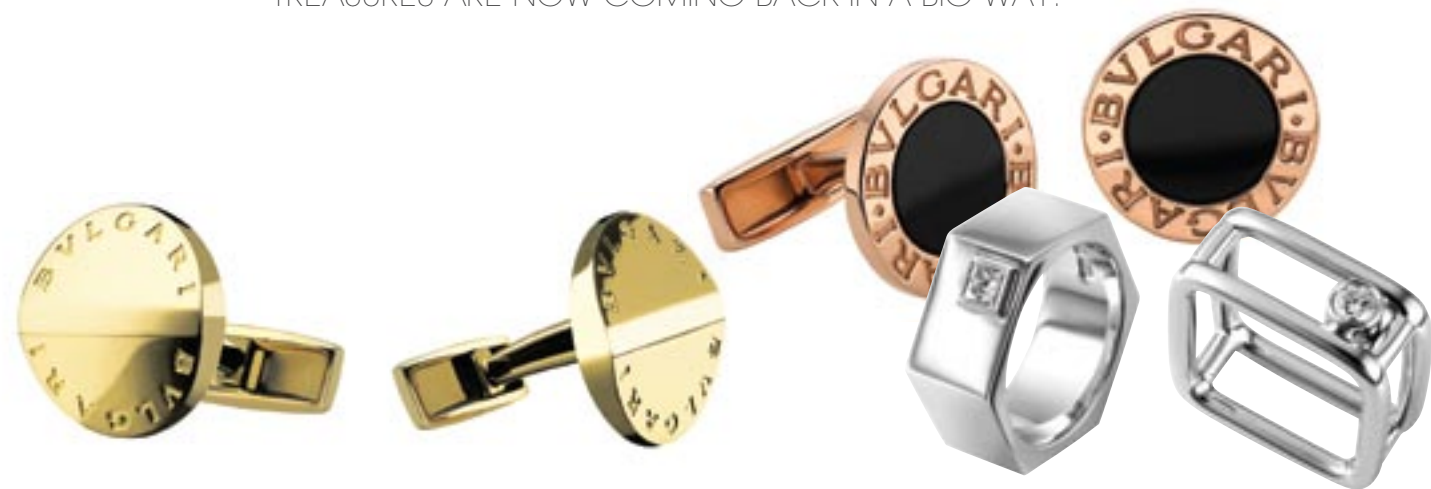




A STORMY LOVE AFFAIR

by Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle

MEN AND JEWELLERY HAVE FOR CENTURIES HAD A TUMULTUOUS RELATIONSHIP, BUT THESE SPARKLING TREASURES ARE NOW COMING BACK IN A BIG WAY.



JEWELLERY HAS BEEN ENTICING MEN AND WOMEN FROM MYRIAD CULTURES THROUGHOUT THE AGES.

Though one of the most ancient forms of body adornment dating back to the Stone Ages, once created for expressions of beauty and artistic exhibition or practical uses such as wealth, status and religious display, the pinning together of clothes, protection against evil forces and assurances of success in wartime, jewellery for men is not as widely accepted in today's cultures as jewels that glimmer on the female body. Nonetheless, the tide is turning as jewellery is no longer the preserve of women, but is making a comeback into male fashion as men are looking beyond traditional wedding rings and watches to diamond rings and gold pendants and bracelets.

Men are becoming more concerned with their appearance as increasing disposable income, awareness and appreciation of the finer things in life are transforming their consumption priorities. The idea of jewellery as luxury items has entered men's vocabulary through the democratisation of the media, which has led to the abundance of celebrity and fashion magazines and television programmes detailing the latest style du jour. Hollywood stars and musicians are helping to perpetuate the trend, as well as football's most recognisable face, David Beckham, who has transformed modern standards of male fashion with his diamond and platinum earrings, rings and necklaces, proving you can be masculine **and** wear jewellery,



especially pieces that define a rugged and refined style through the use of materials like steel, rubber, titanium, platinum and tungsten.

Luxury is taking on a decidedly more mainstream allure as consumers wish to be part of something sophisticated and prestigious. Take for example award-winning American fashion designer Thom Browne, who in 2007 turned his attention to jewellery, crafting a luxurious yet fuss-free men's diamond jewellery collection called Harry Winston Men by Thom Browne, which is redefining how men around the world are approaching jewellery. As Harry Winston's first men's jewellery collection, Browne has matched his avant-garde aesthetic with the refined elegance of the American diamond jeweller. Susy Korb, Creative Director of Harry Winston, relates how the collection "was designed out of the desire of our current clients — a man who is buying something for his wife and then wants something special for himself; or a woman who is looking to buy something for her husband." Browne says, "I've always wanted to design everything a man would need, including jewellery such as tie bars,

Luxury brands such as Montblanc and Tiffany & Co. have also jumped on the men's jewellery bandwagon, having realised the potential of this niche market.

