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HOW TO SPOT

Real

ANTIQUÉ JEWELRY

Louis Scholz was strolling through a flea market one day when he spotted a woman's pin in one of the cases. It was an oversized starfish with a cabochon sapphire at the end of each arm. Scholz recognized the piece as one designed by **Suzanne Bell Perone** and purchased it for just under \$5,000. The original signed piece was actually worth \$80,000.

Scholz had an advantage over most of us scouring the flea markets and thrift shops in search of unique jewelry. He is a gemologist with more than 30 years of experience. During those decades, he has seen jewelry of every type from multi-carat perfect diamonds and rare color-change sapphires to the worst rhinestone-studded costume jewelry and everything in between.

If you don't have a degree in gemology or incredible luck, how do you tell an original piece of antique jewelry from an imitation?

"There are tell-tale signs," said Scholz, the founder and principal of St. John and Myers antique and period jewelry in Lexington.

The first, and perhaps most obvious, is that the piece may be "signed," meaning it may have the designer's name engraved or

stamped in it. For example, Rolex watches made before World War II are signed RWC. After the war, they are signed Rolex.

It may also be "marked," meaning that it is certified gold or sterling silver.

"The National Stamping Act of 1906 required articles made of gold or silver to be marked for quality in this country for the first time, but it did not require a maker's mark," Scholz said. "Also, many jewelers did not adhere to the law. Tiffany was the major company that marked its products, setting the identifiable standard for most sterling silver at 92.5 percent silver. Up until that point, silver could be derived from melting down coins, known as coin silver.

"The National Stamping Act was amended in 1961. After this date, articles made of gold or silver must also be stamped with the full name of the maker."

Wear patterns are another visible sign that a piece has reached the magic age of 100 to be considered an antique, Scholz said.

"As a rule, an antique piece will have a degree of wear," he said. "You want to look for wear patterns that are reasonable to the piece. If it is a round stone that is worn on one side but in good condition on the other side, that indi-



cates it was worn on the same hand, in the same way every day. Odds are that is an old ring. You see that a lot with crest rings. They often have a high-wear side and low-wear side."

The size and weight of the piece are also telling.



Louis Scholz

LEE P. THOMAS



“Older pieces have mass without tremendous weight,” Scholz said. “Antique pieces appear solid and massive but have lightness to them. They were hand crafted. Today, weight has supplanted skill and craftsmanship. Most jewelry produced today is cast or manufactured.”

“A piece may also just look too big to be real. Size alone doesn’t always mean it is not real, but it is a typical sign.”

Flip the piece over and you often find further evidence of the real age. In a true antique piece, for example, you will often see elements of handwork on the reverse side of the piece, such as file or saw marks.

You may also see evidence that the piece has been repaired, Scholz said.

“Repair is not always a bad thing,” he said. “Just be careful. The new jewelry coming out of Turkey and countries such as Pakistan that is being passed off as antique jewelry emulates the great designs. They know what the front looks like, but they may not know what the back looks like. With these pieces, they may break the piece and fix it with a lead solder to make you think it is old.”

Anywhere a piece has been engraved is potentially a good way to identify antique from newer, according to Scholz.

Different finishes may provide clues to a piece’s age. “Mercury, depletion, and eutectic bonded are very time-consuming finishes,” he said, “and often indicate an older piece.”

A knowledge of jewelry periods can also be helpful.

“There are five major periods of jewelry (plus filigree), and each has distinctive characteristics,” Scholz said. “The periods of jewelry mirror the periods of history, and that can help you identify when the piece was created.” (See sidebar)

Sometimes, a piece of jewelry just appeals to you, and in those cases it may not matter whether it came from the Edwardian era or rolled off an assembly line last week. But it sure wouldn’t hurt to know that big ’ol starfish priced at \$5,000 is actually worth \$80,000.

If you want to learn more about jewelry, sign up for the free electronic newsletter from St. John and Myers by going to www.StJohnandMyers.com. If you want to know more about a specific piece of jewelry, call Scholz at (859) 559-4242.

—DEBRA GIBSON

The 5 major periods of jewelry

1. Great Victorian. Most antique jewelry comes from this period because it lasted so long, from around 1837-1901—the reign of Queen Victoria.

During this time, there was what John Loring, design director for Tiffany & Company, calls “an undercurrent of mixed sentimentality, latter-day Romanticism and middle-class smugness that caused it to overdo things.”

Thus, the heavy, drippy, dangly style of the Victorian period. Identifiable motifs included tassels on pins, fleur-de-lis, stars, and crescents. Diamonds, turquoise, seed pearls, opals, moonstones, coral, and blue zircon are commonly used.

Prince Consort Albert died in 1861. Queen Victoria went into mourning, and mourning jewelry—pieces with a black theme—became popular.

2. Art Nouveau, which overlaps Victorian and covers 1895-1915.

The most important characteristic is the flowing lines. There is a lot of color. Art nouveau is a beautiful, whimsical period, with pieces that depict a morphing of animals and humans.

Materials included non-precious stones like opal, moonstone, amber, pearls, and horn.

3. Edwardian, extended from 1901-1914. This is the period for weddings and engagements, pearls and diamonds, all-white pieces, and opulence.

Edwardian motifs included garlands, bows, tassels, bar pins, tiaras, lavalieres, sautoirs, and multiple strands of seed pearls in dog collars. Craftsmen designed filigree rings, pins, and bracelets—a lacy, airy, intricate look.

4. Perhaps the easiest to wear of any of the periods is Art Deco.

Motifs include the dress clip, with the double clip patented by Cartier in 1927, screwback and clip-back earrings; circle pins, diamond and platinum link-style bracelets, Egyptian jewelry (King Tut’s tomb was discovered in 1921), and sautoirs.

Materials included diamonds matched with primary-color gemstones like sapphires, emeralds, and rubies. Marcasite, glass beads, and even plastics appeared, and new diamond cuts were also introduced.

5. The Retro period extended from about 1935 until the mid 1950s.

Retro is about big, including large aquamarines, citrines and amethysts. Retro is a combination of old and new—the curves of Art Nouveau and the clean, simple look of Art Deco.

Platinum was out and yellow gold was back. Rose gold was in as well. Motifs included bows, ribbons, flowers, birds, patriotic themes, clips, and suites of jewelry.

