

VERANDA

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2022

THE CALIFORNIA ISSUE

BLOCKBUSTER DESIGN FROM
THE BIRTHPLACE OF COOL



PLUS

What's Next for the
American Garden

RISE OF A MONARCH

This 19th-century, gold and platinum tiara was gifted to Taylor by her third husband, Mike Todd, in 1957. With its old mine-cut diamonds and scroll and latticework flourishes, she saw fit to wear it to a number of lavish affairs, including the 1963 premiere of *Lawrence of Arabia* in Paris (below). When it came up for auction 10 years ago, it fetched more than four million dollars.



Hollywood's CROWN JEWELS

From the vintage stalls of a Greenwich market to Elizabeth Taylor's own bed, designer **Martyn Lawrence Bullard's** relationship with antique jewelry has led to an only-in-the-movies tale.



Martyn Lawrence Bullard

IT SEEMS ONLY fitting that my journey to Hollywood, to interior design, and ultimately to Elizabeth Taylor's bedroom began with antique jewelry, which entered my life at the age of 12.

It was the late 1970s in London, and my father let me rent a stall in the Greenwich Village Market, a vintage market, for a bit of a hobby. I would arrive very early in the morning before sunrise and run around looking at what other people had on their stalls for the day. I'd use my limited allowance to buy items I thought were pretty, then I'd make them look even better in my stall. I'd wait for daylight and with it, the tourists. And I'd sell my wares. Soon I was actually making money.

A few years in, I became friendly with a dealer next to me who sold antique jewelry. Being the magpie that I am, I've always loved sparkly things, so I was fascinated by what she had, but also by the fact that she could set up and break down her stall in 10 minutes, whereas it took me an hour and a half. This seemed

TIARA: COURTESY OF ELIZABETH TAYLOR.COM; TAYLOR: REPORTERS ASSOCIATION/GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY IMAGES; BULLARD: COURTESY OF LU TAPP/MARTYN LAWRENCE BULLARD.

AND THE OSCAR GOES TO...

Harry Winston's modern pear-shaped diamond necklace, which calls to mind the famed 69-carat Taylor-Burton Diamond Taylor wore around her neck at the 42nd annual Academy Awards (right)—she deemed it too large to be worn in a ring. *Winston Legacy pear-shaped drop necklace by Harry Winston, price upon request; harrywinston.com*



BOND OF MATRIMONY

"I introduced Liz to beer, she introduced me to Bulgari," joked Richard Burton, who gifted her an exquisite Colombian emerald necklace (worn at right) as a wedding gift in 1964. *High Jewelry Magnifica Necklace by Bulgari, price upon request; bulgari.com*



like a better gig, I realized, so I studied her—what she was buying, selling, and how it worked. I began collecting pieces, bought a case, and joined the world of antique jewelry.

By the time I was 17, I yearned to go to drama school. My father, who had been an actor and an opera singer, didn't want me following in those footsteps, but I was determined. I bought and sold jewelry to put myself through theatre school in Covent Garden, and eventually got those stars in my eyes and dreamed of moving to Hollywood and becoming a movie star. By 21 I was on my way to Los Angeles, studying more, going out on casting calls, and selling at the Rose Bowl Flea Market when the going got tough.

Meanwhile, I began to get bit parts—including opposite Eartha Kitt as this boy toy creature in a film called *I Woke Up Early the Day I Died*—and I met a producer on the set named Victor Ginzburg. I was renting this tiny little house in West Hollywood that I learned had been a dressing room cottage for silent star Norma Talmadge's nearby film studio, and I'd decorated the whole thing from flea markets. I invited Victor and his girlfriend over for dinner and they loved it so much, he hired me to decorate his offices in the Hollywood Filmworks Building on

Sunset Boulevard. I had no idea what I was doing. But I thought to myself, If I do this, perhaps he'll give me another movie.

I ran around flea markets, found all this stuff, decorated his offices, and he loved it. From him, I got the executive VP of Capitol Records. From her, Cheryl Tiegs. And then the story just went wild. With Cheryl's house we ended up on magazine covers around the world, and suddenly all these celebrities were hiring me to decorate their houses. Which led to Elizabeth Taylor.

