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# Fashion deals keep brands up with the times

Watchmakers ramp up tie-ups to target younger buyers.  
*By Nicholas Foulkes*

Over the years, while designers have been concentrating on everything from the bosom to the knees, the wrist somehow got overlooked,” ran a print advertisement beside a photograph of male and female hands wearing watches under the headline “Dior Discovers the Wrist”. The year was 1968, the advert was promoting “The Christian Dior Collection by Bulova” and in the half-century since, fashion and watchmaking have been locked in a dance, or rather they have been dance partners periodically trying out new steps and moves. Now, a new combination of fashion and watches is gaining in popularity as collaborations increase. One of the more interesting launches this autumn will be Armani’s debut of a new prestige watch collection. “It will be a Giorgio Armani watch ‘by Parmigiani Fleurier,’” says Davide Traxler, Parmigiani chief executive. “It is a clientele we don’t necessarily reach, and they can discover Parmigiani Fleurier through Armani design.”

While critically acclaimed, Parmigiani, owned by Swiss investment company Sandoz Family Foundation, is known to lose money and Traxler, who was hired to turn the business around, sees the Armani association as a key step. “It’s a three-year plan in which the losses have to be reduced by one-third per year, to come to zero. The first leg of the plan happened perfectly in 2019; 2020 did not follow as expected, due to Covid. So we are not on plan but we are better, with the cash burn lower than at any time in the past 15 years. [The Armani partnership] will certainly contribute to the success of our plan.” Dior was a pioneer of licensing deals and one reason the company continued after the founder’s death in 1957 was the commercial importance of these deals. It was licensing that first brought fashion and watches together: an early adopter was Gucci, which granted a licence to Severin Wunderman in the early 1970s. By the 1980s, names as diverse as Yves St Laurent and Guess had lucrative licensing deals. The next decade was a period of spectacular growth: sales of Guess watches totalled \$18m in 1985 but by 1996 had risen to \$165m. By then some higher-end brands, including Chanel and later Dior and Louis Vuitton, had taken the next step and started watch divisions with facilities in Switzerland. The rationale was



Watch this space: Chanel merged high fashion and horology with its J12 watch, now in its 21st year of production — GC Images

that a brand needed a strong, credible watchmaking presence to sell premium watches at a time when knowledge of and spend on watches was increasing. Today this phase of development is

quite mature; Chanel’s highly successful J12 is in its 21st year of production. Meanwhile, Dior this year launches a new watch line designed by Victoire de Castellane, her first since 2003.

Another pioneer of this model was Hermès. “My great-grandfather started to be interested in that field because he was able to put Hermès-made leather bands on Swiss watches,” says Guillaume

de Seynes, scion of the Hermès dynasty and chairman of its watch division, La Montre Hermès. “Then in the 1970s my uncle Jean Louis Dumas wanted to open a subsidiary in Switzerland; at that time it was a fully quartz business.” The great success of the 1980s was a watch that continues to be a classic, the Arceau, created by legendary Hermès designer Henri d’Origny, but by the turn of the century things began to change again. “I joined in 1998 and thought that we had to develop a different strategy and be really perceived as being at the heart Swiss mechanical watchmaking and to be able to propose some serious movements,” says De Seynes. This meant serious investment. Having begun with 10 employees in 1978, La Montre Hermès now employs 350 people in Switzerland and produces 60,000 watches a year. It also bought a share of movement maker Vaucher in 2006, acquired dial maker Nateber in 2012 and a year later took a majority stake in case manufacturer Joseph Erard. In 2019, Hermès was among the winners of the watchmaking Oscars, the Grand Prix d’Horlogerie de Genève, which De Seynes says was a “strong step”. Brands on both sides increasingly see the value of exploiting each other’s names. Ricardo Guadalupe, Hublot chief executive, believes “the benefit for them [the fashion partner] is that it is an

