10 VINTAGE COSTUME JEWELRY MAKERS

How to Tell Them Apart

A practical guide to marks, construction, materials, and design language

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Vintage costume jewelry can look confusing when several makers used similar rhinestones, faux pearls, enamel, and gold-tone metal. A flower brooch may resemble Weiss from the front, a Trifari design from a distance, and an unsigned DeLizza & Elster piece when the back is examined. The safest way to learn is not to memorize one popular motif. Instead, compare four kinds of evidence: the maker's mark, the construction, the materials, and the overall design language.

This guide focuses on ten American makers and manufacturers frequently found in older collections. They were selected because they represent very different approaches. Trifari is known for polished design and disciplined manufacturing. Coro produced enormous variety and ingenious mechanisms. Miriam Haskell developed richly layered hand-wired jewelry. Eisenberg translated dress ornament into brilliant rhinestone statements. Weiss specialized in vivid stone-set designs. Kramer produced coordinated mid-century fashion sets. Marcel Boucher brought sculptural fine-jewelry thinking to costume pieces. Hattie Carnegie treated jewelry as part of a complete fashion house. Alice Caviness explored unusual materials and imported components. DeLizza & Elster, best known for Juliana, teaches collectors to identify unsigned jewelry through construction.

None of these clues should be treated as an automatic authentication rule. Findings can be replaced, stones can be reset, marks can be copied, and many manufacturers produced for other labels. Use the guide as a practical comparison tool, then confirm important pieces with specialized references, documented examples, and experienced examination.

THE TEN MAKERS AT A GLANCE

Trifari Polished engineering, refined metalwork, and highly recognizable marks	**Coro and Corocraft** Enormous variety, clever mechanisms, and designs made for a broad public
Miriam Haskell Hand-wired beadwork, layered filigree, and lush botanical ornament	**Eisenberg** Dress-clip glamour, brilliant clear stones, and substantial settings
Weiss Color-rich rhinestones, seasonal themes, and crisp prong-set sparkle	**Kramer of New York** Coordinated sets, glamorous crystal layouts, and polished mid-century fashion
Marcel Boucher Fine-jewelry discipline, sculptural movement, and numbered naturalistic designs	**Hattie Carnegie** Fashion-house elegance, imaginative subjects, and jewelry designed as part of a complete look
Alice Caviness Unexpected materials, imported components, rich color, and boutique-scale individuality	**DeLizza & Elster / Juliana** Unsigned construction clues, exuberant stones, and linked designs built for movement

Identification note: The information in this guide is educational and is not a formal appraisal or guarantee of authenticity. Important pieces should be compared with specialized references and examined in person.

1. Trifari

Polished engineering, refined metalwork, and highly recognizable marks

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Look for TRIFARI, KTF, or the crowned-T signature on many authentic pieces.
- Expect clean castings, balanced proportions, and carefully finished backs.
- Common design families include florals, leaves, crowns, animals, fruit-salad glass, enamel, and Lucite-centered figurals.

Trifari is often the easiest starting point for a new collector because the company developed a strong visual identity and marked a large portion of its production. The business grew from the work of Italian-born jeweler Gustavo Trifari and became one of the best-known American costume-jewelry houses of the twentieth century. Its reputation was strengthened by Alfred Philippe, a designer with fine-jewelry experience who joined the company in the 1930s. Under his influence, many Trifari pieces were designed with the order, symmetry, and stone-setting discipline associated with precious jewelry.

A typical Trifari piece feels controlled rather than chaotic. Stones are usually placed in a deliberate pattern, the metal surfaces are smooth, and the reverse is often as neatly finished as the front. Many pieces use graceful leaves, ribbons, flowers, crowns, birds, fish, and other figurals. Collectors also recognize Trifari's clear Lucite-centered animal brooches, often called jelly-belly pieces, and the colorful molded-glass stones popularly described as fruit salad. These names are collector shorthand, not guarantees of authenticity.

The mark is a major clue. Early pieces may carry KTF, reflecting the Trifari, Krussman and Fishel partnership. The familiar Crown Trifari signature places a small crown over the T and is strongly associated with the company's mid-century production. Later pieces commonly use TRIFARI with a copyright symbol. Marks changed over time, and clasp or earring findings can be replaced, so the signature should be evaluated together with construction.

