

LOOKS THAT NEVER GET OLD

Designers are borrowing from the past to recreate vintage styles for the contemporary collector.

BY BETH BERNSTEIN

There will always be purists who want only authentic antique and vintage jewels, but an ever-growing number of women are passing over pre-owned pieces in favor of new ones that offer a fresh take on past styles and motifs. Here are some of the categories in demand today.

RING AROUND THE POESY

As far back as the 14th century, people would express heartfelt emotions through veiled messages in what were known as poesy rings. Deriving their name from the French “*poésie*” (poetry), these rings would bear an inscription — usually a short verse, motto or saying — that held meaning for both the giver and the recipient. Many earlier examples had symbols and sayings engraved and enameled on the outside of the band. During the Georgian era in the 18th century, the trend shifted to plain gold bands with declarations of love and affection inscribed on the inside.

Poesy rings appear in at least two of Shakespeare’s plays — as a description of actors’ lines in *Hamlet*, and as a plot device in *The Merchant of Venice*. There are also hints of them in the dedication to 16th-century English writer John Lyly’s novel *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, which

reads, “The posies in your rings...are always next to the finger, not to be seen of him that holdeth you by the hands.”

Today, several designers have added poesy rings to their collections. Beth Bugdaycay of Foundrae uses champlevé enameling in her versions, which feature the simple, powerful symbols that characterize her jewelry. Sofia Zakia’s rings are also enchanting reinterpretations of the form.

Monica Rich Kosann was one of the first designers to play on poesies, reimagining them as small rings to wear on a necklace chain, and then developing them into the more classic finger rings. They sport messages, mottos and mantras geared toward the modern woman, ranging from the romantic to the inspirational, as well as textural and gemstone details that reflect the words.

“I would come across them when I would go antiquing and thought these would speak to many generations for self-purchase and as gifts to empower in

different aspects of life,” says Kosann. “Many clients stack five or six on a chain; others wear them on their fingers.”

SIGNET OF THE TIMES

Celebrities wear them, designers reinterpret them, stores sell out of them, and collectors covet them. In an age of personalization, signet rings offer wearers a literal stamp of individuality. They are bold and gutsy, often custom-designed with meaningful symbols, initials or dates.

The revival of the trend began when antique and vintage signet rings started showing up at fairs and markets, as well as on Instagram. We then saw them on the runways and red carpets as designers used creative license to make the age-old motifs relevant to today’s woman.

“*Signus*” means “sign” in Latin, and that was the original purpose of these rings. As far back as 1,800 BCE, making an impression in wax with the ring’s engraved image was a way of sealing deals, identifying ownership and authenticating documents. The signet continued to serve as a seal over the years for

everyone from poets to royalty, though it could also represent occupations, beliefs, hobbies or heraldry, or simply depict historical or mythological scenes.

It’s not surprising that contemporary jewelers such as Kim Dunham, Rebus, Retrouvai, Castro and Jade Trau have picked up on this tradition, playing with different engravings, sizes, shapes, motifs and gemstones.

“The traditional oval face of a signet ring offers up a beautiful miniature blank canvas to create enamel paintings,” says Cece Fein Hughes of Cece Jewellery in London. “Unlike the original use of signet rings, which were often worn by royals and powerful families to represent wealth and status, my signet rings are a playful way to celebrate sentimentality with a contemporary twist.”

LOCKET UP

In an era when mobile phones, smart watches and other digital devices store much of our information, including photos and videos, there is something romantic and magical about keeping ►



“THE TRADITIONAL OVAL FACE OF A SIGNET RING OFFERS UP A BEAUTIFUL MINIATURE BLANK CANVAS TO CREATE ENAMEL PAINTINGS”

IMAGES: CECE JEWELLERY, RENNA



From top: Renna ring with engraved monogram underneath a quartz dome, in 18-karat rose gold with baguette diamond accents; Cece Jewellery signet rings on model.



personal memories in a piece of jewelry. That's why lockets continue to be popular.

In Georgian and Victorian times, when lockets first gained popularity, many of them had multiple compartments. These would mostly house portraits and love notes, but they could also hold a lock of a loved one's hair or a tiny memento. There were also locket/poison rings, which opened up to reveal a space for storing small objects. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, lockets remained in demand, with engravings or overlays that changed to fit the styles of the day.

