

The Duchess of Windsor was also pre-loved gems — these are by Cartier from 1947.



No auctions or connections needed. Owning a rare vintage watch or piece of jewellery these days is as simple as stepping into a department store or clicking "add to cart". By Imran Jalal

TREASURE SEEKERS

F-REPORT

Shopping for prized vintage watches and jewellery used to be an exclusive affair akin to buying art. Aside from deep pockets, you also need deeper connections — a direct line to private dealers and auction houses, and knowledge of which forums to trust (we recommend www.limemoney.com). You'd probably have better luck trying to score a 1980s Vivienne Westwood Buffalo Girls hat (you know, the one Pharrell wore to the Grammy's, and which has since spawned a dedicated Twitter account).

But just like how the world of art retail has changed (you can now purchase an original Norman Rockwell painting on Amazon.com, with free shipping to boot), buying a rare watch or necklace that's 30 years or older — the industry standard of vintage — has become easier and more accessible.

Last year, Hong Kong's Lane Crawford launched a vintage watch section at its IFC store together with Daniel Bourn of Vintage DN and Eric Ku of 10 Past Ten, both trusted players in the industry. Displayed in a dedicated section next to the latest designer bags and shoes are the likes of an original '80s Rolex Datejust or '60s Patek Philippe (price tag: about HK\$143,000, or \$123,000). These, along with other high-end watch brands like Cartier and Vacheron Constantin, are the most covetable names in the vintage timepiece business.

Meanwhile, e-commerce fashion site Moda Operandi (MO) holds one or two online trunk shows monthly, showcasing precious collectibles. Recent gems included a '50s Rolex Oyster Perpetual manual winding watch on a pistachio-green alligator skin strap that went for US\$6,200 (\$47,800). Like Lane Crawford, it works with reputable sources like the New York-based CMT Fine Watch and Jewellery Advisors to ensure authenticity.

To attract a younger, hipper clientele, there are also special collections: Last August, MO released 23 vintage Rolexes that had their stainless steel



Former Christie's jewellery expert Brenda Kang launched an e-commerce jewellery and objects store. Reveal list September.



chains replaced with peppy, colourful and brand new nylon straps. Doing so doesn't affect the value of the watches, yet provides buyers with a "bespoke" experience, says CMT founder Carl Cohen. And if you're looking for a specific item, there's an in-house stylist service to help top-tier customers treasure hunt.

According to Amalia Keramitso, MO's director of fine jewellery and watches, the e-store has increased the number of such trunk shows and specialised stylists since 2013 to meet consumers' demands. "Our customer not only wants the latest collections from leading designers, but also the very rare, hard-to-find pieces that are limited in number across the world," she says.

While vintage clothes and accessories tend to be a niche market (hipsters or collectors), the appetite for fine jewellery and watches with the same sort of provenance has grown since the early 2000s, about the same time they started showing up on the red carpet. At Cannes in May, Nicole Kidman sported a simple Altuzarra sheath with a 1955 "secret" watch by Omega, a pretty double loop design set with 6.5 carats worth of diamonds. Earlier at the Oscars, starlet-of-the-moment Lupita Nyong'o wore a gold and diamond headband, snake bracelet and rings from the '60s and 18th and 19th centuries (courtesy of American jeweller Fred Leighton) with her floaty Prada gown. In short, not everyone might be into a fur coat from the '90s, but a precious piece of jewellery from the same era? Glamorous. Period.



Van Cleef & Arpels' 1968 Alhambra necklace, featured in French film *Le Misanthrope* (1974), is a keeper.

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In demand: Cartier's Art Deco white diamond pieces, seen here on the late American actress Gloria Swanson



Pieces on sale at Moda Operandi's vintage trunk shows include Cartier watches and earrings by 20th century French jeweller Suzanne Belperron.

"Hollywood's love affair with vintage watches and jewellery has furthered consumer demand," says Angelina Chen, senior director of Circa in New York and Hong Kong. The company is the leading buyer and seller of jewellery, diamonds and watches worldwide, evaluating over 500 pieces daily. The vintage segment, says Chen, grew 17 per cent between 2012 and 2013, and now makes up two-fifths of the business.

Another factor: what's being produced now. CMT's Cohen points out that with prices of new designs increasing by as much as 30 per cent in recent years, comparable vintage pieces have become more desirable. "People are preferring pieces with history as an alternative to brand new ones," he says.

The local scene is catching on. Last September, Brenda Kang, a former senior jewellery specialist at Christie's who worked at the auction house for 15 years, opened Revival Vintage Jewels. Located at International Building (#12-09), it also offers objets d'art. Pieces date from as early as the Victorian era to the '80s (like a yellow gold and diamond Bulgari necklace that once belonged to Italian movie star Gina Lollobrigida). Prices start from \$500 for a vintage Tiffany & Co. silver trinket box to \$480,000 for a ring from the late '80s with a top grade, emerald-cut 6.51 carat diamond – comparable to something similar made today.

"I like the idea of sharing this passion with other Singaporeans who may not have had a chance to see and learn about rare and collectible vintage pieces at first hand," says Kang. "It's also nice to be the very first to open a vintage jewellery store here and take on the challenge to see how far it could grow."

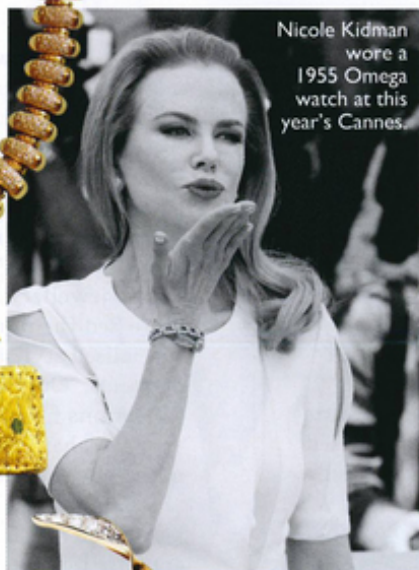
Her clientele so far: mostly young professionals and socialites who've bought everything from antique cameo lockets to retro-style gem-set bracelets from the '60s. Diamond and platinum pieces from the Art Deco period are particularly popular.

Michele Foo, a lawyer who recently purchased a pair of 1920s platinum earrings from Revival Vintage Jewels, says: "It's thrilling to know that you're wearing a piece of history and not just something pretty. The craftsmanship that went into making vintage jewellery is so much finer and intricate than what you find these days. It's a lost art."

Retro pieces like this '80s Bulgari gold and diamond necklace are bestsellers at Revival Vintage Jewels.



Like art: a '60s Ruser 14K yellow gold and ruby comb, from Revival Vintage Jewels



Nicole Kidman wore a 1955 Omega watch at this year's Cannes.



Lupita Nyong'o's jewellery at Oscar night dates back to the 18th century, but looks utterly modern.



A 1937 Cartier brooch with a lively design featuring gold, which was popular around the end of the Great Depression