

Watches & Jewellery Trends



Azure hues: Cate Blanchett in Tiffany & Co necklace at the 2015 Oscars, left; Alanna Bess necklace, above; Lauren Bacall's ring, right — Getty

Stone's appeal comes out of the blue

Turquoise Demand for the semi-precious rock has soared following the closure of important mines, writes *Syl Tang*

Cate Blanchett won compliments for her simple Martin Margiela black dress at the Academy Awards in February. But the dress took a back seat to her turquoise bib necklace by Tiffany & Co.

Although considered a semi-precious stone, in recent years turquoise has become increasingly expensive and rare. As a result, its cost to jewellers has soared.

"The price has gone up a lot in the past year," says Rod Kosann, chief executive of Monica Rich Kosann. Depending on the size of the stone, prices have

increased by as much as 100 per cent in some cases, he adds.

What is behind the shift?

One reason is mine closures. "It has become more difficult to buy high-quality natural rough. You saw a lot in the 1960s and 1970s," says Alanna Richman, designer of Alanna Bess, a range stocked by US retailers Pitkin County Dry Goods in Aspen and Penny Lane in San Antonio.

The wholesale price of turquoise is difficult to gauge because of wide variations in the stone's quality. Turquoise from the Sleeping Beauty mine in Globe, Arizona — the most expensive produced in the US and the world's most abundant source — can today sell at wholesale for as little as \$100 a strand. But a 14mm perfect round and colour-single strand could achieve a wholesale price of \$10,000.

Ms Richman's stone is from Sleeping Beauty. The mine supplied copper and turquoise for 40 years. However, tur-

quoise production was closed in August 2012, when the owners decided to focus solely on copper mining, a more lucrative endeavour because of the metal's widespread industrial uses. Turquoise is often produced as a byproduct of copper.

Several designers have suggested the closure of Sleeping Beauty's turquoise operation has driven up demand, as jewellers from Europe, Asia, and the US acquire the remaining inventory.

"People say there's no mine like it in the world. I bought it to stash away but who knows what will happen. Whether there will be more of it is a gamble," says Ms Richman.

Sleeping Beauty is not the only mine to shift from turquoise production in the US southwest — home to the largest reserves of turquoise worldwide. In 1975, the Copper Queen mine, which had produced Bisbee Blue turquoise from Bisbee, Arizona, closed its mining operations. Morenci mine in Greenlee

County, Arizona, although still active, is one of the largest copper reserves in the world with an estimated 3.2bn tonnes, and so focuses on copper rather than turquoise.

Ms Richman says: "For some time, Sleeping Beauty has had the best reputation. When we started using it, it was only in our more special pieces. When the mine closed, people realised it was time to cut more of the material."

For pieces featuring large stones of significant blue and without matrix — the black lines that criss-cross through some turquoise — auction houses have achieved significant prices.

Emily Barber, department director of jewellery at Bonhams in London, says that a John Brogden turquoise and diamond bracelet sold for £13,000 and a Cartier turquoise and diamond cocktail ring fetched £17,500 last year. The auction house has a diamond, amethyst and turquoise Jean Schlumberger ring from Lauren Bacall's collection to be

auctioned on March 31 and expects it to sell for up to £8,000.

Red carpet glamour is another reason for the increase in the price of turquoise. In 2003, actress Sarah Jessica Parker wore turquoise drop earrings to the season premiere of television show *Sex and the City*. Then, in 2007, Cameron Diaz sported a Fred Leighton turquoise necklace and drop earrings with her Dior gown to the Met Gala. And in 2009, Eva Mendes wore a Van Cleef & Arpels turquoise necklace with her Dior dress to the Golden Globes.

Other fashions may have also played a part. "The other trend is the rise in use of pink gold," says Jean-Bernard Forot, director of jewellery marketing at Piaget. "When you work with white gold, it's a bit cold, so when you use rubies or diamonds, the white gold is barely visible. However, pink gold is very warm, therefore you can add turquoise, and also jade, chrysoprase and other colours," he says.

Mr Forot believes that the stone challenges high-end designers. When working with white gold, designers have to use rhodium plating to make it shiny, he says. As a relatively fragile stone, turquoise cannot be submerged in the bath used in rhodium plating, creating challenges in techniques and settings for designers.

Ultimately, however, the startling blue colour of this semi-precious stone may simply be the key to its popularity.