When I first met Elizabeth through mutual friends, I was still subsidizing my living by buying and selling little bits of jewelry. She was fascinated by that, being the renowned collector that she was, and invited me to her house to show her my wares. I knew she loved amethysts because of her beautiful violet eyes, and I had a piece from a French dealer—an amethyst intaglio ring that had a Medusa and serpent heads wrapped around the band. It was fabulous; I confess that I wanted

to keep it, but I sold it to her for several thousand dollars.

From then on, we became friendly. One night I arrived expecting to escort her to an AIDS Project Los Angeles event and her assistant met me at the door and said, "I don't think Elizabeth's going to go out tonight. She asked you to go up to her bedroom and see her."

I went upstairs and entered this amazing lilac bedroom, where she lay among her gorgeous silk sheets. "Let's not go out," she said to me. "Let's stay home and play with jewelry." It's one of those things you can't even imagine happening—she had a bedroom-size closet that had been turned into basically a vault—drawers and trays labeled with what lay within. I saw the Mike Todd tiara... Burton rubies... She had them all in her home, not in

a bank. We spent the evening taking out tray after tray of these extraordinary Hollywood jewels that I got to play with. I squeezed the Krupp Diamond on my little finger. Elizabeth was almost like a little girl with her jewelry, she was so excited. Everything had a story: her love affairs, special moments, movies.

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GWEN'S FINE PRINT

Drawn to the deep island history and Old English scroll designs of these **Hawaiian yellow-gold bangles** by Philip Rickard, Gwen Stefani collects and customizes them with enameled inscriptions, including the names of her children. Above, "kuuipo" means "sweetheart" in Hawaiian. *Ali'i bangle by Philip Rickard, from \$18,270; philiprickard.com*



HAUTE HEAVY METAL

Cher's favored jewels lean edgy and Gothic, like this **black diamond and rhodium bondage ring** by jewelry designer and longtime friend Loree Rodkin. *Spiderweb Bondage ring by Loree Rodkin, \$22,000; loreerodkin.com*



on a pair of diamond earrings; they have the same impact, that *pièce de résistance*.

Jewelry has always been a statement of wealth, power, and status—remember that in Ancient Rome and among the Indian Maharajas, men wore more jewelry than women. But it's also been a great exhibit of one's personal style, and as the notion of a star, a celebrity, grew in society, so did the chance to express that style with one's jewels.

There are so many examples. I think of Cher, who can own and wear any jewels that she wants but chooses pieces like long, diamond encrusted feather earrings, pieces from Loree Rodkin and Chrome Hearts jewelry, which has a slightly Gothic rock-and-roll edge to

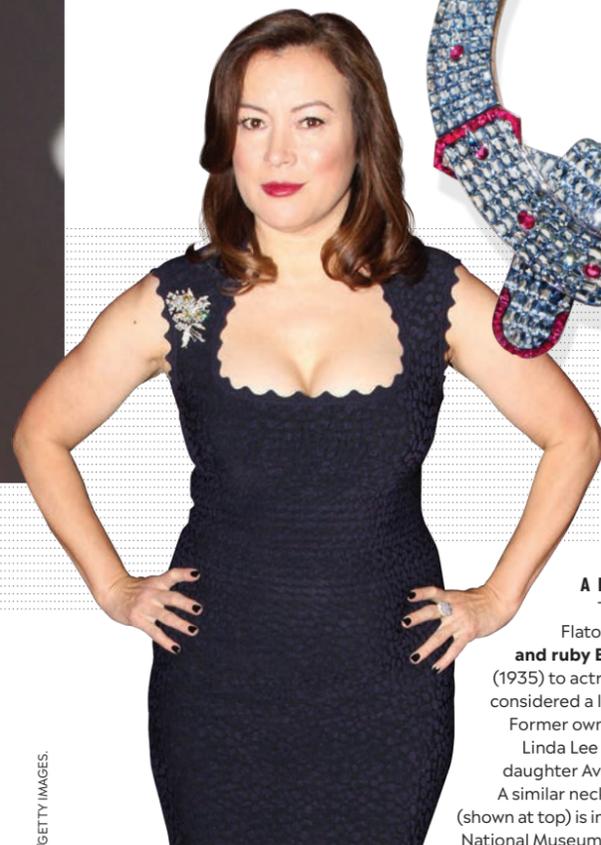
it. Bondage rings covered in diamonds, gloves that encase her arm with a platinum mesh and a giant diamond encrusted on it. They're chunky, edgy, sexy.