Trifari differs from Weiss or Kramer because it does not rely only on uninterrupted rhinestone sparkle. It often lets sculpted metal, enamel, and negative space carry the design. Compared with Coro, Trifari's better pieces commonly feel more unified and restrained, though both companies made jewelry at many price points. A signed Trifari piece is not automatically rare, but strong design, early marks, unusual materials, complete sets, and excellent condition can make one example far more interesting than another.

2. Coro and Corocraft

Enormous variety, clever mechanisms, and designs made for a broad public

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Look for CORO, Corocraft, Coro Craft, Vendome, and other related marks.
- Coro Duette double clips are among the company's most recognizable mechanical designs.
- Quality varies widely, so judge the specific line and construction rather than the name alone.

Coro was one of the largest and most prolific American costume-jewelry companies. The firm began as Cohn and Rosenberger and eventually operated a major manufacturing facility in Providence, Rhode Island. Because Coro produced jewelry for decades and sold through multiple lines, its work cannot be reduced to one look. A box of Coro may contain simple everyday pins, tailored metal necklaces, colorful enamel flowers, elaborate sterling pieces, and ingenious convertible clips.

The company's most famous mechanical idea is the Duette: two dress clips that lock into a frame and become one brooch. When separated, each half can be worn independently. Authentic Coro Duette hardware is a useful identification feature, but the word Duette was also used broadly in conversation, so examine the mechanism, patents, and marks. Coro also made trembler flowers and figures whose mounted elements move slightly, creating life and sparkle.

Coro and Corocraft are related but not always equivalent in materials or market position. Corocraft often represented a more elevated line and can appear in sterling silver, vermeil, or more elaborate constructions. Vendome, another higher-end Coro line, is frequently associated with beadwork, crystal, and fashion-forward designs. Marks may read CORO, Coro Craft, Corocraft, Coro Sterling, or Vendome, among others.

The biggest difference between Coro and a house such as Miriam Haskell is manufacturing language. Haskell often looks hand-wired and layered over filigree. Coro more often looks stamped, cast, riveted, or mechanically assembled for reliable production. Compared with Trifari, Coro can be more playful and less consistent because the company served so many customers and price levels. That variety is exactly why collectors should avoid assuming that all Coro is common or all Corocraft is exceptional. The individual design, line, material, patent, condition, and rarity matter more than a broad brand label.

When examining Coro, look closely at the reverse. Check whether clips, hinges, and rivets belong together; whether stones are prong-set or glued; and whether the finish is original. A well-built Coro brooch with distinctive movement or patent construction can be more historically interesting than a flashier but generic signed piece.

3. Miriam Haskell

Hand-wired beadwork, layered filigree, and lush botanical ornament

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Look for wired beads, pearls, flowers, and stones built over filigree backings.
- Many early pieces were unsigned, making construction and documented comparisons essential.
- The overall effect is often dimensional, botanical, and deliberately hand-made.

Miriam Haskell jewelry is best understood as assembled ornament rather than ordinary cast costume jewelry. Haskell opened her New York business in the 1920s, and designer Frank Hess played a central role in developing the company's celebrated visual language. The most characteristic pieces combine faux pearls, glass beads, seed beads, molded flowers, leaves, and rhinestones that are wired or stitched onto pierced filigree foundations.

Turn a Haskell-style piece over and the back may be as revealing as the front. Instead of seeing a single molded body, you may see fine wires passing through a metal screen, small elements individually attached, and another filigree layer partially covering the construction. This labor-intensive method creates depth. Flowers can sit above leaves; bead clusters project forward; and several tones of metal or glass may be combined without the design feeling flat.

Color is another clue. Haskell jewelry often uses aged-looking gold-tone metal, baroque or simulated pearls, naturalistic browns and greens, or dramatic jewel-colored glass. The work can be symmetrical, but it frequently feels organic, as though a bouquet or vine has grown across the piece. Compared with Eisenberg or Weiss, the sparkle is usually broken up by texture. Compared with Juliana, the stones are less likely to dominate in tightly packed rhinestone constructions.

