



How to Sell Antique Jewelry

BY CARL BLACKBURN

As with antique furniture or fine artwork, a variety of factors help determine the value of antique jewelry. When it comes time to having your antique jewelry appraised and possibly sold, you want to be certain you do the proper due diligence to get a fair and honest evaluation. By exploring the answers to the following four questions, you will be ready to make your own well-informed decisions when selling antique jewelry in La Jolla and San Diego County.

What exactly is antique jewelry?

While antique jewelry is officially defined by U.S. customs as jewelry which is over 100 years old, many estate jewelers categorize it as any jewelry made before 1930 – in other words, before the market crash that led to the Great Depression. Before this, we were still in the age of decadence and opulence. Naturally, during the Great Depression, people had to cut corners in all walks of life, and anything considered a luxury was first on this list. But before 1930, there was still a lavishness and indulgence that led to some beautiful and extravagant jewelry. That said, there was still a lot of extravagant fine jewelry made during the Art Deco Period of the 1930's which would still be considered antique by most collectors and people in the trade, though some purists may choose to call this jewelry "Vintage" as opposed to "Antique."

What are the periods and styles of antique jewelry?

A short history lesson of the five major periods that make up most antique jewelry can help even the most novice seller determine what exactly it is they have and when or where it might have been from.

-- *Georgian Period (1714-1837)*: This jewelry period is named after King George I-IV. Georgian style jewelry is handmade and might best be described as gaudy or over-the-top extravagant. Antique Georgian jewelry often features nature-inspired designs, including leaves and birds, set with precious stones. Jewelry featuring skull, skeleton, and coffin motifs were also popular at this time.

-- *Victorian Period (1837-1900)*: From the mid to late 19th century, there was a lot of jewelry produced, largely because of the birth of the industrial revolution and more affordable manufacturing techniques. In antique Victorian jewelry, you'll find a lot of yellow gold, black enamel, and plenty of flowery designs – what some might consider as their "grandmother's or great grandmother's jewelry."

Popular antique Victorian jewelry includes charm bracelets & necklaces; glass intaglios; carved shell cameo necklaces, rings, & earrings; and "mourning" jewelry in the form of carved jet chains, crosses, pins, and earrings (jet being a type of fossilized driftwood).

-- *Edwardian Period (1901-1915)*: Following the death of Queen Victoria, we enter the Edwardian period (named after England's King Edward VII). In antique Edwardian jewelry, we frequently find more expensive gemstones used, such as diamonds, emeralds and rubies in elaborate designs, the most popular being the "garland" style, which incorporates ribbon motifs, including laurel wreaths, bow knots, tassels, and lace.

-- *Art Nouveau Period (1895-1915)*: Coinciding with British Edwardian era was the Art Nouveau period emerging out of France. This romantic style of antique jewelry features flowing curves and naturalistic designs, including flowers & butterflies, as well as long-haired, sensual women who are transformed into bird-like or flower-like forms.

-- *Art Deco Period (1915-1935)*: Antique Art Deco jewelry is known for its bold, geometric shapes and abstract patterns, as well as its eclectic use of color. This era of jewelry (along with the Edwardian) is one of the most highly reproduced styles today. For this reason, you want to be sure to have an experienced jeweler examine your antique jewelry to verify its authenticity.

What antique jewelry is the most valuable?

When determining the value of a piece of antique jewelry, it is not as simple as counting the gemstones or determining the date. One of the main factors that many sellers overlook is the practicality or wearability of a piece of jewelry.

For example, you might have a large ornate brooch from the Victorian period that has \$5,000 worth of gold and gems (raw materials) in it, and you might be offered \$6,000 for it by a wholesale dealer or jewelry buyer, only about 20% over the value of the raw materials. On the other hand, you might have a smaller, more delicate pendant with only \$500 worth of materials, and be offered \$1000 by the same dealer, or 100% more than the value of the raw materials. The main difference is that there is a much smaller market for large ornate brooches today (in comparison with how many are in the market), while the pendant on the other hand is a lot more wearable and appeals to a much wider audience. Another factor contributing to this wide difference is price point. There is a much larger market for people willing to spend a couple of thousand dollars for an item (retail), as opposed to tens of thousands of dollars.

Additionally, fine craftsmanship, gemstone rarity, and certain brand names also carry weight when determining value: the big three brand names to know in antique jewelry are Tiffany & Co., Cartier, and Van Cleef & Arpels

How do I find the right antique jewelry appraiser?

When taking your antique jewelry to have it appraised, the single most important factor is trust. You want to be certain that the jewelry appraiser has the required experience and knowledge to give you an accurate appraisal, and you want to trust that he or she is going to be fair and ethical in their evaluation. So how do you find that trustworthy [antique jewelry appraiser](#)?

Luckily, these days the internet is an invaluable resource when it comes to researching most any service. Look for online reviews, check the Better Business

Additionally, when potentially selling something that is worth hundreds, thousands, possibly many thousands of dollars, you don't want to be hasty with your decision-making process. Go meet with these antique jewelry appraisers in person, and trust your instincts. You can tell if someone is giving off that used car salesman vibe, or if they appear to be a trustworthy, ethical individual who is interested in growing his or her business and reputation over the long term.

It's also a good idea to get more than one antique jewelry appraisal. Many people are deceived by what they see online or on television shows. But if you take your piece to 3-4 jewelry appraisers and all of their evaluations are roughly the same, then you can usually feel confident that that prices you are being quoted are most likely fair and in line with the current market. Lastly, if you have an insurance appraisal for the antique jewelry item you are looking to sell, and you plan on selling it to a wholesale dealer or jewelry buyer, you should expect to receive about 20-30% of the retail replacement value that is listed on the appraisal, just as a very general rule of thumb.

If you're thinking about selling your antique jewelry or just looking for an accurate and fair verbal jewelry appraisal and cash offer to compare with other potential buyers, please stop by our La Jolla store or call 858-251-3006.

Are you thinking about purchasing a luxury timepiece? Be sure to read Carl Blackburn's article: [Is a Luxury Watch a Good Investment?](#)



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