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The oldest item on sale is an elephant pocket watch-cum-pendant from the mid-19th century

# Precious heritage

Brenda Kang is ensuring that vintage jewellery gets the attention it deserves

BY DEBBIE REYES-COLOMA

There is something quixotic about period jewellery. They evoke a time when master craftsmen painstakingly created, mostly by hand, bespoke works commissioned by patrons. The details that went into styling and design also make them historic mementos as well as status symbols that reveal the socio-economic and political conditions in specific periods of history.

Setting foot into Revival Vintage Jewels and Objects is like taking a tour in a museum where encased works of art provide visual a narration of bygone eras. The pop-up boutique in Malmaison on Orchard Road is Singapore's first dedicated vintage jewels and objects retailer and is born of an intense love for beautifully handcrafted antique and vintage jewellery/objects and their heritage. The team behind Revival curates an extraordinary showcase of rare and timeless pieces, scarcely seen in Southeast Asia.

From the Victorian and Edwardian to Art Nouveau and Contemporary eras, Re-

vival is a treasury of handmade antique and vintage precious jewels, each with a rich provenance and history that are auction-house worthy. With a firm belief that every vintage jewel has a priceless value and a unique personal story to share, Revival digs through the archives to uncover vintage rarities and collectibles.

Revival's founder and owner, Brenda Kang, is a strong advocate of owning jewellery and objects that transcend time, and can be passed down through the generations. The 42-year-old curator and collector is one of few antique and vintage jewellery experts currently based in Asia. Her love for period jewellery was cultivated during her 15 years working at Christie's, where she held senior jewellery specialist positions in New York, Paris, Geneva, Singapore and China. While in Geneva, Kang was part of a team that achieved an average of US\$100 million (\$123 million) in yearly sales. She was a Singapore Airlines flight attendant before joining Christie's, and her frequent travels brought her to places which sparked

her interest in antique jewellery.

"Jewellery, for me, is about celebration, about feeling good. It's good passing on to your children and sharing the story behind each piece," says Kang, who studied gemology. "The joy that wearing or handing down beautiful jewellery gives you is so much better than just buying for investment, thinking in five years it's going to appreciate, which it does. But for me, the plus point is sharing the stories that come with it."

Kang's passion started in 1999, with what she describes as a really good collection of French Art Nouveau jewellery while she was working at Christie's in New York. But it wasn't until 2002 that

she purchased her first piece in Paris — an Art Deco Diamond Bar Brooch, a European-made piece from the 1920s that had a touch of Asian influence to it.

"I call it goosebump jewellery, like when you look at it and you start to get goosebumps. There's a feeling to it that moves you in some way. It's not just about jewellery with diamonds and sapphires. It's about the details, the workmanship and the design," says the former gemology teacher.

One of the reasons she opened a boutique in Singapore despite having initial reservations is to introduce new clients to a more diverse range of jewellery. She acknowledges vintage jewellery isn't for everyone, especially Asians, who prefer to have new pieces. They don't fancy buying second-hand jewellery, perhaps partly owing to superstitions attached to something that has been previously owned. But it is slowly changing — Kang has seen a renewed interest in vintage or retro styles recently, especially among the younger generation and more mature jewellery collectors.

"What's most gratifying for me is be-

#### REVIVAL VINTAGE JEWELS AND OBJECTS

Opens till Nov 10  
11.30am to 8pm, daily  
Malmaison, The Hour Glass  
270 Orchard Road, #01-01, 2nd floor,  
Knightsbridge  
www.revivaljewels.com

## Know your jewellery

The difference between antique and vintage jewellery is primarily one of age. By definition, an antique is an object that is 100 years or more old. Vintage pieces are generally 10 to 20 years old. Vintage is also a nicer term used for second-hand, pre-loved and pre-worn pieces. The stylistic period of the jewellery is important in differentiating antique from vintage. And only an expert can give you this insight.

Revival is anything that has been made popular again and can refer to any period. For example, there was an Egyptian revival in the 1920s because of archaeological findings. A lot of Art Deco had Egyptian influences, and they also impacted jewellery designs.

### CHECK THE TIMELINE

**Antique** 1800 to 1900  
**Art Nouveau** 1890 to 1910  
**Belle Epoque** 1895 to 1914  
**Art Deco** 1920 to 1939  
**Retro** 1940 to 1960  
**Contemporary** 1970s to 1990s

show-stealer is the 18ct gold and diamond "Celtaura" necklace by Bulgari (\$49,000), which was pre-owned by Italian movie star Gina Lollobrigida. Kang was wearing this necklace, which is from her personal collection, during her interview with *Options*.

About 60% of what is sold in Revival is from Kang's collection. The rest is on consignment, which is another service that Revival offers to clients who want to resell their gems. It houses a collection with a total estimated value of \$5 million to \$6 million. She plans to reach out to customers beyond Singapore, particularly in Southeast Asia and China.

Kang says her most memorable experience is being part of the Christie's team that handled the sale of Elizabeth Taylor memorabilia in 2011.

"Absolutely amazing. Just being able to handle Elizabeth Taylor's collection and seeing all those people lined up to see the auction [in New York]. For me, the exciting part is sharing with people the stories behind each piece. She [Taylor] was so good at keeping track of each piece of jewellery," recalls Kang. Like Taylor's three ping-pong diamond rings that were given to her by Richard Burton when he lost a ping pong match — and a bet — to Taylor. Among

the movie star's gorgeous collection were the diamonds from her husbands, jewels she bought herself, her Oscars, her clothing and a tiara (given by Michael Todd, Taylor's third of seven husbands, and the only one she did not divorce).

Kang will be more than happy to share stories like these when you visit Revival. Her history-rich narrative behind every period piece on display is part of the specialist boutique's charm.

*Singapore-based Debbie Reyes-Coloma is a freelance feature and lifestyle writer for various publications in the region.*



Sable Antelope Vase  
 Limited Edition  
 13-3/4" L x 9-1/4" W x 15-3/4" H

Long-tailed Shrike Bird Vase  
 5-1/4" L x 3-1/2" W x 7-1/2" H

## Porcelain of Today Antique of Tomorrow

In the world of modern porcelain art, Franz has carved a name synonymous with prestige and unsurpassed quality and designs. From exquisitely functional tableware and vases to delicate decorative accents and fine jewellery, Franz has achieved great renown in over 4,000 boutiques in 56 countries covering the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Asia.

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ing able to get people to look at things in a different way — this is a passion I've developed from my time overseas and being with Christie's. I want to change people's mindset of looking at old jewellery as just being old and not very interesting. I'd like to turn them into wanting to learn and experience more, to understand the history behind it," says Kang, who is a walking encyclopedia on vintage jewellery with a strong expertise in investment pieces from her auction background.

Revival's collection of exquisite period masterpieces speaks volumes about the clientele it hopes to draw. To illustrate, the circa 1980s Gem-Set Rock Crystal Mystery Clock by Cartier, the most expensive item in the store (\$512,000), is set with diamonds and emeralds, as well as labradorite and agate. A Tiffany heart-shaped locket, circa 1970s, is the least expensive (\$500). The oldest item on retail is an elephant pocket watch-cum-pendant, from the mid-19th century (\$36,000). The "newest" piece is a Van Cleef & Arpels Owl brooch made from citrine in the 1970s (\$13,000). Another