Identification requires caution because many early Miriam Haskell pieces were not regularly signed. Later examples may carry an oval cartouche or other documented Haskell marks. Unsigned jewelry should not be called Haskell merely because it has filigree and faux pearls. Many companies and workshops used related methods, and later reproductions or deliberate fakes exist. Strong attribution depends on documented construction, correct components, period materials, design comparison, and provenance.

Haskell's difference is the sense of handwork. A good piece rewards close inspection: bead caps are selected for scale, wiring follows the contours of the design, and the reverse reflects a purposeful assembly process. Damage to one wire can release several components, so cleaning should be minimal. Avoid soaking, ultrasonic machines, and aggressive polishing. Dust gently and store the piece so projections are not crushed.

4. Eisenberg

Dress-clip glamour, brilliant clear stones, and substantial settings

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Expect high-impact rhinestone work and a substantial, well-finished feel.
- Marks include Eisenberg Original, Eisenberg, and later variations.
- Early jewelry developed alongside the company's clothing and often resembles fine diamond jewelry.

Eisenberg began as a clothing company, not a jewelry house. Rhinestone ornaments were used to enhance garments, and the decorative clips became desirable in their own right. That origin helps explain why classic Eisenberg jewelry often looks like concentrated evening glamour: bold clear stones, strong geometry, and dress clips or brooches designed to command attention on fabric.

Many early and mid-century Eisenberg pieces use high-quality rhinestones set into substantial white-metal, rhodium-finished, or sterling settings. The stones are frequently large and bright, with open or carefully engineered arrangements that allow light to move through the design. During wartime metal restrictions, sterling silver appears on a number of pieces. Marks can include Eisenberg Original, Eisenberg Originals, Eisenberg, and a script E, although mark chronology should be checked against a specialist reference.

Eisenberg differs from Weiss in mood and construction. Both companies are associated with rhinestones, but Eisenberg's best-known work often appears heavier, more architectural, and more closely modeled on fine diamond jewelry. Weiss can be more colorful, seasonal, and playful. Eisenberg also differs from Trifari because the metal is commonly a supporting framework for a field of stones rather than a sculptural feature in itself.

The reverse should show a design built to carry weight. Examine the hinge, clasp, dress-clip mechanism, stone cups, and plating. Replaced stones can be difficult to match because older rhinestones vary in cut, foil, and color. A piece with one modern replacement may flash differently under light. Dark stones are not always dead; sometimes the foil backing has aged. However, widespread cloudiness, corrosion, or missing stones materially changes the appearance.

Collectors often focus on clear rhinestone pieces, but Eisenberg also produced color, enamel, and later designs. Do not reject a piece merely because it does not match the classic clear-stone image. Use the signature, construction, and period design together. The best clue is usually the total impression: an authentic period piece should feel intentional, balanced, and technically capable of supporting its dramatic sparkle.

5. Weiss

Color-rich rhinestones, seasonal themes, and crisp prong-set sparkle

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Look for WEISS or Albert Weiss New York marks, depending on the period.
- Many pieces use vivid Austrian-style rhinestones, navettes, rounds, and molded glass.
- Common themes include flowers, leaves, butterflies, fruit, and holiday designs.

Weiss is one of the names people often learn after discovering a vivid rhinestone brooch in an inherited collection. Albert Weiss had experience in the costume-jewelry industry before establishing his own company in the 1940s. The company became known for bright, well-set stones and designs that could be glamorous, botanical, whimsical, or seasonal.

A typical Weiss piece may use navette stones as petals or leaves, round rhinestones as centers, and contrasting colors arranged for maximum visual impact. Brooches in the form of flowers, butterflies, insects, fruit, and holiday motifs are common collecting categories. Black japanned metal is sometimes used to make clear or colored stones appear more dramatic. Other pieces use silver-tone or gold-tone settings.

Compared with Eisenberg, Weiss often feels lighter and more decorative. Eisenberg frequently evokes formal evening jewelry; Weiss is comfortable with a bright red strawberry, an autumn leaf, or a multicolored floral spray. Compared with Kramer, Weiss designs may have stronger figural or seasonal identity, while Kramer is often associated with coordinated necklaces, bracelets, and earrings built around repeated rhinestone patterns.

