

## LEGACY

# TOP OF THE LINE

The price was right for high-end signed pieces at the Las Vegas antique show.

BY PHYLLIS SCHILLER



**M**aking their annual pilgrimage to the desert, estate and antique jewelry dealers once again gathered for four days of selling and buying at the 18th edition of the Las Vegas Antique Jewelry and Watch Show at the Paris Hotel and Casino. A mix of buyers from around the globe got down to business at the show May 29 to June 1, which saw a record-breaking 25 percent increase in attendance for opening day.

"The mood was good and everybody seemed to have a good or acceptable show. No one was complaining," sums up Patricia Kiley Faber, co-owner of the Aaron Faber Gallery in New York City.

## GLOBAL MIX

Along with buyers from all over the U.S., there were a lot of international buyers, especially out of Asia, says Larry Platt, co-owner of Platt Boutique Jewelry in West Hollywood, California, "something that I've noticed the past few years."

Gus Davis, partner, Camilla Dietz Bergeron, Ltd., New York City, notes that this year, there were more Asian buyers and fewer Europeans. Along with jade, what the Asian buyers are looking for, he explains, are names like "Bulgari, Cartier and Van Cleef." But when it comes to Sterlé and Belperron, it's a harder sell. "Several of my Asian buyers said they were trying to educate their clients for the more unusual names, but that it's taking some time. But what I do like is the fact that Asia is very much interested in

antique and estate jewelry now. Five or ten years ago, it was considered secondhand jewelry and today it's something important that people want to collect."

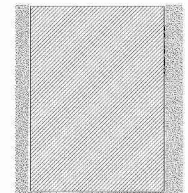
David Johanson of Nelson Rarities, Portland, Maine, says he noticed a few more attendees from the JCK show than last year. "That's where I would say there was an uptick in attendance, but I did not find them to be serious buyers."

Walter Engelbert, manager, McTeigue Since 1895, New York City, found fewer retailers in attendance this year. Davis says those retailers who did come "were serious buyers. We had a very strong show. People are being slightly cautious. They're willing to pay for something rare and unusual and a name. But if it's a more commercial item, even if it has a name, it's not enough for people to buy it."

Johanson noticed that some of the interesting and more expensive signed pieces that sold were older inventory that might not have garnered the same interest in the past, when there was more available in the market. "But they sold because there is such a thin market now for the right kind of things. If it was a great piece of jewelry, it sold."

Prices for quality pieces, especially the higher end — \$20,000-plus pieces — remain "very firm and yet those pieces are selling," says Platt.

According to Engelbert, more important signed pieces were definitely what buyers were looking for. "Unsigned pieces of the various eras — Deco or Edwardian or 1960s pieces — sold as long as they were finely made and unique examples of that era."





*Tiger's eye and diamond necklace mounted in 14-karat yellow gold, circa 1960s. Photo courtesy Camilla Dietz Bergeron, Ltd.*

### PERIOD PLEASERS

Faber says big, chunky gold jewelry styles from the 1960s and 1970s were very strong sellers. She saw "lots of requests for big chains, David Webb jewelry and larger '70s jewelry. In wristwatches, people were looking for true vintage watches. Round complications from Patek Philippe, round Calatravas. For Rolexes, vintage datejusts were popular for women — steel Rolexes with original blue dials or black or white dials. Originally made for men, women are now buying and wearing them. They look great — a really simple dial, simple layout, but the oyster bracelet makes it chunky and fashion-forward."

In 1970s jewelry, Platt says there is "huge demand for pieces by Aldo Cipullo, who was one of Cartier's top designers during that period. His pieces specifically have grown in popularity among the trade and consumers. They have such a fun and colorful design aspect that's current today."

Davis says that gold and chunky is still a big category. Platinum and diamond jewelry, on the other hand, has been "a little quieter," but he says examples from the 1950s were very strong. "People were also interested in anything that had a natural, untreated stone — unheated sapphires or rubies." Faber says diamonds and sapphires are very strong right now, "stones over 2 carats and even larger: cabochon, faceted and star sapphires and large, unset single diamonds. The market is very hot for anything that is big."

### BOUGHT AND SOLD

Faber did some shopping at the show, finding "some wonderful watches" in excellent condition for her clients. Johanson, although he sold "slightly better than average," says he didn't find anything he wanted to buy.

Platt was looking for vintage Cartier and Van Cleef signed pieces — "We're getting an increased demand for those" — and original Georgian and original Victorian, especially diamond-oriented rings. "Our clients have been drawn to those because the stones are a little bit more raw, more organic. It has a totally different effect than traditional engagement rings."

Summing up the show, Faber feels the estate market is growing. "I felt a consistency and steadiness and growth from January to now. I think the overall market for jewelry and watches is definitely much stronger than last year." Davis sees the strength of the market in pieces that are "high end and very fine. That's what the market is going toward. A lot of the stores sell to clients who already have a lot of jewelry and have collected other things besides estate jewelry. Brand recognition is such an important thing, even in estate jewelry, that they want what they buy to have a name." ♦