



Can jewellery keep a secret?

WHILE JEWELLERY PIECES CONTAINING SECRET COMPARTMENTS TRADITIONALLY HAVE BEEN USED FOR EITHER SINFUL OR SENTIMENTAL PURPOSES, INDIA NICHOLSON FINDS THAT MODERN DAY TRANSLATIONS OFTEN TAKE ON A MORE PLAYFUL FUNCTION.

The main attraction of jewellery is arguably based on aesthetics – the way an item shines, sparkles, shimmers ... the list goes on. Sometimes, however, a unique design feature that creates intrigue and mystery can leave a lasting impression on a customer.

Most readers will know not to “judge a book by its cover”, hence jewellery pieces with secret compartments are a testament to the rule.

The popularity of jewellery that featured hidden compartments – and agendas – grew during the Renaissance era, but its existence dates back to 183 B.C.

Poison rings and similar vessel pieces have been said to be synonymous with causing mysterious deaths and were commonly used by the wearer to slip poison into an enemy’s food or drink.

The first documented evidence of the use of a poison ring was by the famous general of Carthage, Hannibal. His ring was the subsequent cause of his own demise – he consumed the poison his ring concealed to avoid torture and betrayal when captured by his enemies, the Romans.

In the Renaissance era, European aristocracies, such as the Borgia family, used poison rings to gain political power. Lucrezia Borgia, the daughter of Pope Alexander VI, is rumoured to have had a hollow ring that she used to contaminate the drinks of political rivals, gaining her own family’s political domination.

However, it was a locket ring owned by Queen Elizabeth I that reportedly changed the nature of vessel jewellery from malicious to nostalgic.

The piece – made from mother of pearl and embossed with rubies and diamonds – was commissioned in 1575 and opens to display two miniature portraits. One portrait is of the Queen and the other is of an unnamed woman believed to be her mother.

The locket ring is said to have treasured the secret pain she felt about her deceased mother.

Furthermore, jewellery pieces that guard and protect a lock of a loved one’s hair were popular in the Victorian era and around the time of the American Civil War.

The notion of jewellery that contains secret compartments has carried through into the present day – although the reasoning behind designs is now less about protection. Modern-day adaptations of jewellery with secret compartments tend to adopt trivial, fun, practical and affectionate meanings.

Examples include a ring that when opened contains a USB flash drive and a pendant designed as a walnut shell that parts to reveal a walnut sitting inside.

Trivial or not, a hidden trait might be the unique offering that a customer has been searching for. Just don’t let too many people in on the secret.

Opposite is a compilation of contemporary jewellery pieces from around the world that feature secret compartments. *



"A piece created to reveal hidden love. Gold-plated silver with a beautiful hand-painted work of enamel inside the pendant. This piece is delicate, classic and has a great element of surprise, which makes it a little magical."

COMPANY: LES NÉRÉIDES
Quote by Juliette Jeanjot

COMPANY: JILL BAKER GOWER
Quote by Jill Baker Gower

"Powderpuff Ring is a large, playful, and oversized ring that functions as a loose powder compact and at the same time humorously addresses beautification obsessions and methods of material glamourisation in society today."



"Memorial and keepsake jewellery are designed to bring memories to an even more personal level by holding a small portion of cremation ashes, a lock of hair or fur (they are equally popular among pet-owners) or soil from a burial site."



COMPANY: MEMORIAL PRODUCTS
Quote by Brian White

COMPANY: MONSERAT DE LUCCA
Quote by Megan Bakva



"Our two-piece Skull and Brain Necklace was created for the doers and the thinkers alike. It serves as a little reminder to step out of the mind and into the present."

COMPANY: SJ JEWELS
Quote by Sarah-Jane Adams

"I wanted to create a collection of jewellery which is a true representation of what I believe jewellery should be. It needed to be precious, be able to be worn by women from the ages of 1-100, and also to become an heirloom."



"Murder She Wrote is the tale of the femme fatale and the English country house. Full of deceit, revenge and jealousy; this collection of fine jewellery lays blood on the croquet lawn with emeralds, rubies, sapphires and, of course, those most shadowy of characters, black diamonds."



COMPANY: STEPHEN WEBSTER
Quote by Stephen Webster

COMPANY: WENDY BRANDES
Quote by Wendy Brandes

"I specialise in jewellery with secret details, partly because I love a good surprise. It also seems extra-luxurious to own a piece that doesn't telegraph its finest details to everyone."



COMPANY: THOMAS SABO
Quote by Hanny Freund



The inspiration of the new Thomas Sabo Glam & Soul collection is love and romance, and the 3D fairytale heart locket is one of the icons of this collection. With great attention to detail it reflects the perfect symbol and messenger of love."



"It was a joy to work with an emerald this colour and it just lent itself to being a secret opening ring covering lush lily-pads and frogs kissing. Wouldn't you have done the same? The fabulous green light coming through the stone really makes this tiny space atmospheric."

COMPANY: THEO FENNEL
Quote by Theo Fennell

COMPANY: POCKETBANDS
Quote by Devin Eisner

"PocketBands are silicone wristbands with a hidden pocket that can be used to stash keys, money and more. When the idea for Pocketbands was initially conceived, we were a little surprised it didn't already exist. It feels like one of those products that should have been made years ago."