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Watches & Jewellery

Switched on to neon: electric hues pop the gloom

**Fine jewellery** Demand is high for mood-lifting designs using vibrant colours. By *Rachael Taylor*

Under normal circumstances jewellery with electric hues might have only been found in very limited numbers within collections. But in the pandemic, consumers have demanded colourful, mood-lifting accessories – and designers have sought to cater to their changing tastes. One of the designers leading the charge is Bea Bongiasca. The Milan-based jeweller works with eye-popping shades of enamel, which she uses to coat twisting fronds of silver that add cartoonish splashes of colour to bold gold jewels set with diamonds and coloured gemstones. Her signature You're So Vine! collection, favoured by pop singers Dua Lipa and Miley Cyrus, launched in early 2018. In the past year sales have risen. Bongiasca cites Japanese *kawaii* culture – or the cult of the cute – as a source of inspiration. The term emerged in the 1970s at a time of rising prosperity in Japan when sales of consumer goods and services expanded rapidly. In the midst of a global pandemic are Bongiasca's customers seeking escapism through her art? "Maybe subconsciously it is [a need for escapism] and that's why it's been so successful in the last year," she says. Harriet Hedges, a jewellery and

watch brand partnership assistant at the luxury personal shopping service Threads Styling, has noticed the trend. "Last year we saw a real increase in [sales of] coloured fine jewellery," she says, listing bestselling designers in this category as Bea Bongiasca, Eéra, Melissa Kaye, Anabela Chan and Kamyen. Hedges describes such pieces, which might use bright enamels, anodised titanium or nano-ceramic coatings alongside precious metals and gemstones, as "more risky" purchases. However, Thread's Styling's fine jewellery customers are, on average, in their early thirties and spend between £2 and £5k per item. They are willing to experiment, she says. Usually, when buying a significantly priced piece of fine jewellery, reassurance about longevity and investment are key to a sale. It is hard to imagine a gold jewel obscured by a layer of neon-pink enamel holding the same value as the same style in plain gold, yet Ruby Beales, jewellery buying manager at London department store Liberty, says that such cynicism is not holding shoppers back. "A couple of years ago, neon was seen as fast fashion,

**Colour correct:** (clockwise from above) Dua Lipa with Bea Bongiasca earrings; Robinson Pelham necklace; Melissa Kaye 18ct gold and pink enamel ring; Anabela Chan Bloom earrings; Anabela Chan Bloom ring

more linked to costume jewellery or the high street, but now we are definitely seeing more neon mixed with precious stones," she says. In December, Liberty launched an exclusive collaboration with British jewellery designer Alice Cicolini. The line included 14ct gold rings decorated with clashing shades of enamel, such as orange and pink. The majority of the designs, some priced upwards of £2,000, sold out before Christmas. "I think people are looking for things to brighten up their day and make them feel optimistic and cheerful," says Beales, who describes herself as a neon lover. She says neon colours are versatile in a counterintuitive way – they go with everything precisely because they stand out. When New York-based jeweller Melissa Kaye first introduced her Neon collection of 18ct gold, diamond and luminous enamel jewels in 2019, she knew it "would be a risk", with buyers and clients potentially writing it off as faddish. However, even at a time when most jewellery lovers have little to dress up for, it has been a commercial hit, despite prices as high as \$22,950 for

a clavicle-hugging neon necklace set with 2.6cts of diamonds. In fact, Kaye would go as far as to say that more time indoors has helped sales. "Our current lifestyles have had a parallel influence on both fashion and fine jewellery," she says. "Now more than ever, when athleisure has become a mainstay in our wardrobes, jewellery is the ultimate way to elevate even the most casual of looks." There is also an undertone of nostalgia to the wild colours dominating fine jewellery. This has been felt most keenly in the revival of the classic bead bracelets that have been made and worn by children for generations. Fashion brands have recreated them faithfully, simply tagging on an inflated price, while fine jewellers have sought to add luxurious twists. London-based jewellery brand Robinson Pelham's offering swaps cheap wire for thick Fairtrade gold spiga chains and plastic beads for polished Murano glass. At £490 for its Arcadia bracelet – named after the idyll it wishes to transport wearers to – this is a nostalgia trip for women rather than girls. Co-founder and director Zoe Benyon says the majority of sales have been to people buying for themselves, driven by a desire to

"feel happy". "What people really want [right now] is simple nostalgic joy," she says. "[In lockdown] you're only wearing it for yourself – there's no one to impress." With parties and events unlikely to return soon, it is likely fine jewellery shoppers will continue to seek solace in colour therapy this year – and jewellers are at the ready with new collections for 2021 that celebrate vibrancy rather than shy away from it, demonstrating that the current trend for all things bright and beautiful – and the optimism they inspire – is far from exhausted.