The mark is useful but not sufficient. Genuine examples can read WEISS, and some marks include Albert Weiss or New York. Reproduction and falsely signed pieces have circulated, so inspect the back, stone setting, soldering, and finish. Many quality Weiss pieces use prong-set stones. A suspicious mark on a roughly textured casting, modern glue, or construction inconsistent with known examples should prompt more research.

Color condition matters greatly. Foiled stones may darken, yellow, or develop spotting. Aurora borealis coatings, introduced in the mid-1950s, can help place some stones after that development, but stones may have been replaced and older stock may have been used later. Always consider the whole piece rather than dating it from one stone.

Weiss differs through its immediate visual energy. It is often the maker in this group that looks most like a jeweled garden or a sparkling seasonal decoration. The strongest pieces combine that exuberance with neat soldering, consistent stone spacing, and a reverse that confirms the design was carefully manufactured.

6. Kramer of New York

Coordinated sets, glamorous crystal layouts, and polished mid-century fashion

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Marks include Kramer, Kramer of New York, Kramer of NY, and Christian Dior by Kramer.
- Look for coordinated necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and brooches with repeated stone patterns.
- The company often favored polished, dressy rhinestone compositions.

Kramer of New York was founded by Louis Kramer in the 1940s and later involved other family members. The firm produced a broad range of fashion jewelry, but collectors especially associate it with polished rhinestone sets from the 1950s and 1960s. A Kramer necklace may use repeating clusters of navettes and rounds, with matching clip earrings or a bracelet that carries the same rhythm.

The easiest difference to see is coordination. While many companies sold parures, Kramer repeatedly created jewelry that reads as a complete wardrobe group. The components often share identical stone shapes, colors, and metalwork. Clear crystal, colored rhinestones, faux pearls, and textured gold-tone metal appear frequently. Marks include Kramer, Kramer of New York, and Kramer of NY. Pieces made under an arrangement with Christian Dior may be marked Christian Dior by Kramer; those require careful verification because the name attracts reproductions and misrepresentation.

Compared with Weiss, Kramer is often less figural. A Weiss brooch may clearly represent a flower or fruit, while a Kramer necklace may focus on abstract repetition and formal sparkle. Compared with Trifari, Kramer generally allows rhinestones to dominate the face of the piece. Compared with Eisenberg, Kramer can feel lighter and more fashion-oriented, though quality varies by line and period.

Look closely at necklace construction. Are the links articulated so the necklace curves naturally? Are matching stones consistent in color and foil? Are the clasp and extension chain appropriate? On earrings, compare the mark, clip hardware, and stone setting with the necklace. Mixed sets are common in estate collections, and two pieces that look similar may not have been sold together.

Kramer jewelry illustrates why signatures should not become shortcuts. The company produced both exceptional and more commercial pieces. A signed bracelet with lively articulation, complete stones, and an unusual color combination may be more desirable than a common clear-rhinestone necklace. Conversely, a dramatic unsigned set should not be attributed to Kramer solely because it resembles the brand. Confirm with marks, documented examples, and construction details.

7. Marcel Boucher

Fine-jewelry discipline, sculptural movement, and numbered naturalistic designs

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Look for Boucher, Marcel Boucher, MB, or early Marboux marks.
- Many postwar pieces carry design or inventory numbers useful for research.
- Expect layered birds, animals, flowers, and flowing forms with dimensional movement.

Marcel Boucher brought direct fine-jewelry experience to American costume jewelry. After work connected with prestigious jewelry houses, he established his own business in New York in the late 1930s. That background is visible in pieces that use disciplined stone placement, complex castings, and a convincing sense of motion.

Boucher is especially associated with dimensional brooches: birds with layered wings, flowers that curl forward, sea creatures, leaves, bows, and animals arranged so the design appears active rather than flat. Metal surfaces may be polished, textured, enameled, or combined with rhinestones and glass. The reverse often reveals carefully planned layers and strong soldered connections.

