



## Elegant cocktail watches, a Kashmir sapphire ring and a tiara that turns into a necklace



There's plenty of choice at auction for a blingtastic gift under the tree this Christmas. As purchases of jewellery and watches peak at this time of the year, auctioneers have been busy selecting antique pieces for their pre-Christmas auctions. But, before we go there, it's interesting to note how Courtville Antiques is drawing in potential customers by offering classes in the history of jewellery design.

"There are classes on how to make jewellery, or how to grade gemstones, but we are keen to run courses looking at how jewellery styles evolved through historic fashion icons and how jewellery featured in portrait paintings," explains Matthew Weldon, owner of Courtville Gallery in Dublin's Powerscourt Townhouse Centre.

This columnist was one of the 42 attendees last week at the pilot courses, which Weldon hopes to develop through Courtville Academy in 2026. Each two-hour class offered a whistle-stop tour through the jewellery styles from Victorian to Art Deco and Art Nouveau to Edwardian eras.

For instance, did you know that Victorian jewellery often had a secret language coded into the design of the piece? A brooch with consecutive ruby, emerald, garnet, amethyst, ruby and diamond stones spells regard, indicating the esteem the giver held for the recipient.

During the suffragette movement, a brooch with stones in green and violet had the hidden meaning "give votes to women".

And did you know that the introduction of platinum in Edwardian times enabled jewellery designers to create more delicate, yet still strong necklaces, brooches and rings?



In the classes, Paris-based jewellery historian Véronique Goguen, and Courtville's jewellery historian, Efthymia Sigkoudi, explained the historical context of jewellery designs, while participants tested their new knowledge to identify brooches, necklaces, rings and bracelets from the different periods.

But back to the auctions: Adam's Fine Jewellery and Ladies' Watches auction on Tuesday December 2nd has an intriguing collection of watches from the late 1800s through to the 1970s.

This single-owner collection offers us another short history lesson in the origins of wristwatches, worn more by women initially than men. From the late 1800s onwards, robust wrist watches became more practical than pocket watches for men at war planning synchronised battle attacks. And it was a Brazilian pilot, Alberto Santos-Dumont, who first commissioned his friend, French watchmaker Louis Cartier, to design a wristwatch for him for use during flying.

In contrast, ladies' watches were first designed as bracelets – often with the watch itself concealed in the design. The 1940s Vacheron & Constantin retro secret bracelet watch (€8,000-€12,000) is one example of this style, as is the Kutchinsky Jaeger-LeCoultre cocktail bracelet with its tiny watch hidden inside a shell-like shield (€6,000-€8,000). The Cartier Art Deco-style pearl, diamond and onyx cocktail watch (€12,000-€18,000) is a more subtly stylish watch, also for sale as part of this single-owner collection.

Adam's director of jewellery, Claire Mestrallet, is also very excited by the inclusion of another Kashmir sapphire in a sapphire and diamond ring (€100,000-€150,000). It is for sale on behalf of a member of the Guerlain family, owners of the famous French perfume house.

This will be the fourth Kashmir sapphire for sale at Adam's in 2025; the first sold for a record €660,000 in May, and another two Kashmir sapphire brooches sold in September for €1.36 million. Kashmir sapphires are particularly valuable, because they were excavated from a small mine in the Indian province for only about five years in the 1880s.

Mestrallet says that each Kashmir sapphire has been a "discovery". When she suspected she had another Kashmir sapphire set in to a ring by French jeweller Boucheron, her fellow directors and even the laboratory technicians doubted her instincts.

"When the lady brought me in her jewellery for sale, I thought it was a Kashmir sapphire, but I didn't say anything. I told the directors we should have it tested and they laughed at me," explains Mestrallet.

However, her instincts were correct and she now expects potential international buyers to arrive in Dublin to view the ring.

"I had people flying in from India, Hong Kong and Australia for the earlier auctions with Kashmir sapphires," she says.



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A late 19th-century diamond tiara, which converts to a necklace (€5,000-€7,000), is another exquisitely made piece. Adam's is also holding an auction of men's watches on December 3rd, with highlights including an extremely rare Longines Sommatore chronograph wristwatch (€40,000-€80,000) and a Rolex Submariner Date (€10,000-€15,000).

Meanwhile, Adams of Blackrock is hosting an online jewellery and watches auction, which ends on December 3rd. With a wide variety of rings, pendants, earrings and bracelets, with estimates starting from around €150-€450, this auction has many pieces that would make for more affordable Christmas presents.

There is also a good range of antique watches, including a Cartier Panthère de Cartier (€1,200-€1,400), and an 18-carat gold nurse's brooch/watch (€350-€450). More unusually, the auction also has a kimono-style dress worn by the late Irish singer Sinead O'Connor, designed by Joanne Hayes (€600-€800). Designer handbags also feature, including a black Chanel quilted flap bag (€1,800 – €2,000) and a Louis Vuitton Speedy 30 bag in damier azur canvas (€500-€600).

What did it sell for?

On the Bog, Camille Souter

Estimate: €6,000-€9,000

Hammer price: €6,000

Auction house: deVeres

Paysages aux Arbres, Roderic O'Conor

Estimate: €200,000-€300,000

Hammer price: €340,000

Auction house: deVeres

Dundrum, Co Down, Colin Middleton

Estimate: €14,000-€18,000

Hammer price: €26,000

Auction house: deVeres

Totem Mars, Sonja Landweer



Estimate: €3,000-€5,000

Hammer price: €4,000

Auction house: deVeres

Sylvia Thompson