



# Antique and Estate Jewelry for Collectors and Professionals: Its Time Has Come

*Increased demand for antique and estate jewelry poses new challenges and growth opportunities.*

**By Edward Lewand, GG, ASA, AAA**

Over the last few years, consumer interest in antique and estate jewelry has become a new trend. This may be due to all the TV “road” shows or because it is feel-good jewelry: grandma had the brooch or a great aunt had a watch just like that. It reminds some of their childhood and others of a fond memory. Another new trend is divesting; people over 65 are starting to sell off their assets that the kids might not want or are converting them into cash so they can enjoy life. Regardless of the reason, it has become a force in the jewelry industry. Antique and estate jewelry is a specialty item. Whether you are a consumer seeking to sell or purchase, or a dealer brokering or advising a client, it is important to have a general background of common periods and styles; understand hallmarks, and know something about trademarks and construction, sources for research, factors in determining value, and the importance of working with professionals.

## **Common Periods and Styles**

The first thing about antique jewelry are its periods and motifs. Knowing the different periods requires education and learning over time. A library of books is very helpful to the identification of style and motifs, but taking hands-on classes and attending antique shows to see the jewelry first-hand are also important for research and in the development of a network of contacts for sale or purchase. Be sure to check with an expert to see if the items are authentic period or if they are reproductions. I will be pointing out some indications of reproductions, but nothing is as valuable as experience and study.

The following overview of common periods and styles is provided courtesy of New York based, Macklowe Galleries. Websites like Macklowe’s are very educational and supply tremendous amounts of information and examples. Visit their site for complete notes and additional information.

<http://www.macklowegallery.com/education.asp/art+nouveau/Art+and+Jewelry+Terms/antiques/Jewelry+Periods>.

### *Georgian—1710s to 1830s*

Various styles were propagated throughout the period. Named “Georgian” after the four English kings, George I- George IV, who reigned during the peak of the British Empire’s global influence on the aesthetics and customs of its colonies. Three main styles dominated the period; these architectural trends set the course for [jewelry](#) and [decorative art](#) styles at the time. During George I’s reign from 1714 to 1727, Rococo, an offshoot of the elaborate decorative ornamentation of Baroque architecture and design, was the prevailing style. This gave way to Gothic [Revival](#), which took its inspiration from surviving medieval structures and having a decidedly structural and rigid appearance. Neoclassical began in the latter half of the 18th century as a reaction against the sharp, overly-ornamented styles of the previous two movements. Harking back to the Classical Western artistic canon, a return to purity was sought, emulating the idealized images of beauty and clean fluid lines of ancient Greece and Rome.



Georgian gold and carnelian cameo ring  
Courtesy of Macklowe Galleries

*Victorian—1830s to 1900s*

The [Victorian](#) era, named after Queen Victoria (the longest reigning British monarch who ruled from 1837 to 1901), marked an era of prosperity and the rise of industrialization and the middle class. The Victorian era in England had three distinct periods, Romantic, Grand, and Late Victorian, while [jewelry](#) of the time throughout Europe took on a variety of [revival](#) forms. The end of the Victorian era coincided with the rise of Belle Époque in France and the beginnings of [Art Nouveau](#). Transitions in style during the period were not abrupt and some pieces exhibit multiple influences. Jewelry during this period not only reflected wealth, but social standing and status. Rules were set to deem appropriate jewelry. Young, unmarried women could only wear the simplest of jewelry, where as diamonds and gems could only be worn by women “of a certain age.” American women were lax in following these European standards, and as a result were criticized for being inappropriate in their jewelry displays.



Gold Victorian bracelet  
Courtesy of private collection

*Art Nouveau—1890s to 1914s*

Coinciding with “La Belle Époque” in France and the Late [Victorian](#) Period in England, [Art Nouveau](#) was a style intended to stand against the industrialization of [jewelry](#) and [decorative arts](#). The style marked the turn of the century and the coming of the “modern age.” Although the period was short-lived, the jewelry and art from that era was a radical shift from the somber mass-produced style of the Victorian era. The designs were innovative and intensely creative, refusing to reference the past but instead incorporating fluid, sinuous lines and soft curves. The nude female figure or female head with long flowing hair was a popular motif, as were nature themes of butterflies, dragonflies, insects, orchids, irises, water lilies and poppies., produced in pastel colors.



Gold Victorian bracelet  
Courtesy of Macklowe Galleries

*Edwardian—1901s to 1910s*

After the death of Queen Victoria, Edward VII and his queen, Alexandra, ascended the throne of England and brought a cosmopolitan update to society, fashion and [jewelry](#). The period was a time of great social change and witnessed the rise of an extremely wealthy upper class, coinciding with “The Gilded Age” in America. The period included a mix of styles, those from the earlier [Victorian](#) era, the [Art Nouveau](#) and Arts & Crafts movement. The hallmarks of true [Edwardian](#) design include light and airy pieces, created in delicate filigree of [diamonds](#) and [platinum](#) or white [gold](#), resembling lace. [Pearls](#) were also in fashion along with chokers, jewels for the hair, and long dangling [earrings](#). Monochromatic “white-on-white” pieces were very popular, made possible by the use of platinum which lent itself to very delicate sculpting. Motifs included garlands, bows, and tassels formed into bar pins, tiaras, multiple strands of pearls worn as a choker. Scalloped edges were also common in jewelry.