How powerful women have made jewellery work for them

**Projecting power** Choice of accessories can be loaded with meaning, writes *Liza Foreman*

As female public figures have increasingly assumed high-ranking positions, their choice of jewellery to communicate mood or political messages has come under greater scrutiny. Consider US vice-president Kamala Harris and her 'power pearls' worn during this month's inauguration ceremony; or Brenda Hale, former president of the UK Supreme Court, wearing a spider brooch during a ruling on the suspension of parliament in 2019. Queen Elizabeth wore a brooch gifted to her by US president Barack Obama when she met his successor, Donald Trump, on a visit to Britain. Even Former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright wrote a book, *Read My Pins: Stories from a Diplomat's Jewel Box*, about how her brooch collection reflected her political views with symbolism. Some of Margaret Thatcher's jewellery choices, including the former UK prime minister's use of a stone bracelet and amethyst ring, have featured in the Netflix series *The Crown*. The collar and necklace picks of the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the liberal US Supreme Court justice and only the second woman ever to serve on the high court, have also been much analysed. For archaeologists such as Helen Geake, the story extends beyond the pages of fashion magazines. Some of the best examples of women in power and their jewels are found in graves. "It seems that brooches, necklaces and pins were used politically as far back as we can go," she says. "Jewellery was seen as simple portable wealth, or as a beautifier – it was not seen in the same way as a helmet or a sword." During the 18th and particularly the 19th century, "female power utterly melted away", she says. "It's only now that we are rediscovering its attributes and methods. Albright, Lady Hale and Queen Elizabeth [recently used] their appearance, and jewellery in particular, to make political points. Then, as we go back in time, we can see other successful women making their way in a difficult male world by doing the same."



Watch this: 'power pearl' wearing US vice-president Kamala Harris — Getty Images

Although jewellery has long been tied to wealth and status, it does not have to be expensive. "There are other kinds of more symbolic power, like Elizabeth I wearing pearls, the symbol of virginity and chastity, because her status as the Virgin Queen was part of her power." But Geake makes the point that symbolic jewellery need not be expensive. "Lady Hale's brooch apparently cost £12," says Geake. An online Goldsmiths' Fair exhibition that opened last year, *The Brooch Unpinned*, touches on the subject. The focus is Goldsmiths' contemporary collection. "Jewellery is inescapably about power, status and connections," says Dora Thornton, curator at the Goldsmiths' Company Collection. "That goes back to ancient times. The grave goods of individuals from the distant past proclaim who they are and their power networks. Of course, historically jewellery was just as much a men's thing and women were sort of lent pieces that were passed on to the next generation." Meanwhile, American jewellery historian Elyse Zorn Karlin has examples showing a wider variety of connections between politics and jewellery. They include the Dove of Peace brooch René Lalique made for US president Woodrow Wilson's wife at the end of the first world war. Consider also jewellery that "secretly supported deposed leaders", including Napoleon in France, says Zorn Karlin. "Jewels had secret compartments with his crest worn by his followers."

In 18th-century England, she notes the Wedgwood abolitionists' pendant, as well as suffragette jewellery and brooches in the UK and US. However, those in power must get their jewellery tactics right. "The crown jewels were broken up during the French revolution, as they represented what the people hated about the royal family," says Zorn Karlin. "And the famous Affair of the Necklace – which hastened Queen Marie-Antoinette's execution [after her name was falsely used in a theft] – is said to have contributed to the revolution." Jewellery can also be seen as an extension of dress when it comes to trying to impress voters. "Certain articles of clothing certainly have a major significance; pantsuits for women, the tailoring of a suit jacket for men or women often reflect what they want to express," says Michael Coan, assistant professor of jewellery design at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. "The average voter might not be aware of them, but they would certainly make an impact, and most definitely have a subconscious impact," he says. "The first response to a pin would be, 'Hmmm, what is it?' then a close inspection if possible to determine its significance, to then, 'Do I like it or not?' – all this in a matter of seconds. "The most powerful examples of jewellery on politicians would be pins/brooches, and this would apply to all genders."

Sparkling tribute to a Pacific pioneer

A 19th-century yellow and white diamond brooch commemorating the explorer and botanist Sir Joseph Banks, who joined Captain James Cook on his first Pacific voyage (1768-71), is in a single-owner sale at Sotheby's on March 24. The auction house is selling more than 350 lots from Newhouse, the 18th-century home belonging to the late Patricia Knatchbull, the second Countess Mountbatten of Burma and great-great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria, and her husband John. The brooch, with an estimated value of £30,000-£50,000, features a secret glazed locket with a lock of Banks's hair and his initials.

