



Objects of desire

For Constance Cummings, uncommon beauty is an everyday luxury, as Philippa Prentice discovers

If you could be transported back to any fashion era, to which would you return? Perhaps the 1920s for cloche hats and drop-waist dresses, or the 60s for knee-high boots? For Constance Cummings of Love & Object, era is somewhat irrelevant. She has her dial tuned firmly to glamour, revisiting the feminine sensuality of the 70s, the exuberance of the 80s and historical goldmines beyond, to source opulent vintage costume jewellery and accessories. “It’s almost like archaeology for jewellery,” she says.

Auckland-based Cummings, 28, says she’s always had a thing for couture costume jewels. Growing up, she learned the value of vintage from her father, whose business was estate jewellery and antiques. Later, art-history degree in hand, she and partner Eddie von Dadelszen, 29, creative director of menswear label Working Style, travelled extensively together, and would often bring home heirloom-worthy finds that evoked lust among friends and family. Says Cummings: “It always felt normal to buy vintage jewellery and wear it with contemporary clothing, but I realised a lot of people didn’t have the avenues to purchase that sort of thing.”

Harnessing her eye for perennially sophisticated collectables with serious pedigree, Cummings launched Love & Object in November 2013 as the “antithesis of fast-fashion jewellery”, an online destination of the rare and beautiful, and for those who

desire something truly special. The incredible one-off treasures she stocks include both unsigned pieces and creations by iconic designers (YSL, Lacroix, Dior, Givenchy), some priced for younger shoppers and some to-die-for “museum-quality” couture items with price tags to match. Customers can purchase from the website or at private viewings at Love & Object showrooms in Auckland or Hong Kong. Each impeccably preserved piece comes with details on its provenance obtained through Cumming’s meticulous research.

Attending auctions and circling the globe with her father gave Cummings a unique education and introduced her to many of the sources she draws from today, predominately the vast private stashes of women in Paris, New York, Texas and Japan. “They’re women who were obsessed with fashion in the 70s and 80s, and a lot of them worked in that industry, so they built up a collection they’ve kept for years. Everything is 100 per cent authentic.”

With a strong local fan base, traction in the Australian market and a growing contingent of customers further afield, Love & Object’s clientele is “a diverse group - many of them are businesswomen who attend a lot of corporate events and don’t want to wear the same thing as everybody else. I do all the work and at the end of the day they know it has been specially chosen for them.”

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Constance Cummings wears a couture Balmain 'Elle' necklace and earrings - the inspiration for her new collection.



HANDLE WITH CARE

How to maintain a vintage treasure.

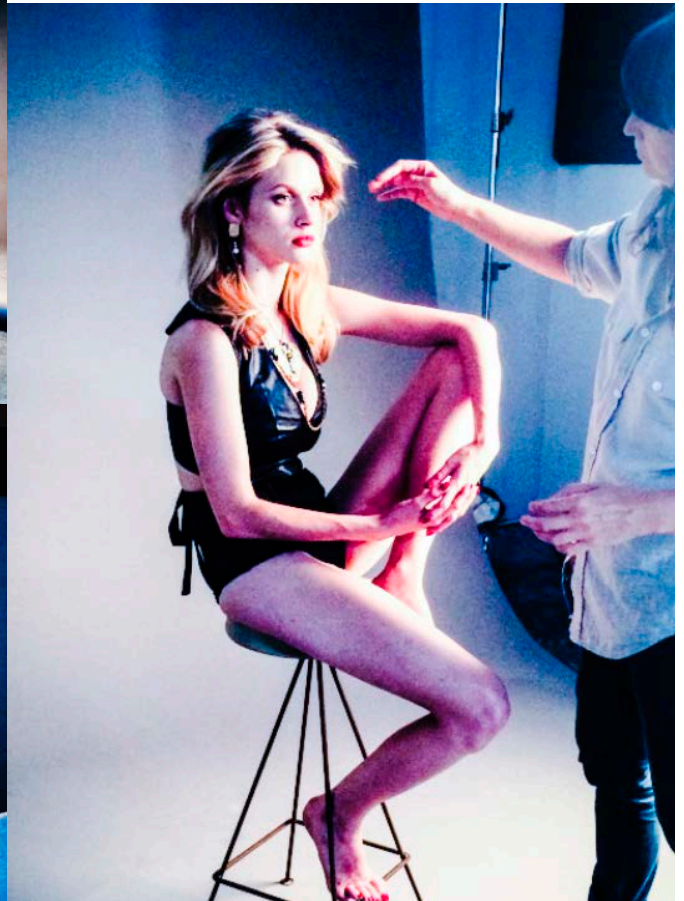
- **KEEP IT CLEAN AND DRY:** "The number-one killer for vintage jewellery is moisture," says Cummings. "Wipe with a soft cloth and remove makeup with white vinegar, which evaporates. If it's really stuck use white vinegar with a tiny bit of lemon and a cotton bud."
- **KEEP IT SAFE:** "Store jewellery in a snap-lock bag with all the air taken out of it."
- **WEAR IT WISELY:** "The golden rule is last thing on, first thing off."



