



Retro Hair Combs & Hair Accessories
1960 – 1970 (Part 2)

Introduction

Although most people think of 60's fashion as being hippie fashion, the 1960's appearance was actually much more complicated and varied. In my Guide on the hair accessories in the 1960s Part I noted that 4 distinctive 'looks' for such personal ornaments could be distinguished. These were:-

1. A neo-Baroque look continuing from the 1950s which favoured rhinestones in elaborate settings.
2. An Op Art fashion of geometric type designs, favoured by the Mods.
3. An ethnic look favoured by the Hippies, often incorporating natural materials like shells, seeds or feathers.
4. The works of individual artisan-designers, usually hand made and intricate.

In this guide I will be examining the influence of the Hippies and that of the explosion of individual artisan-designers during the decade.

The Legacy of the Hippies

The Hippie movement was a spiritual quest of individuals communing with each other, populations in far away countries, and with Nature. Extensive travellers, the Hippies journeyed to meet traditional societies, particularly in India, Indonesia, Thailand, and Afghanistan. In the USA they created new bridges with the Native American culture.

Hippies borrowed clothing from many folk cultures, using strong colours and flamboyant styles, and bringing back many hand crafted items from their travels. They had a love of humble items such as jeans and other tattered and embellished street wear. They also believed in the value of handicrafts: beading, embroidery, and tooled leather being among their favourite techniques. The popularity of bell-bottom jeans, tie-dyed shirts, and paisley printed clothing would become the norm in late 60s fashion. This look continues to be popular today.

Although they began in an aura of protest, Hippie styles soon entered the mainstream and the world of high fashion. Here the styles were removed from their political surroundings and were emulated by *haute couture* designers such as Yves Saint. Ethnicity also became fashionable and entered the fashionable world through the traditional 'trickled down' pathway from the Paris runway to the mass market.



Picture 1: Hippie style evening dresses as high fashion

Hippies rejected high fashion looks and designer names in favour of the individuality of doing their own thing dress wise. As personal adornments they favoured ethnic looking ornaments

with beads, bells and peace symbols. Their influence was also seen in the many non traditional materials which began to be used in jewellery and hair ornaments. These included wood, feathers and shells, ceramic and wooden beads, macramé and embroidery.



Picture 2: Japan barrette made from shells and other natural materials

The barrette by Japan in illustration 2 is an excellent example of this Hippie influenced type of hair ornament. It is made entirely of natural shells and raw coral, with a few faux pearls added for effect.

Miriam Haskell

We have already seen that the work of this influential American designer crosses several decades. From the 1960s we find increasing elaboration of the designs in Miriam Haskell jewellery, and the incorporation of more semi precious natural materials such as mother of pearl, turquoise, coral and exotic shells, combined with the previously established organic design elements.

During this time the company produced many small side combs which are widely available today, and which exhibit the influence of the Hippies in their various manifestations. Pictures 3 and 4 show a very beautiful side comb in this vein from the Haskell collection.



Pictures 3 and 4: Two views of a Miriam Haskell hair comb with dangling leaves

The heading has three overlapping leaves in different shapes, sizes and metals: a pewter colour, antique gold and brighter glitzy gold. From the heading hang a number of pendants terminating in more leaves in these three metals. The effect of these can be seen on the picture with the mannequin. The comb is a veritable work of art for we can see that each leaf is a separately made entity with a different size and shape from its fellows. The standard of finish is excellent, with the stems and veins of the leaves carefully delineated. Picture 4 shows the ornament in wear on the mannequin. This lovely comb also echoes the recurrent 'back to nature' theme of the 60s.



Picture 5: Miriam Haskell hair comb with dangling bells

These dangling ornaments are favourites in the Haskell range. Another example in picture 5 is similarly styled, but the pendants terminate in seven gold tone bells. Like natural motifs, tinkling bells were also staple Hippy style ornaments.

In many of these ornaments by Haskell and other designers Mother Nature is stylized into semi abstract patterns, with cabochons in textured mounts, and animal motifs studded with gems. Side combs and barrettes were done as garlands, leaves and flowers. Gold tone metal that was chiselled, reeded, hammered, corded, plaited or twisted into ornate headings. Wild animals, spiky fish, flowers and leaves, starbursts, explosions, flaming stars, cascades of large and voluminous gemstones in jagged clusters all replaced the soft round curves of the Fifties.

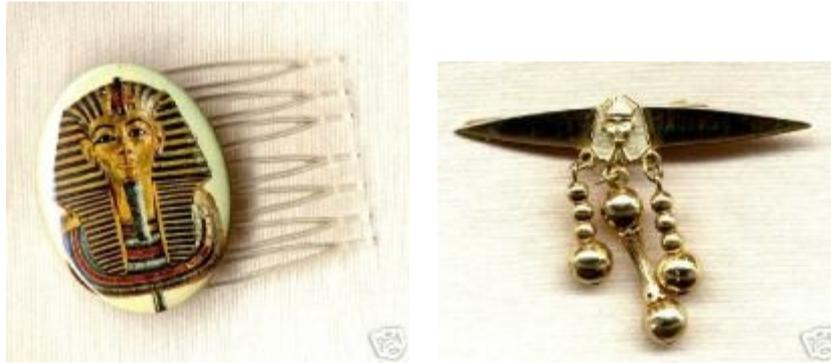


Picture 6: 'Back to nature' hair comb with enamelled vine leaves

Above is a more naturalistic treatment of the back to nature theme in this pretty little side comb with an enamelled brass heading. The theme is that of grapes and vine leaves which in this instance are quite naturalistically treated. As previously stated there was a surge of interest in crafts work of all kinds, and enamelling is one of the favourite treatments which enjoyed a revival.