**Savannah style** London-based jeweller Emefa Cole has added five new designs to her Afrika collection, inspired by the changing landscapes of the Sahel and savannah, and her Ghanaian heritage. Featuring stones such as tsavorite and sapphire, the pieces – two rings, a pair of earrings, a cuff and a vessel – are made from 100 per cent recycled 18ct gold. The collection is part of Cole's wider Erosion series, inspired by the texture and patterns caused by water carving into rocks.

**Joséphine's jewels** Chaumet will display a malachite cameo parure (above) belonging to Empress Joséphine as part of an exhibition in Paris this spring marking the bicentenary of Napoleon's death. The early 19th-century jewellery set, which also features gold, pearls and tortoiseshell, will be on show at the house's Place Vendôme headquarters between 10 April and 12 June. The free exhibition, entitled *Joséphine et Napoléon, une histoire (extra) ordinaire*, will use more than 150 jewels, paintings, artworks, letters and illustrated documents to examine the couple's

romance. Pieces from the imperial jeweller's historic collection will be complemented by loans from private collectors and museums. Mais Oui Dior is expanding its Oui collection with two new bracelet designs. Featuring the word "Oui" in yellow or rose gold with a diamond, each bracelet comes with the choice of a cord in one of 17 different shades. The collection, first launched in 2005 and designed by Victoire de Castellane, artistic director of Dior Joaillerie, celebrates love and friendship.

**Chanel choice** Thirty-eight lots of Chanel jewellery are being offered by Bonhams in a timed online auction between February 5 and 16. Part of a wider 200-piece designer handbags and fashion sale dedicated to the French house, the jewellery includes a dramatic dark red gripoix bead collar necklace (above), which is dated circa 2016 and has an estimate of £800-£1,200. A gilt lion choker, circa 1984, is expected to fetch £300-£500. Many of the lots come from a single-owner collection.

**It's a wrap** UK fine jeweller Boodles has launched its Ribbons collection. Initially featuring new designs for two bracelets, two rings, two pairs of earrings and a necklace, the line pairs Ashoka-cut diamonds – similar in look to a cushion cut – with platinum, 18ct rose gold and yellow gold. The idea for the range came to Rebecca Hawkins, Boodles' head of design, in Japan. "I was buying a gift for a friend and was spellbound by the way the sales assistant wrapped it," she said. "The precision and care were remarkable."

**Just like lace** Chopard's new jewellery line combines diamonds and gold to replicate the lightness and whiteness of lace. Inspired by the floral patterns, scrolls, scalloped edges and swirls of antique lace, the Precious Lace collection

includes four designs. A pair of earrings, pendant and ring feature a wave motif, while a stylised flower pattern with scalloped borders and pear-shaped diamond petals graces a ring, pair of earrings, pendant and bangle. A pendant, neck chain, ring and pair of earrings feature a semicircular floret in a similar style. The collection also reinterprets the house's heart pendant in two sizes.

**The ox factor** Annoushka has created 10 limited edition Red Packet charms to celebrate next month's Chinese new year and the upcoming Year of the Ox. The 18ct yellow gold and red enamel charms, decorated with an ox, are miniature representations of the red envelopes traditionally given as gifts, often containing money, for the annual holiday. Each houses a plain polished 18ct gold letter that can be engraved with a hidden message.

**Atlas's new leaf** Tiffany's Atlas collection has evolved with the release of new jewellery featuring the Roman numeral design. The original collection appeared in 1995. The newly launched Closed pieces, made from 18ct rose gold, sterling silver and pavé diamonds, feature the first of three motifs in the new Atlas X collection. Jewellery featuring the other two styles – X and Open – will launch in April.

**Royal inspiration** Garrard has launched two new high jewellery bridal suites, aimed at the Middle Eastern market. The 18ct white gold Albemarle suite incorporates the Garrard Windsor motif, inspired by the pattern of diamonds that decorated the base of the Girls of Great Britain and Ireland tiara designed by the house for Queen Mary in 1893. It includes an 18.04ct diamond collar necklace (left), a pair of drop earrings set with 3.82 carats of diamonds and a 4.28ct diamond bracelet. The other suite draws on Garrard's Fanfare design, inspired by 18th-century opera masquerades. **Kate Youde**

