



Retro Hair Combs & Hair Accessories
1980 – 1990 (Part 2)

The Return of Glamour

After becoming somewhat subdued and conservative in the 1970s the costume jewellery industry again flourished in the 1980s. A number of important influences combined to give women a new freedom and confidence to wear frankly fake fashion jewellery. In fact, the bigger and glitzier the better!

In this respect, several important influences which contributed to the popular taste can be identified.

1. **The 'Real Jewellery' Look:** inspired by Diana Princess of Wales.
2. **Nostalgic Historical Revivals:** imitation of historical periods.
3. **Frankly Fake:** inspired by the glitz and glamour of TV shows like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* and the influence of celebrities like Madonna
4. **Resurgence of Plastic Jewellery:** novelty themes and treatments such as prints, animal patterns, and so on.

Part II will examine the influence of the 'Dallasty' phenomenon and the resurgence of novelty styles in plastic jewellery and hair accessories.

Frankly Fake

Unlike previous generations when rhinestone jewellery had been more favoured by mature women, the craze was for bright and glittery jewellery was followed by teenagers and older women alike in the 1980s. Previous rules about what was considered appropriate wear for particular occasions were discarded. Rhinestones, faux pearls and bright gold or gilt jewellery came to be worn on every possible occasion, not just in the evening.

The 'Dallasty' Phenomenon

In the USA glamour came in the far reaching influence of Television shows like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, which were watched by millions of viewers around the world. The shows epitomized an era of glamour and decadence that later became the hallmark of the American primetime soap operas of the 1980s.

The women portrayed in these soap operas were powerful and assertive, yet also feminine. The lavish use of both fine and costume jewellery was worn day and night on the show, and this trend soon drifted into mainstream fashion. Big, almost huge, gilt fashion earrings several almost two inches across drew attention to the face and hair. stones could be real or fake. Gilt metal, pearls and diamante were intended to tell the rest of the world you had "arrived".

The clothing and jewellery they wore was reminiscent of the seductive Hollywood styles of the 1930s and 1940s. These shows, targeted towards females, influenced women to wear jewellery to show one's economic status. Synthetic fabrics went out of style in the 1980s. Wool, cotton, and silk returned to popularity for their perceived quality. For evening rich brocades, lace and lame were the fabrics of choice.



Picture 1: The Cast of the TV soap opera Dynasty in all their splendour

Personalities in the music industry also became international fashion icons. Superstar Madonna showed an amazing ability to re-invent herself every few years, and her look was copied slavishly by many young women. She first emerged on the dance music scene with her 'street urchin' look of short skirts over leggings, rubber bracelets, long layered strings of beads, bleached hair with dark roots, and head bands.

In her *Material Girl* phase, Madonna paid homage to the 1950s icon Marilyn Monroe and made it popular to wear 1950s-inspired looks such as head scarves with dark sunglasses and long elbow-length gloves for evening wear. Madonna also wore a great deal of jewellery both on and off stage. *Material Girl* created further excitement for glitz and glamour in the form of rhinestone jewellery.

Power Dressing and 'Big Hair'

All these influences trickled down the social scale in the form of power dressing. If ordinary working women did not succumb to the brash fashions of Dynasty and Dallas they wore a toned down version in the form of 'Women dress-for-success' business uniforms with big shoulders, big hair and co-ordinating costume jewellery.

Shoulder pads, popularized perhaps by Linda Evans from the soap opera *Dynasty*, remained popular throughout the 1980s and even the first three years of the 1990s. The reason behind the sudden popularity of shoulder pads for women in the 1980s may be that women in the workplace were no longer unusual, and wanted to 'power dress' to show that they were the equals of men at the office. Many women's outfits had Velcro on the inside of the shoulder where various sized shoulder pads could be attached.

