



ARTS & ANTIQUES

A Jeweller To The Stars By Abby Cronin

To find the shop owned by a 'jeweller to the stars' you only need to walk a few steps off Charing Cross Road into the passage of Cecil Court. This pedestrian thoroughfare has the Dickensian atmosphere of old London. Victorian shop frontages house individual specialist dealers selling all manner of collectibles: antique books, modern first editions, rare maps, antique and modern prints, silver, stamps and theatrical ephemera. But the 'jewel' in the crown is Christopher St James' jewellery shop at number 12. His front window is mesmerising, with stunning shimmering treasures on display. Once inside you will be warmly welcomed by Christopher, who is always delighted to share his vast knowledge of jewellery design and discuss his collection with interested customers and folks who are just curious about his unique stock. History radiates from his diverse selection of gems. They range from Tudor style to the present and many of these brilliant jewels were made by Christopher himself.

Thespan - Collector – Craftsman

Christopher's story is fascinating. It's life-long a journey both onstage, backstage and in the wings. Growing up in a theatrical family nurtured his appreciation and love for theatre. All he ever wanted to be was an actor, which

he was for over 30 years. But the onstage thespian side of Christopher gradually changed direction. He describes himself as an incessant collector of odds and ends – "I had my own box

There were amazing pieces from Georgian times to the present and it was from this experience that I became interested in historical costume and period detailing.

of tricks...scouring market stalls, collecting odd bits of jewellery like old cufflinks and shirt buttons. It was great fun and you never knew when you might need these trinkets to use as accessories for period costumes."

The turning point came some years ago when he trained as an actor with the Repertory Company in Birmingham. "When I wasn't in a production, I learned everything I ever learned backstage. The Rep Company had an extraordinary costume collection and I catalogued the whole collection. I learned about period detail. There were amazing pieces from Georgian times to the present and it was from this experience that I became interested in historical costume and period detailing."

Gradually Christopher's part-time hobby turned into a full-time professional career. When period pieces of jewellery were required for a production, he haunted market stalls in search of trinkets he could use to make a Tudor or Medieval piece. His expertise progressed step by step, he explained: "The best way to learn was to take things apart, see how they were made and put them back together again. I watched and listened and asked how do you do this? that? My skills just evolved from that point and people began to ask me to make for a particular production. Today theatrical production costs have soared and most theatres are unable to afford specialist props



Signed photo of Glenn Close



Art Deco Jewellery



Downton Abby Jewels for Lady Cora by Christopher St James

departments so they farm everything out." Fortunately, Christopher, with a reputation for excellence in crafting jewellery, is ready to step in. With the indispensable support of his partner, Robert Mace, he can be relied upon to meet the detailed design demands as he crafts the jewels required.

Bejewelled Stars

Christopher's repertoire of theatrical jewellery includes a catalogue of impressive credits stretching back some 35 years. He has supplied gems for a long list of glamorous stars. Today his credits include musicals, plays, movies, TV, opera and catwalks. He has 'dressed' some of the most outstanding actors in their field. One of his first commissions came in the 1980s when Faye Dunaway needed a crown for her role in 'Wicked Lady'. Since then, calls for his work have continued. He admits that at first he wasn't sure how to do it so he - "just winged it." Whether he 'winged it' or not, his excellent period designs and craftsmanship is second to none. Somewhat of a transatlantic thespian, he works in Broadway and Hollywood and wherever - when he gets the call. Some years ago he provided Elizabeth Taylor with brooches for her to give the cast and crew in the 2001 London production of 'The Little Foxes'. Glenn Close shone in the spectacular jewellery by Christopher in the recent Broadway and London productions of 'Sunset Boulevard'. He described working with Close as "a dream". She signed a photo thanking Christopher; it hangs on the wall in his shop. More recently his original gilt 1950s jewellery was used in the production of 'Mami' at the English National Opera. This production will transfer to the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Remind yourselves of the extraordinary success of the TV series Downton Abbey. Its success may be due, in part, to the exquisite period costumes and accessories. The entire cast had to be dressed in the fashions of the day, but it is fair to say that the leading ladies' wardrobes took top billing. Here period jewellery was an essential ingredient. So when the

Downton costume designer came to Christopher requesting bespoke items for specific episodes, he was delighted to accept. Devoted Downton fans may remember the jewels worn in the ballroom episodes. But perhaps even more memorable is the stunning Parure of jewellery worn by Elizabeth McGovern as Cora, Countess of Grantham, in the Christmas special 2013 (pictured here). These are only a few of the jewels supplied by Christopher.

The sheer vitality of Christopher's jewellery is infinite. Next time you are in Cecil Court pop into number 12. Familiarise yourself with his extensive collection. You just might find that 'special occasion' piece you are looking for. Or - you could commission one for yourself. His clientele is a mixture of theatrical designers, collectors and impulse shoppers all looking for that unique piece. Among his popular and collectible stock items are designer brooches by Lea Stein, a longstanding friend. Stein, a Parisian-based jeweller-designer, is well known for brooches of people, animals and geometrics made from laminated cellulose. There is always a wide variety of Stein's items available at very reasonable prices. In a similar vein, there are dozens of Art Deco pieces, probably Christopher's favourite period design. At modest cost, you will find a rich selection of Art Deco bracelets, necklaces, earrings, and brooches, in Bakelite and Lucite, both vintage and modern, and several made by Christopher. He takes the view that: "Art Deco never ages. You can wear it anytime with anything and it will always look amazing". If you love jewellery, you will not be disappointed by visiting this exceptional 'jeweller to the stars'.

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Film and theatre pieces by Christopher St James