The Cleopatra Look

Following on from the travels of the Hippies a number of ethnic 'looks' were influential in jewellery design of the 1960s. One of the most popular was a renewed interest in Egypt. This was spurred by the release of the blockbuster film Cleopatra starring Elizabeth Taylor, who was then at the peak of her career. One of the most expensive films ever produced, the enormous budget financed a stunning wardrobe for its glamorous star, including some very elaborate and beautiful headdresses in the Egyptian and Greco-Egyptian style. The result was that the long Egyptian style bob and corresponding hair adornments became very popular for a year or two.



Pictures 7 and 8: Egyptian look hair ornaments inspired by the film *Cleopatra*

Pictures 7 and 8 illustrate two of these 'Egyptian' look hair ornaments of the lower end which were sold in popular chain stores. Picture 6 is a small comb with Lucite prongs and a heading styled with a replica of the mask of Tutankhamen. The gold tone barrette in picture 6 features an 'Egyptian' head in the centre with a number of dangling pendant ends.

The Artisan Designers

The fourth important influence that I have noted for this decade is that of the artisan-craftspeople who were working in fashion and jewellery design. In this sense the 1960s have some parallel with the Art Nouveau movement, whose basic philosophy entailed a move away from mass production into hand craftsmanship. The idea was that an object should be designed and made by the same artisan. Many of the 'big names' of the 1960s, some of whom went on to found their own fashion houses or companies, began as individual creative artisans marching to the beat of their own drums.

The major difference was that these artisans not only could design their own jewellery, but had the talents and expertise to manufacture and market it as well. They experimented with shape, form and texture. Individual craftspeople, men and women alike, poured tremendous energy into their own visionary and non-representational pieces.

Lee Menichetti

An example of this breed of artists was the American fashion designer Lee Menichetti. The son of Italian-American parents, Lee Menichetti was a native of New York. Famed as an innovator in the design of jewellery and glamorous accessories for over thirty years, he headed his own successful design company. His fascination with the creative process led him first through the world of fashion, to Broadway costume design. Later he experimented with jewellery design and metal sculpture.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s he produced a wonderful collection of hand made jewellery and personal ornaments in a very diverse range of styles. In some respects there is a parallel with the work of Miriam Haskell in the degree of hand craftsmanship which went into each of these wonderful and often theatrical ornaments. However unlike the objects produced by the Haskell Company the work of Menichetti was never mass produced. Each ornament is a one off. Many of the works of Lee Menichetti are signed by the artist or bear a label attesting to his creative genius.



Picture 9: Lee Menichetti hand made exotic flower hair comb

Picture 9 shows a very beautiful signed hair comb in the form of an exotic flower. The petals and leaves are made of silver leather, with beads of faux turquoise placed at the centre. A series of dangling pendants, echoing another favourite theme of the decade, are of crystal bugle beads terminating in faux turquoise ceramic spheres. All of these elements show masterful handling of materials, style, theatricality and a love of beauty.



Picture 10: Lee Menichetti rhinestone flower hair ornaments

Picture 10 shows another pair of these beautiful floral hair ornaments from the Menichetti collection. These have been styled in hand wrought gilt metal with the petals and centres of the flowers enriched with multi coloured rhinestones placed in clawed settings.

This brings to an end my discussion of the design themes which influenced hair ornaments in the 'swinging sixties'. The story continues in the next of my guides which covers the 1970s.

Further reading:

For those who would like to do some reading on the fascinating subject of comb collecting, the following books are strongly recommended:

Jen CRUSE, *The Comb, its development and history*. Robert Hale, 2007.

This is the first major book in English to deal in depth with combs and hairpins around the world. Having well over 500 colour and black and white illustrations the text surveys the subject from ancient cultures to the mid 20th century. The development of the combmaker's craft is recounted up to and including the development of plastics. The book illustrates the use of combs as articles of grooming and dressing as well as for ornamental use. An in depth and essential reference book for both collectors and scholars.

Mary BACHMAN, *Collectors Guide to Hair Combs*, Collector Books, 1998.

This wonderful little book is an invaluable source of information on the huge range of Art Deco combs which were produced in the USA. Although the text is not extensive it is well arranged in logical sections according to materials and styles. The work is packed with delightful colour pictures of the author's own amazing collection. There are also 19th century and ethnic examples but the concentration is definitely upon the vast range of designs which are found in celluloid and other synthetic hair combs of the early 20th century.

Norma HAGUE, *Combs and Hair Accessories*. Antique Pocket Guides. Pub. in the USA by Seven Hills Books, Cincinnati.

This little book complements Bachman because it concentrates on British and European examples, and covers the period 1780 to the 1950s. This too is illustrated with the author's own collection. It is a pity that the pictures are monochrome. However, the great strength of this work is the scholarly and comprehensiveness of its text. The author has placed hair accessories in their social and historical context, and includes much valuable and fascinating information about the art movements and other events which influenced fashion. The text is arranged chronologically, making it easy to use.

Together these two small books constitute the two 'bibles' of hair comb collecting.

A third book which is of interest from an illustrative point of view is **Evelyn HAERTIG**, *Antique Combs and Purses*. Carmel, California, Gallery Graphics Press.

This is a large and expensive 'coffee table' book, with many sumptuous illustrations in both mono and colour. Unfortunately it is let down by the poor quality of the text. This is messy and fragmented, and unlike the two works above appears to follow no logical plan in its organization and is difficult to use.