

Jewellery special

If you're in the market for a piece of jewellery, your problem today is where to start. You're spoilt for choice. You could wind a paper collar by cool jeweller Tom Bains around your neck, sport high diamonds by William Welstead, wear a modern reinterpretation of the Victorian locket by Charlotte Cory, show off a great big gobsnake by Irving Partridge, or go for a ring made from a carved cameo head of Ruth Ellis (the last woman to be hanged in the UK) by Theo Fennell. If your tastes are for the more delicate and refined, you could choose one of Carolina Bucci's exquisite woven-gold bracelets, some of Kirsten Goss's enchanting multiple pendants or slip another of Theo Fennell's pieces, an adorable heart pendant, round your neck. And that is merely to scratch the surface. There are also the grand Bond Street jewellers: Cartier, Bulgari, Tiffany and their ilk and, at the other end of the spectrum, the raft of young jewellers setting out on their professional careers whose wares can be tracked down at the annual Goldsmiths' Fair next week.

All sorts of quiet revolutions are under way in the world of jewellery. Quite apart from the much more bold and adventurous use of materials (who'd have thought plastic, taxidermy, tweed, chintz, buttons, photographs, let alone paper, would make it into precious jewellery?), there's a revolution in the way jewellery is bought. It's no longer just something men buy for women on special occasions, making solemn forays to serious jewellers in grand premises. These days, jewellery is to be found in almost every fashion boutique, in galleries, in museums, in mainstream shops, in *ateliers* and—ever more important—it's to be found online.

Ever since women started earning proper money of their own, what the Americans like to call 'self-gifting', sales to women have become a large part of the jeweller's business. Michael Wainwright, managing director of Boodles, says that the number of women buying for themselves has grown exponentially in the past 10 years. 'It's

largely due to the rise of the career woman and extremely rich divorcees who are more than happy to spend their settlement on indulging themselves in jewellery,' he says. Boodles now consciously targets women in their marketing and often arranges 'girls' evenings' in its stores.

The jewellers who regularly exhibit at the Goldsmiths' Fair find that at least half their business is from women buying for themselves. Interestingly, they buy differently from men. As jeweller Esther Eyre, whose latest collection is inspired by the stonework at Villandry in the Loire and whose signature pieces are made using Jamaican shell, puts it: 'Women tend to see jewellery more as an accessory than something terribly precious. Often, they won't spend as much as a man will, but they do buy more frequently.' And they're much more interested in design, whereas men tend to be concerned with the size of the stone and its value.

If there's an upside to what I suppose we must call these difficult times, it has to be

'Women see jewellery more as an accessory than terribly precious; men tend to be concerned with size and value'

this: jewellers are having to try even harder to be more creative. They know that nobody is going to buy anything that doesn't seem special.

It's why Theo Fennell, for instance, who has recently bought back the business that bears his name, has decided to act on several fronts. First, he's injecting some humour and wit into his lines: skulls as rings, delicious plays on historical themes. Secondly, he's inviting customers to become more involved in the process of choosing the pieces, thus making them more personal and more particular. 'We have the craftsmen on the premises, which allows us to show them how things are made and how much attention to detail matters.' And, thirdly, he's introducing ranges that start at under £500, and quite enchanting some of them are—little hearts and crosses and pendants such as the Phi symbol (the Greek sign for harmony).

Others are also going the bespoke route. Carolina Bucci, for instance, is well-known for her enchanting woven bracelets, but she'll now do them in special colours and sizes and she invites the customer to be part of the design process. Annoushka Ducas, who founded Links of London, has just launched what one might call a *demi-couture* service at Harvey Nichols. She offers the buyer the chance to design an opulent cocktail ring of their own, choosing



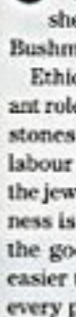
Above left Mikimoto pearl strands. Left Lily Hastedl's cottonflower pearl necklace. Above The eternal temptation of jewellery. Right Paisley earrings by Ming Lampson. Top right Rubellite ring by Jane Sarginson

from 23 different stones (London blue topaz, amethyst, chrysoprase, rose quartz, to name but a few), eight different diamond mounts and a choice of yellow or white gold, so some 1,500 permutations in all. The stones themselves come in two signature shapes: the octagon and the oval (which looks very dramatic set crossways across the finger). Prices range from \$800 to \$2,700, depending upon the stone, and the ring will be delivered in 14 working days.