Edwardian brooch  
Courtesy of Private collection

*Art Deco—1920s to 1939s*

“Art Deco” as a term was coined in 1960 by art historian Bevis Hillier to describe the movement known as Style Moderne. The distinctive style of the 1920s and 30s borrowed heavily from other Modernism movements of the time and was established as a distinct style by members of the French artist collective known as La Société des artistes décorateurs, following the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels held in Paris.

Though born in France, [Art Deco](#) was almost entirely an American phenomenon, fueled by the decadence of “The Roaring Twenties.” The movement affected the [decorative arts](#) most profoundly, in the commercial fields of architecture, graphic arts, industrial design, and [jewelry](#) design. The style is easily recognizable by the use of clean lines, trapezoidal shapes, stepped edges, and arched corners. Unlike the sinuous lines of [Art Nouveau](#), Art Deco emphasized linearity and [geometric](#) form.

*Retro—1935s to 1950s*

The [Retro jewelry](#) period, or Cocktail jewelry as it is sometimes called, took place during World War II. As a reaction to this dire world conflict, jewelry became bolder, brighter, and more light-hearted. Unlike the [Art Deco](#) style, [Retro jewelry](#) has soft curves and feminine motifs, set off against the severe silhouettes of women’s war-time wardrobes. [Gold](#) regained popularity, as [platinum](#) was essential to the war effort and scarcely available for commercial use. Different colors of gold, such as yellow, rose, and green, were used in striking combinations. Popular gemstones included aquamarines, [topaz](#), and [citripines](#), as well as synthetic [rubies](#) and [sapphires](#) (often in huge rectangular cuts), which were used in cocktail rings, oversized bracelets, and watches. Patriotic themes were popular, diamonds, sapphires, and rubies were often paired together, and three dimensional sculptural ribbons, bows, and folds made out of metal were common.

Other periods are Arts & Crafts and the 1950s and mid-20th century. One fact that should be noted is that white gold was developed around 1915 or so, to be used in place of platinum (due to both cost and war effort). White gold does not occur in nature; it is done by mixing alloys with the gold to give it a whitish color.

**Hallmarks and Trademarks**

Collectors should also study and learn the hallmarks and trademarks of the jewelry; how they affect the value of a piece and assist in dating the item. The Hallmark Research Institute book “[World Hallmarks](#)” Volume 1, by William Whetstone, [Danusia Niklewicz, ASA](#), and [Lindy Matula, ASA](#), is a must for any collector,. The book offers photos and drawing of hallmarks that can help you period-date the piece, and other valuable information. A hallmark is a government stamp of standards and shows that the taxes, if required, were paid. A trademark is the mark of the manufacturer or retailer of the piece.

**Diamonds**

There is so much to cover when discussing antique jewelry. One thing to consider is the cut of the diamonds. Old mine-cut diamonds were cushion shape in general or followed the outline of the rough diamond. It wasn’t until the late 1800s, during the industrial revolution, that diamonds become round “old European cuts.” After 1917, the proportions of the modern diamond were developed (see above photo). The older style cut diamonds are very popular today and are being cut again and used, sometimes as updated versions and occasionally to deceive. Right is a photo of a cushion-shaped diamond.

**Gold**

Gold does play a factor in determining price...but the style, period and design are, in some cases, just as important, and, in other cases, far more so.



Sapphire and diamond ring  
Courtesy of Macklowe Galleries



Retro ruby and diamond brooch  
Courtesy of Macklowe Galleries



Diamond cut examples  
Courtesy of Macklowe Galleries



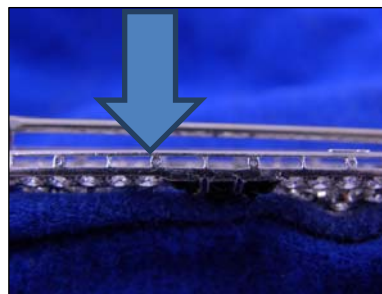
A 17.04 carat D/VS1 Golconda diamond  
Courtesy of private collection

## Platinum

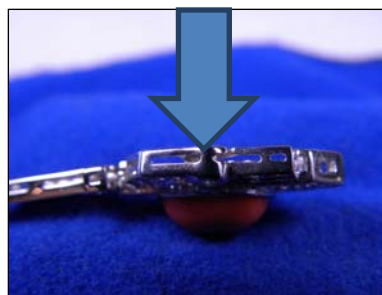
Other things to keep in mind: platinum was not really used until 1900. You might see earlier pieces with platinum over gold but the layer of gold will be thicker. In silver-over-gold pieces, the gold was a thin layer backing.

