

The Art to Live à la Français

Katerina Helwig for Jewellery Review, 10/2009

French design consists of nuances, tints, halftones, and composition. French design is a refined perception of life.

Usually, France associates with refinement in our mind. Boutiques and jewellery brands are the incarnation of French style. A well-known term haute couture appeared in Paris in the middle of the 19th century when Poiree, Chanel and Dior elevated their trade to the level of art and turned lady's beauty into a subject of worship. The inimitable French design is the combination of great history, rich cultural heritage, traditions, and specific world-view.

Mysterious symbols

Unique plastics of art of the epoch of Merovings, first dynasty of French kings. In the "Dark" Mediaeval period, a specific art appeared combining the motives of Celtic ornaments and the cryptography of first Christians. Fanciful styled letters and images of birds and fishes had a deep sense, while animal-shaped decorations had a totem meaning.

Illustration (watch the layout): Bracelet by Cartier

The collection of the Art Deco style is attractive by its totem symbolism.

Passion for a vampire

Elevated but dismal images are born under the influence of Gothic art and architecture. Gothic vampire theme is among the most popular ones in modern French jewellery art. In general, sorcery and related symbolism, borrowed from different epochs and finding different interpretations, have always been the main source of inspiration for goldsmiths.

Illustration (watch the layout): Necklace by Boucheron

Collection in the Neo-Gothic style

Luxury and «negligence»

France is the motherland of world historic styles, such as classicism and rococo. French kings Louis XIV, Louis XV, and, later on, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte were the trendsetters all over the Europe. Courteous style of Louis XV was the first lady's style. His favourite, marquise de Pompadour, entered the history as the founder of rococo. Refined incurved lines of rocaille, pastel colours, and complicated half-tones represent a kind of reflection of women's essence in the shapes of surrounding world. Chinoiserie, or the ardour for Chinese aesthetics, being one of the rococo directions, was the first appellation of Western art to the East.

Illustration (watch the layout): Assembled group, collection by Dior

«Milly Carnivora»

One of the most recent collections by Dior, created by Victoir de Castellan, refers rather to as post-modernism, but is similar to rococo by its plastics and complicated composition.

Universal Law of the Beautiful

The Classicism, the second round of return to the Antiquity after the Italian Renaissance, was a new interpretation of Antique ideas. In this period, imperishable masterpieces of art and architecture were created. In the early 17th century, Nicolas Poussin reached the perfection in composition; in the early 18th century, Jaques-Louis Davide created a plastic form of new classicism. Pure lines and lapidarity of form expression were achieved in the Empire style. In the late 18th century, the world art capital moves from Rome to Paris. The world apprehended classic ideas via the prism of French classicism. For

example, in Russia, the whole city was built in the Empire style. This city, St.-Petersburg, possesses a unique aura. In the late 19th century, the great French jeweller Charles Faberge worked in St.-Petersburg; many of his works were performed in the refined classicism style. In Paris and London, true masterpieces were created by the Cartier house.

Illustration (watch the layout): Collection by Cartier

Classicism is a cosmopolitan style, its adepts synthesise the universal law of the beautiful.

The trace of “whip slash”

In the second part of the 19th century, France occupied leading positions in art and, later on, in design. Impressionists declared the war to the academism; new concepts and styles emerged and involved the society, like an avalanche. Postimpressionism and modernism appeared. It is possible to say that Monet’s observation of solar light led finally to the creation of synthetic styles. Artistic life of Paris boiled up in that period. It is no mere chance that it was in France where the Art Nouveau made its appearance, the first integrated synthetic style where all elements of human environment were represented in one vein.

Illustration (watch the layout): Ring by Boucheron

Biomorphous spicy plastics of the Art Nouveau assigns these masterpieces of jewellery a mysterious attractiveness.

Attractiveness of Luxury

In the first half of the 20th century, a new trend appeared in the decorative art and manifested itself in architecture, fashion, and painting; this was Art Deco. Designers working in the Art Deco style were

Dominants in the collections by Cartier

Neo-Classicism

Abstract geometric forms

Architecture

The age of speed

Fauvism

German expressionism

Dyagilev Russian Seasons

Cubism

Abstract art

Art Deco

Consistency

Proportion balance

Automotive theme

Totem style

inspired by Art Nouveau, Empire, and ethnic art. Typical features of Art Deco are geometric patterns, luxury, chic, expensive and modern materials (ivory, crocodile leather, aluminium, rare sorts of wood).

The aesthetics of Art Deco is timely now, as well. Luxury and expensive materials did not lose their attractiveness. Many fashion houses present their recent collections, which are evidently influenced by Art Deco.

Illustration (watch the layout): Bracelet and ring by Cartier

Passion for details, refinement, ergonomic forms

Watch or Car?

A new technogenic era of the 20th century cultivated the styles of functionalism and high-tech. Gradually, partly under the effect of post-modernistic irony, actively expressed constructions, elements of fastening, and mechanisms intrinsic to these styles entered jewellery and watch design. At present, this is one of the major trends in watch design.

Illustration (watch the layout): Dominants of philosophy of Bernard Richards

Manufacture: sport cars and motorbikes, technical aesthetics, sports, and speed.

Irony and Compilation

Like in baroque time, in the modern epoch, a person feels him- or herself somewhere "in the middle, between everything and nothing" and casts doubt on generally recognised values. In art and design, these views are expressed via an ironic citation of all world art culture.

Illustration (watch the layout): Collection by Dior «Milly Carnivora»:

Humour, non-standard combinations, bright colour, and complicated composition.

Dominants in the collections by

Boucheron

Charm, sorcery

Perfection of the haute couture

Extravagance of animal world

Valuable symbols

Vortex of diamonds

Art Nouveau

Art Deco

Organic design

Totem style

Dominants of the collections by Dior

Humour

Colour

Floristic motives

Stones surrounded by colours

Elements of floral Art Nouveau,

biomorphism,

postmodernism