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Brooch Revival: Badges of Style

OCTOBER 3, 2022 | [BETH BERNSTEIN](#)

Worn on a jacket, around your neck or even as part of an updo, antique brooches are making a comeback in unexpected ways.

The return of the antique or vintage brooch as a red-carpet staple started in approximately 2010, when a host of celebrities started styling this classic jewel in unexpected ways. Who could forget Fred Leighton's lizard brooch climbing down the back of Anna Faris's yellow gown? Or the vintage Cartier peacock perched on Uma Thurman's shoulder at the Met Gala in 2016?

A brooch can certainly be a conversation starter, and there are many ways to wear them. Here are six modern variations on styling brooches, for women who want to marry the past with the present for an eclectic, personalized look.



Fred Leighton butterflies on wide elasticized ribbon around the neck. Photo: Fred Leighton.

1. In your hair

We saw it at the 2022 Met Gala and at the Cannes Film Festival. Dressing up the tresses with brooches is a trend adopted by stars including Maude Apatow and Elle Fanning. One of the tricks to fastening the jewel as a hair ornament is to purchase bobby pins in a color as close to your hair as possible and work them through the back of the brooch.

For an extra layer of protection, you can also purchase the little plastic backs worn with wire earrings and slide these onto the pin of the brooch before closing it. According to Jacqueline Smelkinson, co-owner of The Spare Room Antiques, the Georgian-era antique-cut diamond *en tremblant* floral styles or those that detach from diadems or tiaras are best as they “add the subtle sparkle that was once meant to glisten softly in candlelight.” She also offers: “Another more affordable look is to wear a larger cut-steel brooch set in silver.” Claire Danes dressed her updo with Fred Leighton’s antique cut-steel arrow at the Met Gala in in 2017.

Left image: Fred Leighton set of three diamond star brooches in gold and platinum, circa 1900. Photo: Fred Leighton.

2. Through a ribbon

Rebecca Selva, chief executive officer of Fred Leighton, has styled many brooches on A-listers. She says she likes to achieve an element of surprise when working with both customers and celebrity clients. “If I am working with earlier antique brooches, I will choose popular motifs and feature them in unconventional looks and a brand-new light,” she says.

“For example, I have attached them to wide elasticized velvet ribbon, but instead of creating a choker I formed an asymmetrical long crossover effect, like a loosened man’s tie, with two diamond butterflies from the 19th century. It’s an elegant-yet-offbeat look and can be worn with a T-shirt, as can one large butterfly I recently styled on the wrist, fastened to a wide ribbon.

Right image: Fred Leighton old mine cut diamond butterfly brooch, in silver topped gold, worn on elasticized ribbon. Photo: Fred Leighton.

3. On a chain

Selva also has an affinity for working with layers of necklaces and adding a brooch in to the mix: “I love to clasp one brooch to an antique or vintage chain, which immediately turns it into a lariat,” she shares. This is one that you can do easily at home. Long Victorian guard chains that can be wrapped around multiple times also work for this look when clasped with a brooch.

Emily Duffelmeyer, owner of Jean Jean Vintage, is a fan of this style and suggests Victorian gemstone brooches in motifs of stars, crescent moons or hearts. A more intricate version involves Selva’s scattered pansy brooches added to a 19th-century bib necklace.

*Left image: Fred Leighton Art
Nouveau floral enamel brooch.
Photo: Fred Leighton.*

4. As a floating necklace

Flip your cashmere cardigan so the buttons go down the back, to give you a flat neckline for small brooches that, when evenly spaced, look almost like a floating necklace.

The brooches that are most flattering for this look are a mix of Georgian Halley's Comet motifs in foil-backed gemstones and dainty floral pins that follow a similar shape, or delicate lingerie pins.

This creative styling trick can also work on low-neckline cocktail dresses. "This is the perfect opportunity to mix real and faux pieces and a bunch of different time periods," Duffelmeyer says. "The appeal of brooches is their versatility and variety. I love to teach my customer to wear several at once, particularly trimming a neckline and to have fun while styling themselves."

Right image: Jean Jean vintage mix of Victorian through Retro time periods and fine and costume period styles. Photo: Jean Jean.

5. Themed clusters

If you have a favorite motif in antique or vintage jewelry, then Pat Novissimo of Lowther Antiques suggests wearing a themed cluster. “My theme is different shapes and colors of Georgian pansies on a pastel sweater, or small bug pins on the lapel of a white shirt,” she says, noting that you don’t have to be strict when it comes to sticking with just one motif. “If you have a love of celestial jewelry, you can choose different shooting stars and crescent moons,” she suggests.

Other motifs that work well together are garden-party or natural themes, such as different varieties of flowers on their own or mixed with dragonflies, ladybugs, butterflies, lizards and snakes. The creatures can create their own little story.

Right image: Fred Leighton set of three diamond star brooches in gold and platinum, circa 1900. Photo: Fred Leighton.

6. Anywhere on a blazer

There are multiple tricks to wearing antique and vintage brooches on a jacket. Let us count the ways: in a cluster on a lapel, scattered across the lapel and upper breast of the blazer, and on one or both bottom pockets. Art Deco clip brooches traditionally separate into two parts and can be worn on both lapels. Or, when you have two of the same style or two or more removable parts of a diadem, try them together on one sleeve.

“This is an exciting time as there are so many great antique and vintage brooches out there,” Selva offers. “They are extremely versatile, and if you are adventurous with your jewels, you will find wonderfully unexpected ways in which to wear them.”

Left image: Sandra Cronan Art Deco double clip brooch featuring rows of parallel pearls and crystals, finished with diamond and onyx, circa 1920. Photo: Sandra Cronan.

Main image: Uma Thurman, at Met Gala 2016, wearing a Tommy Hilfiger gown and vintage Cartier peacock on her shoulder. Photo: Shutterstock.

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