

FROM ABOVE: Necklace with vintage synthetic sapphires from the late '30s early '40s, mounted in silver and phosphor bronze with cubic zirconia and swarovski crystal; synthetic sapphire earrings, mounted in silver and phosphor bronze

# CUT & PASTE

Costume jewellery designer Andrew Prince has created pieces for everyone from Michael Jackson to the cast of *Downton Abbey*. He tells **TERESA LEVONIAN COLE** why paste is just as good as the real thing

“I didn’t want something practical, I wanted something fabulous!” exclaims Andrew Prince. ‘And the minute I saw it, it was sold. Even though I couldn’t afford it. I pawned absolutely everything...’ The object of his enthusiasm was a 1938 Railton Coachcraft series III drophead coupé, called ‘Doris’, which, he discovered, as he drove his new purchase home, had no brakes. The cream bodywork and burgundy arches, however, were gorgeous. ‘Then I wanted something to put on the front,’ says Prince, ‘and I managed to find a Lalique peacock’s head.’ He laughs uproariously: ‘It is so ostentatious!’

I first met Andrew Prince in the plush boardroom of Christie’s in London’s St James’, to introduce the upcoming programme of ‘art and jewellery journeys’ organised by Christie’s Travel. Best-known for the lavish costume jewellery he created for the third and fourth series of *Downton Abbey*, Andrew had been invited to bring a selection of pieces worn by the cast. ‘I sold most of the *Downton*

jewellery at charity auctions, and have raised about £30,000, to date,’ he tells me. ‘But I kept half a dozen items, and will definitely not be selling Maggie Smith’s tiara and choker.’

These were in good company, alongside a 16-carat yellow diamond, Harry Winston emerald earrings, and the aquamarine tiara that once belonged to the Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna, part of a Christie’s private treaty sale. Should you fancy something similar for a fraction of the price, Andrew is your man. Not short of celebrity clients, his creations have adorned everyone from the Shirley Bassey to Miss Piggy.

Today, however, we meet at his flat in the East End – the unprepossessing exterior concealing a small but perfectly formed wonderland within. Mezzotints clothe the walls, bookshelves are stacked according to esoteric subject, and antique cabinets are crammed with beautiful objects, along with items from his personal cache of jewellery.

Then there’s the perfume collection: hundreds of bottles dating to the early 1900s, that represent



an olfactory record of changing social mores. There's Tabac Blond by Caron, made in 1915 'for the modern woman who drinks, smokes and wears

leather', its musty notes as shockingly modern, after all these years, as Beethoven's late quartets.

There's a gloriously un-PC 1919 bottle of Vigny's Le Golliwogg, complete with Golliwogg stopper, 'as was worn by Josephine Baker'; and a bottle of No.1 by Ernest Beaux, 'who would go on to make No.5 for Chanel'. Then there's the noxious Tailspin, redolent of coal tar soap, 'because in the 1940s, soap was expensive, and people wanted to smell clean'... all the way to Amouage, which when 'presented in 1984 in an Asprey's silver bottle, sold for £1,400'. His favourite? 'Roja Dove's Fetish, mixed with Armani Privé's Bois d'Encens,' he says, treating me to a heady oriental whiff. 'People stop me on the street to ask what it is!'

Encouraged by his maternal grandmother, Andrew has been honing his sense for the finer things in life since an early age. Obsessed with jewellery, he swallowed his mother's pearl earring aged three, and made his first ring – using copper wire cannibalised from the television – at the age of five. At 17, he bought his first piece of costume jewellery: an 1880s glass 'emerald' surrounded by rock crystal, set in gold and silver, which he pulls out of a drawer to show me. We are, however, two hours into a marathon seven-hour interview before we broach the subject of jewellery. Charming, infectiously enthusiastic and encyclopaedically knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects, he lurches from 14th-century Japanese steel swords to the questionable reputation of the Empress Theodora; from an early Yemenite Koran to Edwin Lutyens ('I love his buildings:

they come dangerously close to looking wrong!'). And all without drawing breath.