Others are investing meaning and emotional content into their designs. Sheila Pickles, who used to own and run Penhallions, now has www.objetsdartjewellery.com, a site entirely devoted to selling jewellery, every piece of which has a story and an artistic reference. From a glittering bangle of silver set with semi-precious stones, echoing Gaudi's idiosyncratic architecture, to a Desdemona pendant (a black pearl for Othello, a white one for Desdemona and a green stone for jealousy) all have a narrative to bring them alive.

Several of the jewellers who will be exhibiting at Goldsmiths' invest their pieces with great personal feeling. Zoe Arnold has made a memory necklace that consists of richly clustered pendants and hoarded possessions, a modern take on the charm bracelet. The more sculptural pieces can be displayed on a wall when not being used and her intensely personal, romantic pieces come accompanied by poems she's written. Eileen Gatt, from the Highlands, takes Scottish folklore as the starting point for her contemporary charm bracelets and her silver christening cups, spoons and bowls. Grace Girvan invests her work with a great deal of nostalgia, derived from her childhood in Orkney. Her ideas come from the changing colours of the sea and she loves to use pebbles in her under-

Creative innovative ideas also matter. Take the work of Charlotte Cory, an artist/photographer whose pieces can be found at Rebecca Hossack's Gallery in Fitzrovia. She uses photography to reinterpret the world of Victorian mourning jewellery and



has a series of interesting pendants and cameos, all featuring photographs of the animal world. Prices aren't bad either, starting at \$100 and going up to about \$1,000. And Pippa Sarginson, another wonderful jeweller, who is also to be found at Rebecca Hossack's gallery, has gained a large fan club not only for her way of picking rough stones and setting them simply in gold, but also for her very ethical stance in trying to encourage design among indigenous peoples she has worked with, including the San Bushmen of the Kalahari.

Ethics are playing an increasingly important role, as is provenance. Properly sourced stones and diamonds and properly paid labour are all now things that concern both the jewellers and their customers. The business is on the move and, for the customer, the good news is that it has never been easier to find enchanting pieces at almost every price point.

The Goldsmiths' Fair is on September 28-October 11 (closed October 5) at Goldsmiths' Hall, Foster Lane, London EC2 7020-7006 7010; www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk

Darling, you shouldn't have



Nick Foulkes on the mine-field of buying jewellery for women

For years, I genuinely thought that when a woman said 'surprise me', something, well, surprising, was being asked for. But she is really asking you to buy her something she will like. It is, in the nicest possible way, a test. She is asking if you have been paying attention as she has been leafing through fashion magazines or trailing around Harvey Nichols. If you've been listening in class, you can stop reading now, but the last thing others should do is chance it in the hope of it working out. Buying jewellery on your own is like looking for a gas leak with a lit match. Instead, announce you are going shopping together. There is hardly a woman born who can resist such an offer.

However, if it has to be a 'surprise', think where the piece will be worn—and it must be a piece to be enjoyed, not languish in a safe. If it is for a holiday, Arnaud Bamberger, Cartier's suave man on Bond Street, acknowledges the recent trend for white metals, but points out that yellow gold looks great with a tan. But what about stones? As Caroline Scheufele of Chopard puts it: 'You can't make a mistake with diamonds.' She also advises that rubies look especially good on blondes, and emeralds are perfect for brunettes.

It's also good to have a smooth line when presenting jewellery: a birthstone will supply a birthstone (garnets for January, aquamarines for March, rubies for July) or a glance at her eyes will provide a colour chart to enable you to offer the immortal 'I saw them and thought of the sparkle in your eyes', a line best delivered when fixing the earrings into place (do check the ears are pierced first).

Jewellery is an intimate gift, usually given when a man is in love, but some items carry even greater emotional weight. I am thinking here of rings. Not for nothing are they given epithets such as 'eternity'. Therefore, if you give a ring, expect it to betoken a level of commitment: you don't have to go down on one knee, but that's how it's likely to be interpreted. And when it comes to price, the old rule for engagement rings—spend a month's earnings—is not bad. It's a rule that holds good for any jewellery as, if things go well, you and she will be looking at it for years to come. Nick Foulkes is the author of 'Mikimoto' (Assouline Publishing, 2008)