

In Fashion: Crystal clear - crystals and fashion

by Sharon_Mosley

Who doesn't like a little glimmer and glitz every once in a while? Crystals have long caught the eye of discriminating fashion legends like glamorous Hollywood star Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe and Judy Garland. You didn't think those ruby slippers were covered in dozens of plastic sequins, did you?

THE GEM INSIDE US ALL - Now anyone can sparkle thanks to the work of Beadwork magazine Editor in Chief Marlene Blessing and designer Jamie Hogsett, who share their expertise in a new book 'Create Jewelry Crystals.' CNS Photo courtesy of Interweave.com. Now even the ordinary among us can sparkle with the radiant gems that have inspired jewelry designers thanks to the work of Beadwork magazine Editor in Chief Marlene Blessing and designer Jamie Hogsett who share their expertise in a new book "Create Jewelry Crystals" (Interweave Press, \$22.95). It contains step-by-step instructions on how to put together 20 different projects involving crystals from statement necklaces to dazzling brooches to brilliant bangles.

As someone who appreciates sophisticated jewelry, but who has admittedly never strung a bead in her life, it's not only the stunning photography that caught my attention, but the interesting trivia about crystals found throughout the book. Here are some of the best tidbits:

- Rock 'n' roll - What we call rock crystal is a pure form of quartz, popularized by early jewelers. In the 18th century, man-made techniques for producing completely transparent leaded glass were perfected and European glassmakers began to advertise their "crystal-clear" products and the term "crystal" came to apply to the glass. Natural rock crystals are still available for jewelry designs today, but they are not as plentiful or as varied as glass crystal beads.

- Space-age magic - Pure rock crystal is used in optical and electronic equipment from binoculars to computers. Crystals have been integral to the development of technology such as telescopes, microscopes, satellite communications, radar and more.

- Rhinestone cowboys - Rhinestones, paste and crystals are not the same, although the authors acknowledge that many use these designations simultaneously. Here's the deal: High-quality natural rock crystals sifted from the Rhine River were called rhinestones (now that makes sense) and were cut and faceted to create

jewelry. Over time, the name has come to refer to faceted lead crystal or faceted glass, usually backed with foil.

- Stick it to 'em - Paste refers to glass with very high lead content, which was originally faceted to be incorporated into jewelry, buckles and other items of adornment worn by 18th century ladies and gents. The stones received a metal coating or foiling to add brilliance and enhance the refraction of light. Even Marie Antoinette was a fan.

- The Iceman cometh - The word "crystal" derives from the Greek "krystallos," which refers to a mythic ice palace of the Olympian gods that not even the heat of the sun could destroy. In China, rock crystal was also referred to as "water jade" and "thousand-year-old ice."

- Look into my crystal ball - Crystal has always held magical powers for ancient people. In the Middle Ages, the glassy oracle served as tools of psychic clairvoyants. Crystals were also believed to have healing properties. The stone was ground into a powder and mixed with wine to remedy dysentery, gout and colic. Ladies in fashionable ancient Roman society carried crystal balls in their hands to cool themselves during the heat of the summer.

- A sacred source - Crystal has not only been associated with fortunetelling and healing; it has also been given sacred status by various religions. For Buddhists, it is one of the seven precious substances, while for the Lamas of Tibet, the eastern region of heaven is believed to be built of white crystal.

- In 1892 Daniel Swarovski developed and patented a machine in Austria that cut crystals faster and with greater precision than could be done manually. Today the crystal manufacturer produces more than 100,000 different shapes, colors, sizes and facets of crystals and have been incorporated into fashion runways since Christian Dior in the 1950s.

- All that glitters - Marilyn Monroe wore a glittering, skintight Jean Louis gown dripping with 6,000 Swarovski crystals when she sang "Happy Birthday" to John F. Kennedy at Madison Square Garden in 1962.

This dress fetched \$1.2 million at a Christie's auction in 1999.

- There's no place like home - Judy Garland's ruby red slippers were encrusted with Swarovski crystals in "The Wizard of Oz." In 2000, one of the four pairs she wore in the movie was sold for \$660,000.

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