It is surprising, then, to learn that Andrew left school at the age of 15½ 'knowing absolutely nothing', and went to work for Ian Harris at N. Bloom & Son. In his element at last, he learnt the secrets of the trade. 'Then, at 17, I went to a dinner party and had one of those life-changing revelations: "My God, I'm boring, I have nothing to say!"

So I started reading...' The reading further informed his passion for jewellery, placing it in its cultural and historical context, so that he is quick to spot 'misattributions'. 'While in New York on a Christie's trip, I went to a dealer's, and noticed that several pieces were not what they claimed to be: like a 'genuine' Art Deco piece, which contained an emerald from a mine that was not discovered until 1956! You find that when a new book appears, such as Melissa Gabardi's *Art Deco Jewellery*, it inspires a sudden spate of copies. A pair of Cusi earrings illustrated there, for example, was copied, signed "Tiffany", and sold as original. So it really is very important to read.'

With a love of fine design, he laments the breaking up of old pieces for profit, and the re-cutting of iconic gems in the quest for perfection. 'The ancient pink Agra diamond, which had belonged to the Mughul Emperor Babur, was subjected to a boring modern cushion cut. Anything too perfect is instantly forgettable,' he says.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Andrew Prince at work; synthetic sapphire and phosphor bronze necklace and earring set; synthetic sapphire and phosphor bronze necklace with Swarovski crystals and pearls mounted in phosphor bronze; silver and cubic zirconia earrings





'It is the imperfections that make something unique. But it is no longer about art, it's about money. Jewellery is what happens around the stones – that is, the design. The rest is gemology. Early Cartier, who could not compete with Boucheron for big stones, concentrated on wonderful design.'

A mention of Cartier, and the dynastic marriage between the Cartier and Worth families, brings us on to the relationship between jewellery and fashion. 'The designer Paul Poiret had a huge influence on jewellery, because he made it socially acceptable for women not to wear corsets. He is rarely mentioned, but he was the Versace of his day, quite revolutionary. With the disappearance of the corset, 400 years of jewellery became obsolete in the six years between 1907 and 1911, and a new style of jewellery had to be created. The wonderful plumes and big wide necklaces vanished as dresses now hung vertically from the shoulder, and the neck narrowed. An entirely new generation of jewellery had to be made, and clip jewellery appeared, because it was versatile, and did not pierce the fabric.'

Although choosing to make costume jewellery, Prince's attention to detail is no less than if he were working with D-grade diamonds. In his contribution to *Downton*, moreover, historical accuracy was key. 'I asked about the person's age and situation,' he explains, 'because the jewellery had to be appropriate to age, not the dress. A woman would have acquired jewellery in her 20s and 30s – so you would expect the Dowager Countess of Grantham, a character in her 70s, to be wearing pieces some 30 years out of date.'

There is just time, before the sun sets, to visit the workshop, a short stroll away, where the magic takes place. It is surprisingly functional, piled with brilliantly hued 'paste', glittering Swarovski crystals, cubic zirconia, and fresh-water pearls. In one corner is the 'emerald and diamond' tiara, worn by Judy Dench in *Mrs Henderson Presents*. Elsewhere lies work-in-progress for a collection Prince is preparing for Kentshire Galleries at Bergdorf



Goodman in New York, 'working through the night and soldering my fingers off' as the clock counts down.

And now the Gemological Institute of America wants to interview him, the ultimate accolade. 'I told them, I only work with paste!' he laughs, 'But it made no difference. The point is, you can have fun with paste. It has nothing to do with money – it's about quality of workmanship, design. If it has to be locked up, it's not jewellery: it's a worry'.

[andrewprince.co.uk](http://andrewprince.co.uk); [christies.com/travel](http://christies.com/travel)



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Necklace with colour change synthetic sapphires and cubic zirconia; cubic zirconia and silver tiara, right hand pendant worn by Maggie Smith in *Downton Abbey*; sterling silver, cultured pearl and cubic zirconia tiara worn by Maggie Smith in *Downton Abbey*