## Reproductions

Keep in mind that trying to reproduce antique and period jewelry can cost more than what the actual piece might be selling for today. Also, a reproduction piece might not be made by hand or constructed the same. Below is a photo (A) of the back of a piece of deco jewelry. The arrow points to where the under-gallery is attached, you can see the solder mark. This is an indication that the piece could be period. If the piece was of a solid casting it would be questionable whether the piece is actually from the Deco period (I would say it was a repro). Photo (B) shows a solid cast piece. Also if the piece had modern cut diamonds, its authenticity would be questionable too. Another very important feature of authentic period jewelry to remember is that the back of fine jewelry is finished usually as finely as the front.



Reproductions Photo A  
Courtesy of Camilla Dietz-Bergeron Ltd.  
of New York



Reproductions Photo B  
Courtesy of Camilla Dietz-Bergeron Ltd.  
of New York

## Research Sources

### Online Resources

When researching value, be sure to view the transaction from both sides of the deal. Remember that because of the resources available on the Internet, both you and your client can find similar pieces online and see what they are selling for. Believe it or not, eBay has tremendous listings for antique and estate jewelry. One can even research other auction sites to see what similar items have sold for.

The Internet can also help you find the right market for your item. *The trick with the Internet is typing in the right keywords. Don't be so fast to buy subscriptions to sites that offer auction results, they may not have everything and most of the time, if you spend a few minutes searching, you can get the results you need directly from the auction sites yourself.*

### Auction Catalogs

Auction catalogs can also be a wealth of knowledge, and learning how auctions work is very important; do they pay referral fees, what commissions they take, etc. They are also a great resource for pricing. Keep in mind, if a price is too high when compared to similar sales, find out why. Additional research might be needed; was the item sold to the public or a dealer? Some items, when sold at a wholesale level, are priced depending on auction results, such as large diamonds, and fine colored stones.

### Dealers

Developing relationships with dealers is very important. Many dealers will give you estimates based on a photo and gemological information. Also note that gemologists from the GIA (Gemological Institute of America) are not appraisers, and GIA teaches no appraisal theory.

### Art Historians

Art historians who understand and study jewelry are also very helpful in the identification of periods; what styles were used during a certain period and what materials were or were not used. They can often tell you what the item might represent. As a professional appraiser I use several art historians as consultants and they have saved me both time and embarrassment.

**Determining Value**

There many different markets offering antique and estate jewelry. Making sure the item is priced accurately and placed in the appropriate market is very important so one can obtain the best price for the item. There is a common principle in valuation theory (Progression and Recession) that an item in the wrong market will reflect that market’s price. A simple example:

If we took a Tiffany & Co. brooch and placed it in a flea market it would bring a lower price: whereas if we took a common brooch and placed it in a Fifth Avenue jewelry store in New York it might bring a higher price. So finding the right market for yourself or your client is very important. You don’t want to take a fine diamond necklace that is signed and place it in a local auction without large exposure and sell it for \$50,000 and then have your client find the necklace two weeks later in a Christie’s auction where it brought \$200,000. Would you be liable? Could the smaller auction house be liable? Aren’t you both supposed to be professionals? Could this be something a court might have to decide?



Tiffany & Co. bracelet  
Courtesy of Camilla Dietz  
Bergeron Ltd.

**Working with Professionals**

Before you sell or buy, be sure to consult a professional independent appraiser, such as an accredited member of the American Society of Appraisers. ASA is the oldest and only major appraisal organization representing all appraisal specialists. The Society is known and respected around the world for providing the highest standards in all areas of ethics, professionalism, education and designation criteria.



Tiffany & Co. brooch  
Courtesy of Camilla Dietz  
Bergeron Ltd.

Locating an ASA designated appraiser is easy. Simply visit [www.FindAnAppraiser.org](http://www.FindAnAppraiser.org) or call toll free (800) ASA-VALU (272-8258). The website’s “Find An Appraiser” program provides quick and easy search options like location, discipline, specialty, industry, etc. to help pinpoint the right expert for your client’s needs. If additional help is required, the Society’s operators are also able to assist with your search efforts.

—Edward Lewand, ASA, GG, AAA. *Private independent Appraiser, Consultant Appraisal Service, LLC., New York and Georgia. He is also an Instructor at New York University School of Continuing and Professional Studies “The Art of Jewelry Appraising”. Mr. Lewand along with his wife Sandy are the directors’ of the “Antique Jewelry and Art Conference, Inc.” known As “Jewelry Camp” [www.Jewelrystcamp.org](http://www.Jewelrystcamp.org) now in its 37th year in New York and Atlanta a conference of lectures and hands-on sessions pertaining to antique, estate and costume jewelry.*

*Editor’s Note: This article originally appeared November 1, 2013 in [The Journal of Antiques and Collectibles](#).*