Selberan pendants.
Bulgari cufflink.
Bulgari cufflink.
Selberan ring.

Tie Accents and Cuff Links from Clia.

MEN'S JEWELLERY MARKET ON THE RISE

The world's luxury goods market is estimated to be between US\$800 billion to \$1 trillion, and is expected to achieve US\$2 trillion by 2010, states "The Global Gems and Jewellery Industry – Vision 2015: Transforming for Growth" report by KPMG India released in 2006. Concerning jewellery in particular, global sales are predicted to grow from US\$146 billion in 2005 to \$230 billion by 2015.

Still, men's jewellery remains a niche market with vast untapped potential due to lack of innovative design, selection, branding, promotion and variety in price. Unity Marketing, a consultancy specialised in consumer marketing, notes in its "Luxury Report 2009: The Ultimate Guide to the Luxury Consumer Market" that although men's jewellery remains a very small part of the overall jewellery market, interest in purchasing and wearing men's jewellery is growing among affluents. Founder Pam Danziger elaborates, "The interest in men's jewellery reflects the need to be more competitive in the job market and business world – a new dress for success is taking over after years of casual business attire." Rings were by far the most popular luxury jewellery items bought, and most men took a shine to pieces made of gold and without gemstones.

The Jewelry Consumer Opinion Council's "2007 Year in Review" reported that "Men have increasingly signalled their growing desire for fine jewellery, including diamonds." Jewellery market research professional Liz Chatelain, President of MVI Marketing Ltd., reveals that men's jewellery is being embraced because of "the development of the metro male. These individuals use many products and services to enhance their appearance and feel that jewellery is just another accessory that they're comfortable with."



H. Stern Neptune bracelet.

DeMaria ring.

Palmiero Arabesque ring.

Jacob's Jewelry ring with black diamonds.

All perfectly fitting for modern, self-assured men who are just as image-conscious as their female counterparts, demanding to be a part of the luxury jewellery culture.

cufflinks, watches, rings and so on." It is intended for the tastes of real men, "every guy who is a true individual and confident enough not to need something that is flashy and obvious. Since most men's jewellery today tends to be garish, I think in a way, this understatedness that I bring makes it 'antiestablishment'."

Luxury brands such as Montblanc and Tiffany & Co. have also jumped on the men's jewellery bandwagon, having realised the potential of this niche market. Montblanc, whose collections boast robust materials such as tantalum, carbon, rubber, granite and mammoth and meteorite inlays,

launched its male jewellery line in the late '90s. Having acknowledged the growth of this market, it has witnessed its male customers going for cufflinks, pendants, engagement rings, bracelets and necklaces, as well as non-traditional materials like tantalum and liquid metal, seeking out items with long-term value during this recession. To stimulate interest in this market, its men's jewellery aficionados "are regularly presented with new and desirable products, including exclusive limited editions, making their jewellery and accessories a talking point among their acquaintances," comments Valerie Tan, PR Manager of Montblanc Singapore.

Tiffany's 1837 Collection inscribed with the company's founding year proposes hip urban hardware for men. Space age meets fine jewellery in its titanium and sterling silver line launched in 2006. Lightweight, durable titanium also finds expression in the Atlas Titanium collection, introduced in 2007, while the most recent collection is the avant-garde Paloma Picasso Moderne. Tiffany even went so far as to open its first boutique that

concentrates exclusively on men's jewellery and accessories in September 2007 called "Tiffany & Co. The Men's Store" at Isetan in Shinjuku, Japan.

Smaller brands and independent designers are also investing significantly in this market. Initially offering leather riding gear, Chrome Hearts, founded by motorcycle enthusiast Richard Stark, has been winning over devotees with its high-end handmade jewellery in sterling silver, gold, platinum and precious stones since 1989. Attracting the likes of Karl Lagerfeld, Snoop Dogg and Steven Tyler with its rock star appeal, the brand's artistry is manifested in chunky and ornate rings, bracelets and pendants that feature fleur-de-lys, star and cross motifs, mixing mediaeval times with 21st-century LA culture.

All perfectly fitting for modern, self-assured men who are just as image-conscious as their female counterparts, demanding to be a part of the luxury jewellery culture. **P**