same time on bare arms; matching pairs of bracelets were also extremely popular, as were pairs of dress clips, which could often also be worn as a single brooch. The daringly low backs of dresses encouraged the fashion for long "sautoirs" and necklaces worn at the back rather than the front, or decorated with pendants on the clasp.

Democratic design

Jewelers had to adapt to accommodate these revolutionary innovations in fashion. Influenced by the Vienna Secessionists, the Bauhaus in Germany and the Futurists in Italy, designs became more geometrical and linear, reflecting the new industrial aesthetic. The predominantly white, black and pastel palette of the Belle Epoque "style guirlande" (inspired by the feminine ribbon and floral motifs of the French 18th century) was initially replaced by the vivid, primary colors advocated by

Platinum and diamond bracelet, ca. 1930–35
Central baguette-cut diamond 2.83 ct., as well as half-moon, triangular and baguette-cut diamonds, totaling approx. 13.30 ct. and brilliant-cut diamonds totaling approx. 20.4 ct.
At auction in Vienna on 3 June 2005
Estimate € 60 000 – € 90 000
Dorotheum



"This bracelet is of outstanding quality, with no less than 583 diamonds and brilliants, culminating in the central baguette-cut diamond of 2.83 ct. This figure is engraved in the bracelet, as once a diamond is set, it is difficult to determine its exact weight."

(Herbert Jetzinger, Dorotheum)



Platinum and diamond bracelet, ca. 1930
Old European-cut brilliants, transitional cut brilliants, baguette-cut diamonds and rhinestones.
Sold in Vienna in March 2004 for € 14 640
Dorotheum

"Characteristic of this period is the mixture of old European-cut diamonds and transitionally cut diamonds (a technique which bridged the old European cut and the more modern brilliant cut). The value of such a bracelet is also determined by the quality of the stones employed."

(Herbert Jetzinger, Dorotheum)

Raoul Dufy, Henri Matisse and other Fauvist painters. White stones and platinum soon returned to fashion, however.

Besides the leading Parisian jewelers like Cartier, Chaumet, Boucheron, Van Cleef & Arpels and Mauboussin, radical young avant-garde designers such as Jean Fouquet, Gérard Sandoz, Raymond Templier and Jean Desprès were to contribute decisively to the success of the Art Deco style. Jewels were now seen as accessories that matched the shape and color of the garment on which they were worn, rather than ornaments whose function was to display wealth; in this sense, there was a newly "democratic" aspect to jewelry. Precious stones were often combined with more profane materials such as enamel, glass, rock crystal, wood or even bakelite.

Egyptomania

Perhaps the most profound influence on Art Deco jewelry was exerted by distant and exotic civilizations, which fascinated both avant-garde designers and the established jewelers. The discovery in 1922 of the tomb of Tutankhamen and the splendid jewels of the mysterious Pharaoh provided endless inspiration: Egyptian pyramids, sphinxes, obelisks, palmettes, lotus flowers, scarabs, hieroglyphs and various stylized deities were very popular motifs, and the two-dimensional quality and bright chromatic contrasts of pharaonic art were especially suited to the ideals of Art Deco.

Persian carpets and miniatures also inspired bright, primary colors and ornamental motifs: Islamic-influenced flowers, leaves and arabesques decorated brooches, aigrettes and vanity cases. Having gained the fabulously wealthy Maharajah of Dhranghadra as a client in the 1920s, the vivid colors of Indian enamel

jewelry found their way into many of Cartier's ruby, emerald and diamond creations of the period. Beads were frequently mounted in clusters on bracelets, brooches and clips. Far Eastern motifs and materials – jade,



enamel and pearls – were also translated into Art Deco pieces.

From its first appearance in the early years of the 20th century, Art Deco was to remain the predominant artistic trend until about 1935. Perhaps it is the astonishing diversity, originality and workmanship of Art Deco jewels that have ensured their enduring popularity. There has been many a style revolution since the 1920s, yet Art Deco jewelry has retained its timeless appeal, as the pieces shown here amply illustrate. Do I hear any bids?

Pair of dress clips, ca. 1930
Platinum, with brilliant-cut, baguette-cut and fantasy-cut diamonds, each with one half-moon cut diamond.
Sold in Vienna in March 2004 for € 20 740
Dorotheum



"Dress clips are typical Art Deco pieces: they can be worn and combined in different ways (as brooches or as pendants, to keep a jacket closed; as a pair or alone). The baguette cut of the diamonds is particularly well executed in these pieces. It is also interesting to note the geometric design of the pieces, characteristic of Art Deco jewelry."

(Herbert Jetzinger, Dorotheum)

Jadeite and diamond bracelet, ca. 1935
This fine bracelet, consisting of four circular, carved jadeite plaques with dragon motifs, held by geometrical elements set with 16 baguette and 52 diamonds, demonstrates the influence of the Far East on Art Deco jewels.
Sold in Zurich in June 2003 for € 6 400
Galerie Koller

Further reading

David Bennett & Daniela Mascetti, "Understanding Jewellery," The Antique Collectors' Club, Woodbridge 1989
Hans Nadelhoffer, "Cartier, Jewellers Extraordinary," Thames & Hudson, London 1984
(German edition: "Cartier, Juweliers der Könige, König der Juweliers," Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Zurich 1984)
Gilles Chazal, "L'Art de Cartier," Exhibition catalogue, Musée du Petit-Palais, Paris 1989

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