Karina Khalife, vice-president of GoldCorp, a jewellery company in Oak Park, Michigan, says: "Even the turquoise with the spider web matrix is appealing. Some people believe this shows the stone 'absorbs evil', and therefore nothing will happen to the person wearing it."

She adds: "Our Arab clientele seek out [this kind of] turquoise set in the more expensive 18 or 21-carat gold. The main purpose of this highly desirable item is to ward off evil."

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Style-conscious men pin fashion hopes on return of the tie bar

Masculine style 20th-century favourites are back in vogue. By *Elisa Anniss*

If you thought cuff links were the only items of men's jewellery worn with shirts and ties, think again.

Tie bars are flat, spring-hinged clasps attached horizontally to a tie and fixed midway between the third and fourth button of a dress shirt. Tie pins are similar but smaller.

Both were popular in the 1920s in Europe and the US, and were regularly manufactured by fine jewellery brands such as Cartier. Even Herbert Hoover was a fan. He was the first US president to give a signed tie bar to supporters, a gesture emulated by subsequent leaders.

The popularity of tie bars and tie pins continued throughout the 1960s. But by the beginning of the 1970s, they started to appear obsolete against wide kipper ties and flyaway collars.

However, recently, neck-centric pieces — tie bars and tie pins — have returned, with jewellers reporting increased demand.

Graeme Thompson, director of jewellery at Bonhams Hong Kong, is a collector of antique tie pins. His personal collection comes "from an era of decadence" dating from the 1880s through to the 1920s and started when his parents gave him his first pin.

"It is my family crest, a gold heraldic dolphin, with a natural pearl in its mouth, the goldwork is amazing. I also love the 'mood' pins Cartier designed. They swivel from ruby to emerald and they reflect your mood. This is the pin I am currently trying to buy."

Typically, he finds these tie pins at London's Portobello or Grays Antiques Market, the Lapada Arts and Antiques Fair or Bonhams Knightsbridge, and he expects to pay anything from £400 to £2,000.

Although, he says, an exceptional, rare tie pin by Fabergé or Cartier would fetch more. Mr Thompson's interest however, is only in pieces from the past. "I wouldn't look twice if the tie pin was new," he says.

But other style-conscious men are buying new tie pins. Jewellery companies such as Tateossian and luxury labels including Dunhill and Lanvin have revived the style.

"We sell them particularly well from Lanvin," says Damien Paul, head of



Putting on the glitz: Fred Astaire sports a tie pin in 1941, above; below, tie bars by Dunhill, Theo Fennell and Tateossian — Getty



menswear at Matchesfashion.com. "They come in a range of materials, including onyx and rhodium."

Their rise in popularity is part of a wider trend for men to pay greater attention to their appearance.

"Innovation and men's perception of fashion contributed to an increase in spending in 2013," says Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst at the NPD Group, in a report published in May 2014.

It detailed how US men's apparel retail sales reached \$60.8bn in 2013, a 5 per cent increase over the \$57.8bn generated in 2012.

Classic silver tie bars sell better than novelty or embellished tie bars, says Eric Jennings, vice-president and fashion director, menswear at Saks Fifth Avenue. Saks best-sellers are own-label versions and tie bars by Tateossian.

Tateossian introduced tie bars into its collections in 2002. Responding to growing demand, it broadened its selection adding rhodium-plated designs in 2007.

"We tend to make sure each cuff link has a matching tie bar," says Robert Tateossian, chief executive, adding that sales of tie clips are dependent on territory. "Over the past year in the US, you see a lot more men wearing tie bars, especially on narrow ties."

"However, as the workplace dress-down culture is the same on both sides of the Atlantic, the shift is more that tie bars are not used for business meetings, but more to look fashionable."

Tie pins have a much older pedigree than tie bars. Originally, made from gold or silver and inlaid with pearls, diamonds or other gemstones, they were first popularised in the 19th century and were used to hold complicated cravats in place.

But new designs are more rare. Alice Made This, an independent brand, launched its first tie pin in 2014.

"The pin allows you to show your personality and add a lot of character to an outfit," says Alice Walsh, its founder, describing the tie pins that come in plated bronze or in solid silver, gold and rose gold and that are more frequently worn on the lapel.

Echoing the intricate designs of 18th century courtier dress, they are made in Hatton Garden in London and cost up to £1,800.