

# Top 10 Hints for Buying Fashion Accessories

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## It's in the bag

You'll need some handbag background if you're going to collect for posterity, because although some names are practically guaranteed to be collectable (Hermes, Chanel, Ferragamo for starters), there are also designs produced by each company that are considered iconic, which means those bags will retain a better value. Although condition is important, it's true that a leather bag can often be restored to its former glory. Not so for vinyl – once it's damaged you can't repair it and the same goes for Lucite, which can become very brittle with age. The lining of a bag can often be a good indicator of its quality; the better bags were lined with silk, suede or full leather, whereas the cheaper versions were given acetate or nylon. Make sure the lining has no mildew, rips or holes, and check the clasp on a vintage handbag to make sure it's not warped, peeling or pitted. Leather bags with sturdy metal frames (which will be inside the outer fabric) will hold their shape the best, and they often have protective little metal feet that prevent the leather from touching the surface.

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## Best foot forward

Whereas the sizing in the 1940s and 1970s is usually very similar to today's sizes, shoes made in the 1950s and '60s are generally a bit smaller. If you try a shoe on and it's too short for your foot, don't be tricked into thinking that it will stretch – it won't. It might stretch width-ways, but not in length. Tears on seams can be repaired, but they can also be an indication that the leather is weak. If the finish on the shoes is tacky or sticky, don't buy them – it means it's not repairable, and the same goes for tackiness on the lining on the inside, which will just be really uncomfortable. If you find a great pair of vintage shoes but the heel has been worn down to the metal spike inside, make sure you have them repaired before you wear them or you'll cause more damage. A missing buckle can be impossible to replace, and torn holes on buckles and straps are rarely repairable.



## If the hat fits

If you're buying a vintage hat to wear, the most important thing to consider is that it fits! So if you're shopping online, you need to make sure the size is equal to the measurement you're using. Look for a hat that's clean and doesn't smell musty, and check the fabric and liner carefully for damage, especially with felt, which can have insect or water damage. Make sure the hat is sturdy enough for wear, and that the material is a uniform colour – not faded – and hasn't got any rips or tears.

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## Hair today

There are three main types of hair comb: back combs, side combs and mantilla combs, with the mantillas being worn atop an elaborate hairdo, often with a veil or mantilla draped over. They are usually slightly curved, with a single row of teeth and decoration on the panel above. Lots of people collect vintage hair combs to wear, and if you're planning to do this it's a good idea to stick with the more durable and less expensive ones, saving the more fragile and older combs for display only.



Tortoiseshell hair comb with sterling silver decoration c.1890. [www.silverquillantiques.com](http://www.silverquillantiques.com). **Far left:** Stiletto Vivier for Dior, late 1950s. The stiletto was invented by Roger Vivier in the early 1950s.

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## A breath of lacy air

It's possible to get an indication of the age of a lace fan by measuring it. In the early nineteenth century fans were quite small – around 20cm long – to go with the small and simple dresses that were fashionable at the time, with tapered sticks and a span of about 120 degrees. From the 1830s to the 1860s the fans got bigger as the dresses got bigger and more hoops were added, with the sticks averaging 25cm and the fan having a span of around 180 degrees. By the end of the nineteenth century the sticks had grown to around 30cm and were narrower and more spaced out. The sticks for lace fans were mostly made from ivory, horn, mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell, although if the fan has machine-made lace it will probably have synthetic sticks. Don't be tempted to buy a damaged fan and think you can repair it yourself; although they seem to be of a very simple construction, the repair of a lace fan is a highly specialized business.



French black lace fan with shaped wooden tines, c.1910, \$250 from Faulconbridge Antiques in Faulconbridge, NSW.

### The scent of a bargain

So you've found an old bottle of your favourite perfume and it's a bargain price compared to a new one. Before you snap it up, however, remember that once they are around nine or ten years old, most perfumes start to lose their freshness and can smell like alcohol – probably not the effect that you're after! If it's the bottle you want, check that it has its original label or gilding and make sure that a crystal bottle isn't damaged along the mouth – this is the place that gets the most wear, from the stopper being put in and out, and there are often little nicks along the glass edge. Make sure the stopper and base are original to one another – if the bottle is incised to the base, the stopper should have the same number. Original boxes also add value to perfume bottles.



Early 1900s 9ct rose gold, mother-of-pearl and enamel cufflinks, \$1550 from Kalmar Antiques in Sydney.

### On your sleeve

Because they were designed and sold to be worn nearly every day, cufflinks can often suffer from wear and tear. Make sure there are no chips or cracks if they have enamelling, and check that any small stones are not damaged. The chains that connect the two links are the weakest part of the cufflink, and if they look worn or weak, think again about purchasing – you don't want to lose them from your sleeve. Replacement chains are available if you don't mind having them, but they will usually detract from the value of antique cufflinks. There are lots of fake Cartier cufflinks on the market, but these can be easily picked out from the originals by looking at the signature; Cartier signed the majority of his pieces with his full name, either in script or in capital letters, whereas the fakes have the initials JC included in the hallmark. Faked Art Deco pieces that are being made in Asia can be attractive and inexpensive, but they'll also have less detail than the real thing and the finish is usually pretty shoddy, with poor quality stones and low quality settings and mounts.



### For the dresser

The vanity set is the perfect accessory for a dresser and they were made in so many different materials that there has to be something for everyone, from celluloid, catalin, glass and tortoiseshell to silver, enamel, mother-of-pearl, porcelain, ivory, brass and even wood. Regardless of their material, you need to check for condition, looking for cracks, wear and missing stones. The components of a vanity set can include brushes, combs, perfume bottles, mirrors, hair receivers and powder jars, with the jars often getting the most use and therefore being the most likely to be damaged, especially if they are made of glass: check the edge of the lid and the rim for chips. Make sure that atomizer perfume bottles are complete, with the atomizer bulbs, caps and lids – and that they work. If it's just a brush and comb set, you can distinguish the men's from the lady's by the brush – if it was made for male use, the brush won't have a handle.



### Nailing it

For centuries women dyed their fingernails to enhance the beauty of their hands, with women of a lesser rank being permitted pastels and the most brilliant colours being reserved for the Queen. Nail colour only became available to the masses in all colours after the invention of liquid nail polish in 1916. It was initially colourless, but after the first bottle of rose-tinted colour appeared the following year there was no going back. At the time women were already growing more conscious of their hands; after the cuticle remover was introduced in 1911, it became far more popular to visit the manicurist. The number of American women using manicure products increased from less than 25% in 1911 to 86% by 1939.



### Hand in glove

Vintage gloves are perfect for inducing visions of an elegant past era, but for many ladies of today they're for admiring only, as the gloves of yesteryear were made to fit smaller hands. Gloves were sized in accordance with shoe sizes, with the most common being 6, 6½, 7 and 7½. If you have a foot larger than a size 8 it means you'll probably have trouble fitting into a vintage glove, although it also depends on the style and fabric. Most vintage gloves were made in cotton or nylon with the occasional pair turning up in rayon or silk and they can all be a bit stretchy, depending on the weave. In Australia the majority of vintage gloves on the market date from the 1950s and '60s, with the length being determined by the time of the day at which the glove was to be worn. A glove halfway up the lower arm was for daytime wear; below the elbow was for an evening event but with a short-sleeved dress; above the elbow was for a sleeveless evening gown; and the longest, which came almost up to the shoulders (and was known as opera length) was worn with a strapless gown.