Marks can include Marboux on some early work, MB, Boucher, and Marcel Boucher. Many pieces also carry inventory or design numbers. Those numbers can be valuable research tools when compared with reliable chronological references, but a number alone does not authenticate a piece. Reproductions, later related production, and altered findings require a full examination.

Boucher differs from Trifari in energy. Trifari often feels balanced and elegantly controlled; Boucher may feel as though a bird is turning, a wave is curling, or a flower is opening. Compared with Hattie Carnegie, Boucher's identity rests more consistently on sculptural jewelry design rather than on a broader fashion-house aesthetic. Compared with Juliana, Boucher's metal body often shapes the subject, while Juliana commonly builds visual impact from rhinestone arrangements and linked construction.

Because many Boucher pieces are layered, inspect for bends and repairs. A wing or petal that has been flattened can change the intended silhouette. Check whether enamel loss follows natural wear or suggests harsh cleaning. Examine solder joins for modern repair, and compare the number and mark with documented examples.

The best Boucher pieces can resemble miniature sculpture. Even when the stones are modest, the metalwork can create movement through curves, overlapping surfaces, and changing texture. That sculptural intelligence is the clearest distinction: the jewelry was designed not merely to sparkle but to occupy space.

8. Hattie Carnegie

Fashion-house elegance, imaginative subjects, and jewelry designed as part of a complete look

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Look for Hattie Carnegie, Carnegie, HC, or documented house marks.
- Styles range from polished tailored jewelry to whimsical animals and richly colored statement pieces.
- Evaluate each piece individually because production spanned designers, suppliers, and decades.

Hattie Carnegie was a major American fashion entrepreneur whose business offered clothing, hats, accessories, cosmetics, and jewelry. Her jewelry therefore belongs to a larger fashion vision. It was meant to complete an outfit and could be elegant, witty, theatrical, or exotic depending on the season and the designer involved.

This range is both the appeal and the challenge. Hattie Carnegie jewelry may include tailored gold-tone necklaces, colorful beaded pieces, faux pearls, whimsical animals, figural brooches, Asian-inspired motifs, or elaborate rhinestone designs. Some pieces feel restrained and couture-like; others are intentionally humorous. The unifying idea is fashion awareness rather than one construction method.

Marks commonly include Hattie Carnegie or Carnegie, with additional documented variations. Because the company operated for years and worked with different designers and manufacturers, the mark must be interpreted in context. A signature on a generic piece is not enough, and an unmarked item should not be attributed merely because it resembles a known Carnegie subject.

Hattie Carnegie differs from Miriam Haskell in structure. Haskell's classic identity is bound to wired assembly over filigree; Carnegie may use cast metal, beads, enamel, rhinestones, or imported components depending on the design. It differs from Weiss because the themes are not primarily driven by rhinestone florals and seasonal sparkle. It differs from Boucher because Carnegie is a fashion-house label that could encompass multiple design voices.

When examining a piece, ask what role it would have played in a coordinated wardrobe. Is it a dramatic focal brooch for a suit? A refined necklace for a dress? A witty animal pin meant to personalize a lapel? This fashion context often explains proportions and subject matter.

Condition issues vary with materials. Faux pearls may peel, enamel may chip, and molded elements can crack. Do not polish away intentional antique finishes. Strong Carnegie pieces often have a distinctive point of view, but attribution should rely on the mark, construction, materials, and comparison with documented examples rather than on whimsy alone.

9. Alice Caviness

Unexpected materials, imported components, rich color, and boutique-scale individuality

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Look for ALICE CAVINESS or Alice Caviness marks, sometimes with country or metal marks.
- Expect unusual glass, beads, enamel, sterling, cameos, tassels, and imported elements.
- The line is varied, so unusual material combinations are often more revealing than one signature style.

Alice Caviness built a New York costume-jewelry business after working in fashion. Compared with giant manufacturers such as Coro, the company is often described in more boutique terms, with a strong interest in unusual components and distinctive combinations. Collectors encounter jewelry marked Alice Caviness as well as pieces associated with imported materials or country-of-origin marks.

The visual range is broad. Caviness jewelry may use art glass, crystal beads, faux pearls, enamel, sterling silver, marcasite, carved or molded elements, cameos, chains, tassels, and richly colored stones. Some pieces are delicate and European-looking; others are bold mid-century statements. This variety means that identification cannot rest on a single motif.