Another phenomenon of the 1980s is the taste for what has become known as 'big hair.' This is a term that can refer to hairstyles that emphasize large volume or largely styled hair. Big hair was popular in the late 1970s, as popularized by Dolly Parton and Farrah Fawcett, a development from earlier bouffant styles. During the 1980s, big hair became a trend with music stars such as Bon Jovi, Siouxsie Sioux of Siouxsie & the Banshees, and many others.

Big eccentric hairstyles were popularised by film and music stars, particularly among teenagers. They were generally achieved by the use of hairspray, hair gel and mousse, which resulted in the desired shiny look and greater volume. And then there was the fully blown-out mane held back by a headband, bangs teased into a cloud. Hair was ratted until it could stand up on its own without even the benefit of hairspray, which was usually applied afterward. An entire head of crimped locks, bangs included, was definitely the popular way to go.

Glitzy Jewellery with Fake Stones

We can see that the current fashion in the 1980s for silky dresses in bold colours and 'big' hair cried out to be balanced by glitzy jewellery in gilt settings with huge fake looking stones. Hair accessories of the period were certainly neither small nor delicate!



Picture 2: Dallasty style hair comb with rhinestone dangles

The hair accessories shown in pictures 2 and 3 might well have been worn by Alexis Carrington (aka Joan Collins) herself. Picture 2 shows a comb to the top which is attached a veritable waterfall of huge rhinestones. They are arranged so as to hang down over the wearer's hair and to tremble and flash when she moves.

Picture 3 is a large rhinestone barrette in a complex openwork design, with the stones claw set into chromed silver tone metal.



Picture 3: Large and impressive rhinestone encrusted barrette

One of the most characteristic combinations, and one which expressed pure decadence, was for the combination of large faux pearls and frankly fake rhinestones with other materials in an elaborate gold tone setting. The beautiful hair comb in picture 4 is signed *Laurent Olivier* and was hand made in France, but the design is pure Dallasty.



Picture 4: Faux pearl and rhinestone hair comb signed by Laurent Olivier, Paris

Creators of high end hair accessories which are the very epitome of French luxury and elegance, many Olivier hair ornaments are reminiscent of the elegant and feminine fashions that hark back to French royalty of the 18th century. The designs include both neo classical

and Rococo influences. Hand-made in France from the finest materials, each piece is carefully hand-polished to perfection.

Laurent Olivier products are sold at the finest department stores, spas and boutiques and are considered to be among the most beautiful hair ornaments in the world. Laurent Olivier hair ornaments use luxury materials made from cellulose acetate sheets, as well as high quality rhinestones and baroque pearls and faux tortoiseshell. They do not use any animal products in the manufacture of their collection.

This beautiful and very baroque looking comb in picture 4 is made with the usual faux tortoise foundation and is signed on the back with the legend *Laurent Olivier – France* in distinctive cursive script. The heading is a complex assemblage of rhinestones intermixed with faux pearls in both spherical and pear shapes, plus some additional elements in dark blue Lucite imitating lapis lazuli. These materials are encrusted upon a heavy and elaborate gold tone heading.



Picture 5: Elaborate gold tone barrettes typical of the 1980s

The two large Dallasty style barrettes shown in picture 5 are unsigned but both of very good substantial quality, and very much in the 80s taste with their elaborate gold tone settings. The topmost ornament has a large faux pearl set between two spreading wing motifs. These are of gold tone metal and further embellished with yellowish gold enamel. The enamel is applied in such a way that the raised gold tone elements of the design stand up in relief.

The lower ornament is also in elaborate gold tone. This features a large decorative plaque or rectangular cabochon of ceramic material imitating the mottled green of malachite. This use of ceramics or synthetics to simulate natural materials such as lapis lazuli (which we saw in the Laurent Olivier comb) or as here malachite is typical of the period.

Resurgence of Plastic Jewellery

After languishing somewhat during the 1970s plastic jewellery again became fashionable in the 80s. This coincided with the vogue for collecting early bakelite and other vintage jewellery. Around 1989-90 the Haskell jewellery company marketed many styles reminiscent of 1930s pieces, but made of plastic and sold in fine department stores and boutiques.