However, the true significance of these jewels lies in the stories that click shut into them — the secrets, private love messages and special moments that

the wearer treasures. As they pass from generation to generation, lockets begin to hold an entire family history, becoming heirlooms of great personal value.

"Though the concept of a locket has been around for ages, the desire for a sentimental and personalized piece of jewelry endures," says Arman Sarkisyan, who has featured lockets in his eponymous collection ever since it launched.

Other brands with imaginative takes on this trend include Sorellina, which uses hardstones as the backdrop for its inlaid designs, and Annoushka, which offers compartments in clever shapes, such as bottles or birds, alongside its sliding lockets with birthstones.

PADLOCKS OF LOVE

Padlocks have become a common theme in the work of contemporary designers. Many of these pieces are three-dimensional, gemmy and tactile, from the ornate styles of jeweler Sevan Bıçakçı to the colorful, multi-sapphire versions by Polly Wales. Erica Molinari's shield- and heart-shaped locks have images on the front and messages in Latin or Italian on the back, sometimes with diamonds and enamel detailing; her work has garnered a cult following among collectors and retailers throughout the US. Brands like Circa 1700, Jenna Blake and Anne Sisteron are just a few of the modern producers of fully functional padlock jewels that open with a key.



The padlock in jewelry dates back to the Georgian/Regency era and the Romantic period of the Victorian era, symbolizing the protection of love. It traditionally had a key that the man would keep as a token of his enduring love, while the woman wore the often heart-shaped lock that went with it. Allusions to chastity and fidelity were also part of the symbolism, though today our associations tend more toward affection and passion.

CHARMS APLENTY

Charms and talismans on antique or vintage watch fob chains are a stylish way for women to journal their lives. These pieces form a wearable memoir of her hopes, dreams and beliefs, of where she has been and where she is going, of her major accomplishments and important events. Although charm bracelets are a classic, women of all generations are turning increasingly to necklaces, which let them wear their charms closer to the heart. Many chains offer enhancer clips to clasp on additional charms.

The trend recalls the men's pocket fob chains of the late Victorian and Edwardian/Belle Epoque periods. The main charms and pendants are chock full of Victorian symbolism, representing luck, love, protection and guidance. While the messages tend to stay similar, the designs can vary, throwing in a dash of wit or whimsy, daring or edginess. Foundrae, Michelle Fantaci, Jenna Blake, Storrow Jewelry, and Selim Mouzannar are among the brands that continue to evolve this category.

Mouzannar's Kastak collection was inspired by his father's and grandfather's pocket watch chains, though "we bring some modernity by adding transparent contemporary enamel charms [and] new links," he says.

THE JOYS OF GYPSY RINGS

Gypsy rings, first popular in the Victorian era, made a comeback in the early 20th century. They feature one center stone or a three-stone design in a burnished setting, flush with the metal. The legend around the name stems from when women would travel through the countryside in the 19th century. They



"THE DESIRE FOR A SENTIMENTAL AND PERSONALIZED PIECE OF JEWELRY ENDURES"



Clockwise from top left: Cece Fein Hughes of Cece Jewellery; Monica Rich Kosann's Breathe, Luck and Carpe Diem poesy necklace rings on chain; Brent Neale 18-karat gold gypsy ring with diamond center, pink spinel and orange sapphire; Selim Mouzannar Kastak necklace in yellow gold with morganite, diamonds and enamel.

feared gypsies would come along and steal the stones out of their rings, so they set the gems low, without any prongs to give their presence away.

From Victorian times through the turn of the 20th century, these rings predominantly contained diamonds, rubies, emeralds or sapphires in cushion, old mine or old European cuts. Designer Brent Neale Winston of Brent Neale has taken the concept a step further, creating chunky versions that mix newer cuts and a wider variety of stones. Although the clean lines and minimalist look of antique gypsy rings give them an inherent modernity, her pieces add a bit of boldness. Deborah Pagani's versions are modern and sculptural, while Sig Ward and Page Sargisson offer elegant and rough-hewn takes on these styles, respectively.

"The first gypsy ring I created was my own personal engagement ring, because I wanted a look with clean lines in addition to a style that wouldn't snag on anything — my clothes, my work, and even my kids," says Winston. "To me, making this well-known estate style more modern means focusing on the ease of wearability, while offering a way to make even the fanciest diamonds a little less serious and perfect to wear from day to night." ■

IMAGES: CECE JEWELLERY; MONICA RICH KOSANN; BRENT NEALE; SELIM MOUZANNAR