One useful distinction is material curiosity. A Caviness piece may combine a glass color or bead shape that feels less standardized than the components in mass-market production. Necklaces and earrings can have elegant movement, and some pieces emphasize dangling beads, chain, or tassel forms. Sterling and imported components appear often enough that country and metal marks deserve careful examination.

Compared with Trifari, Caviness is usually less uniform in finish and brand language. Compared with Weiss, it may rely less on a dense field of conventional rhinestones and more on unusual glass, beads, or mixed materials. Compared with Haskell, Caviness pieces may be assembled from distinctive components without using Haskell's characteristic wired filigree architecture.

Marks are helpful, but not every piece associated with the company was necessarily signed, and unrelated jewelry marked simply Alice should not be confused with Alice Caviness. Check the full wording, typography, placement, and accompanying marks. Imported pieces may carry Germany, Austria, Italy, or other origin information, but origin alone proves nothing.

Because the line is varied, documentation is especially important. Compare unusual pieces with catalogs, advertisements, recognized reference photographs, and complete marked sets. Caviness is a good reminder that vintage identification is not always about recognizing one famous silhouette. Sometimes it is the combination of sophisticated color, unexpected material, boutique construction, and a correct signature that tells the story.

10. DeLizza & Elster / Juliana

Unsigned construction clues, exuberant stones, and linked designs built for movement

QUICK IDENTIFICATION CLUES

- Most Juliana line jewelry was not permanently signed; paper tags and cards were often lost.
- Study construction: figure-eight solder puddling, open-back settings, linked elements, and characteristic bracelet structures.
- Use multiple clues because individual features were also used by other manufacturers.

DeLizza & Elster is one of the most important names for learning how to identify unsigned costume jewelry. Founded in New York after World War II, the company manufactured jewelry and components for many other firms. Its best-known retail line is Juliana, associated especially with colorful, high-impact jewelry of the late 1960s. Paper tags and earring cards identified the line when new, but the jewelry itself was generally not permanently signed.

That absence of a stamp forces the collector to study construction. Commonly discussed clues include figure-eight-shaped solder puddling on some connections, open-back stone settings, linked sections that create movement, pin mechanisms integrated into the design, and five-link bracelet construction. However, no single clue is exclusive. Open backs, for example, were used by many companies. Reliable identification requires a cluster of correct features and comparison with confirmed examples.

Juliana designs often celebrate the stones. Large navettes, rivolis, molded glass, cabochons, margarita stones, dangling beads, and unusual color combinations may be packed into layered brooches, bracelets, necklaces, and earrings. The jewelry can appear almost explosive, with stones pointing in several directions and linked sections shifting as the wearer moves.

This is the clearest difference from Trifari. Trifari often uses sculpted metal and controlled symmetry; Juliana frequently uses stone color, projection, and linked construction to create drama. Compared with Weiss, Juliana may appear more structurally complex and three-dimensional, although both used vivid rhinestones. Compared with Haskell, the assembly is typically soldered and linked rather than wired through filigree.

Because confirmed Juliana attribution can affect collector interest, over-attribution is common. A colorful unsigned brooch with open backs is not automatically DeLizza & Elster. Examine the clasp, rivets, solder patterns, stone cups, link structure, and matching pieces. Search recognized Juliana references and databases for the exact or closely related design.

The essential lesson is methodological: Juliana teaches collectors to read the back of jewelry. The front may attract attention, but the reverse reveals how the object was built, and construction is often more dependable than a general resemblance.

Side-by-Side Comparison

What carries the design, what to inspect, and what commonly causes confusion

The fastest way to separate these makers is to ask what carries the design. In classic Trifari, sculpted metal and controlled composition often carry the design. In Coro, variety and mechanical ingenuity are major themes. In Haskell, wire, beads, pearls, and filigree create the structure. In Eisenberg, large brilliant stones and substantial settings dominate. In Weiss, vivid rhinestone color and recognizable flowers or seasonal figures are frequent. In Kramer, repeated patterns across coordinated sets are common. In Boucher, the metal creates movement and sculpture. In Hattie Carnegie, fashion context and imaginative subject matter matter more than one manufacturing method. In Alice Caviness, unusual components and sophisticated material combinations stand out. In Juliana, linked construction and exuberant stone arrangements are central.