The plastics used for jewellery and hair ornaments in the 1980s were not only smooth but textured as well. Stripes and polka dot patterns were popular, in addition to those imitating animal prints. All the colours of the rainbow were employed to create a dazzling effect.



Picture 6: French animal print hair comb, barrette and hair claw

Picture 6 shows a selection of good quality hair ornaments in the popular animal prints, or the type which were sold in better department stores. All these examples are back stamped *MADE IN FRANCE*.

The tiger striped ornament at the top is a barrette, fitted with a French spring clip. However the leopard print object on the right is a hair claw, a type of hair accessory which came into prominence in the 1980s, along with banana clips. These banana clips and hair claws were a particular another favourite with young women. The latter often wore wild earrings, rather long or of peculiar design, and hair that was chin length or shorter.

As well as animal prints, novelty hair ornaments in the shape of figural animals were also very popular at this time. The pretty hair comb in picture 7 is another *MADE IN FRANCE* ornament. It is topped off with a figural snow leopard which crouches atop the heading. The animal has diamante eyes and a collar of the same. The iridescent effect of the plastic material is somewhat similar to the effect found upon some Lea Stein ornaments but this one bears no signature.



Picture 7: Plastic hair comb with figural snow leopard, French.

Another jungle animal is portrayed in the Anne Klein gold tone barrette in picture 8. This one is of very substantial construction and has three figural lion masks. Anne Klein & Co was launched in 1968. The company achieved prestige and growth and won many design awards.



Picture 8: Barrette by Anne Klein, showing the company's famous lion mask

At the height of her success Anne Klein died unexpectedly in 1974. More recently the company's lion logo has become a fashion icon and is available not only in jewellery but also

in fabrics and other materials on scarves, bags, etc. So this lovely barrette is very much a collector's item.



Picture 9: Barrette with figural animals by Medusa's Heirlooms

The whimsical barrette with three figural dogs, or possibly a dog, leopard and lion, is signed by *Medusas Heirlooms*, another popular brand name of the period. The modelling of the animals is not quite so well done in this example as in picture 7, but the overall effect is stunning. Medusas Heirlooms seems to have specialised in these animal print hair accessories at this period, as I have seen a great many of them available on eBay.

Designer Hair Accessories

The 1980s saw the emergence of a new brand of jewellery between fine and costume jewellery, often called 'designer' jewellery. In the past, *haute couture* houses had specially commissioned jewellery collections to be worn by the models on their catwalk shows. Such pieces were, of course, exclusive one off pieces and not generally available to the public.

However with the rise of the ready to wear industry, many couture houses were now making limited editions of their own jewellery to be sold in their boutiques. For example, in 1983 Karl Lagerfeld took over Chanel and reinvigorated the brand by his use of the double C in costume jewels and handbags. Other designers such as Christian Lacroix and Yves Saint Laurent worked closely with jewellers to produce a collection for each season. In Italy Gianni Versace's collection epitomised the glitz and glamour of the 1980s.



Picture 10: 'Designer' barrette for the house of Dior

Although these ornaments were more affordable than the one off items produced for the catwalk, they were still more expensive than the general run of costume jewellery. Consequently they were difficult to place in chain stores, and generally sold in galleries and the fashion houses own boutiques. Many of these hair accessories, like the Dior barrette in picture 10, were little more than walking advertisements for the fashion house itself.

The End of the Decade

By the late 1980s there was a backlash against ostentatious dressing and jewellery, which lasted into the mid 1990s. By then the demise of the Soviet Union, wars in Europe and the Middle East, the AIDS crisis, cyber culture and political and corporate corruption all contributed to the sober and anxious fashion mood. Along with the new minimalism touted by

Calvin Klein, Donna Karen and a host of Belgian and Japanese designers towards the end of the decade Gothic, heroin chic and grunge became the fashion watchwords

But that, of course, is a continuing story ...

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 is 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 scholarliness 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.