That style, I must add, infuses Cher's homes (we've done three together) with what she calls "a Buddhist behaving badly." We've always got these beautiful, serene motifs—Indian, Balinese, Thai, Egyptian, Moroccan vibes—but they're always twisted up with something that's a little bit more edgy.

Stars in music have long made strong statements with their jewelry. I think of Madonna and her crosses. I love how Gwen Stefani chooses her jewelry. When she was touring in Hawaii with No Doubt years ago, she spotted these

THE NEW SUN QUEEN

In a 2021 campaign by Tiffany & Co. with her husband Jay-Z, Beyoncé becomes the fourth person ever to wear the legendary **128.54-carat yellow Tiffany diamond** (after socialite E. Sheldon Whitehouse in 1957, Audrey Hepburn in 1961, and Lady Gaga three years ago). *The Tiffany Diamond necklace by Tiffany & Co.; tiffany.com*



A DAZZLING PEDIGREE

The 2019 sale of Paul Flato's iconic **aquamarine and ruby Belt Buckle necklace** (1935) to actress Jennifer Tilly was considered a landmark acquisition. Former owners include Cole and Linda Lee Porter, Fred Astaire's daughter Ava, and Fred Leighton. A similar necklace by the designer (shown at top) is in the collection of the National Museum of American History.



GARBO'S GOLDEN STREET STYLE

Greta Garbo was first photographed in Verdura's **Curb-Link Watch** in 1941 (right) and went on to wear it well into retirement. *Curb-link bracelet by Verdura, \$25,500; verdura.com*



Who else but Elizabeth Taylor stipulated in her contracts that while filming, gifts from her directors must be jewels? When she was in Italy filming *Cleopatra* in 1961 and '62, Bulgari was the big jeweler at the time. Which meant everyone had to buy her Bulgari jewels.

And so that is how I ended up lying in bed with Elizabeth Taylor, eating fried chicken, trying on all her jewelry. It was one of my life's great moments.

IT MAY SOUND wildly intimate, but in a way it comes with the territory. As an interior designer, you end up not just advising people on their homes but often helping them pick which car they're going to drive, which gown or jewels to wear to the Oscars—or just wear every day.

Perhaps designers see the choices so clearly because they're so similar. A beautiful chandelier or some gorgeous dish on the table are the finishing touches, like jewelry. It's like wearing a black dress and clipping

citizen or celebrity—rivals the passion of Elizabeth Taylor.

Perhaps, before we leave it on that lilac bed, though, let's consider the actress Jennifer Tilly, a wildly dedicated collector. In 2019 she bought the spectacular Paul Flato Belt Buckle necklace commissioned by Cole Porter in 1935 for his wife, who later bequeathed it to Fred Astaire's daughter, Ava. Talk about an Old Hollywood provenance! It's giant, its belt and buckle shape shimmering in aquamarines and rubies. That is a very rare piece, and she's collected more like it, including a charm bracelet that belonged to Joan Crawford, a yellow and white diamond brooch that Eddie Fisher gave Elizabeth Taylor, and a Cartier minaudière—in its original box—owned by Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor.

But Jennifer was not the only jewelry-mad star to capture Simpson's sparkling legacy. In 1987 at auction following the Duchess's death, Elizabeth Taylor

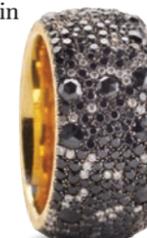
bought the Prince of Wales Feathers Brooch—a piece she'd admired when she and her own Welshman visited the couple—that Edward had given to Wallis. (It was, people say, the first piece she ever bought with her own money.)

What a chain—these great jewelry collectors who admire other great jewelry collectors, and then add them to their own personal collections. The glamour of Hollywood passing from star to star, from era to era. And how can they resist? I myself will always have a passion for antique jewelry, for the romance of it, the feel of it, the energy of it. It's a window into our souls. No matter whose bed on which we recline. ♦ —AS TOLD TO TRACEY MINKIN

MARTYN'S SPARKLING DEBUT

On the heels of Bullard's first collection of **antique-inspired rings** (including dashing cigar bands, left) comes a series of shimmering serpents—think Queen Victoria's engagement ring.

Caviar band by Martyn Lawrence Bullard, \$4,800; martynlawrencebullard.com



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