From top: Scassi necklace; Constella earring; Miriam Haskell bracelet; Delphine earring; Givenchy necklace; Brutalist ring.



Australian model Elle Brittain is the face and body of Love & Object's new campaign. "She has an old-school beauty about her but she's contemporary looking," says Cummings.



There are younger buyers on the books as well. "Rather than go to a fast-fashion throwaway-jewellery company, they come to us to buy a pair of Celine earrings they'll be able to keep for 20 years. It's about being sustainable, but stylish."

Love & Object stocks vintage jewels, but its aesthetic is very now. "Many people think if it's vintage jewellery you have to wear it with a tea dress and do the whole look," says Cummings, "but it's about taking what's old and making it new again."

The raw imagery of Love & Object's lookbooks exemplifies this modernisation. Last season, New Zealand model Zippora Seven's naked body was draped in Love & Object's luxury pieces. The new campaign stars Australian model Elle Brittain, who has "an old-school beauty about her, yet she's contemporary looking," says Cummings. Called 'Of Beauty Rich and Rare', the collection is inspired by the 70s and couture Balmain 'Elle' necklace and earrings. It includes long necklaces ideal for wearing with polo necks, shoulder-dusting earrings and, in a nod to recent Chanel runways, brooches to pair with coats and shirts.

Cummings says she gets to do what she loves every day and the "best thing is the customer who phones up raving about a piece she bought, saying she's had 50 compliments, got chased down the street by somebody asking about it and carries the provenance card in her handbag so she can talk to people about it."

There's no denying the allure of a statement piece, but how do the minimalists among us make it work? "Just pair it with jeans and a T-shirt, or wear one of our gold chokers with a white shirt," says Cummings. "Costume jewellery is made to be worn often – it's there to have fun with. Our jewellery is not about being ostentatious; it's not about a woman feeling like she's being flashy. I think Coco Chanel summed it up best: 'Costume jewellery is not made to give a woman an aura of wealth, but to make them beautiful.' Do it for yourself. It's about what you feel best in." ■

CONSTANCE CUMMINGS ON STYLE

Describe your style. A little bit Parisian laid-back chic.

Undone but feminine, never girly and always heels. I don't wear a lot of makeup, so it's important to wear something that's a little more grown-up and sexy.

What are your jewellery essentials? I can't live without a gold choker – I wear so many shirts and crew-neck T-shirts and a choker is easy to slip on. I've always piled rings on, and whenever I wear my hair up, I wear earrings.

Who's your style icon? The one I've had since I was little is Kate Moss. I've recently become obsessed with model Elena Perminova. She wears accessories fabulously and has a unique style – she can do rock chick one day and be a bohemian beauty the next.

Who's your favourite designer? Karl Lagerfeld does an amazing job with Chanel and Fendi. He's a genius. Locally, I love what Harman Grubisa are doing. They're two young women in business and have the same mantra as us – quality and timelessness but with a contemporary edge. They use beautiful fabrics and are not trying to be trendy. They're just trying to produce something really beautiful.

Where's your favourite place to shop? I'm right into online shopping, but my favourite New Zealand store is World. I love that they're eclectic and slightly eccentric and I adore what they do with their stores.

Who's your fantasy client? Carine Roitfeld – she's my business and style muse. I'm magazine obsessed and have boxes and boxes [of French *Vogue*] in my wardrobe.

What's your dream vintage discovery? A perfect Chanel Maltese-cross cuff. They're very hard to find and very hard to find in excellent condition and no one wants to sell them.