Marks help most when they agree with the object. A correct-looking mark on construction that is inconsistent with the maker should raise questions. Conversely, the absence of a mark is not proof that a piece is unimportant. Early Haskell and Juliana are famous examples where unsigned construction can be central to identification.

A practical examination sequence is: photograph the front and back; locate every mark; inspect hinges, clasps, clips, and solder; note whether stones are prong-set, bezel-set, glued, wired, or riveted; identify metal and country marks; and compare the complete construction with confirmed pieces. Avoid cleaning until materials are understood. Water can damage foil, wire, glue, faux pearls, and plated finishes.

Maker	Primary visual language	Best first clue	Common caution
Trifari	Sculpted metal plus controlled stones	Signature and polished reverse	A familiar motif alone is not enough
Coro/Corocraft	Huge variety and mechanical designs	Line mark, patent, or mechanism	Quality varies greatly by line
Miriam Haskell	Wired beads and filigree layers	Reverse wiring and component choice	Many early pieces are unsigned
Eisenberg	Large brilliant stones in substantial settings	Weight, prongs, and period mark	Replacement stones can change the look
Weiss	Colorful rhinestone florals and figurals	Prong setting, mark, and design theme	Reproduction signatures exist
Kramer	Coordinated crystal fashion sets	Matching link patterns and mark	Mixed sets are common
Boucher	Sculptural metal and naturalistic movement	Mark plus inventory/design number	Numbers must be verified
Hattie Carnegie	Fashion-house variety and imagination	Correct house mark in context	No single construction defines the label
Alice Caviness	Unusual components and rich material mixes	Full signature plus origin/metal marks	The line is stylistically broad
Juliana/D&E	Exuberant stones and linked construction	Multiple reverse-construction clues	Open backs alone prove nothing

Reading Marks and Dating Clues

How signatures, findings, patents, and country marks should work together

A maker's mark is one of the most useful clues in vintage costume jewelry, but it must be read as part of the object. The first question is where the mark appears. On a brooch it may be cast or stamped into the reverse, placed on an applied plaque, or marked on the pin stem. On a necklace it may be on the clasp, hook, end tag, or decorative center. Earrings may be marked on the clip, screw back, post, or back plate. Bracelets may carry a mark inside the clasp or on the back of one link. Removable findings can be transferred from one piece to another, so a signature on a clasp deserves less confidence when the rest of the jewelry looks inconsistent.

Study the lettering rather than reading only the name. Look at the shape of the letters, spacing, depth, punctuation, copyright symbol, and the metal surface around the mark. A crisp old stamp can survive wear, while a recently added mark may cut through patina or plating. Applied plaques should be attached in a manner consistent with period manufacture. Crooked letters do not automatically mean a fake, because stamping pressure varied, but obvious modern engraving on otherwise old-looking jewelry is a warning.

Marks also help establish a broad sequence. KTF belongs to an early Trifari partnership, while crowned-T and copyright-era Trifari marks represent later stages. Eisenberg used several signatures across decades. Kramer used variations of its New York wording and also produced jewelry carrying the Christian Dior by Kramer name. Boucher marks can appear with design numbers. Haskell signatures became more regular after a long early period when many pieces were unsigned. These sequences are valuable only when checked in a specialist reference; online seller descriptions frequently repeat incorrect dates.

Country and metal marks add context. Sterling, 925, vermeil, gold filled, and country names may indicate materials or import requirements. A Germany or Austria mark can be compatible with a company that imported components or finished jewelry, but it does not identify the American seller by itself. Likewise, a patent number may reveal a finding or mechanism without proving who designed the visible ornament.

Unsigned jewelry should be approached with the same discipline. Start by identifying the construction family rather than naming a maker. Is the piece wired over filigree, cast as one body, built from stamped components, linked from multiple stone-set units, or riveted together? Once the method is clear, compare it with confirmed examples. An attribution should become stronger as independent clues agree: correct construction, correct materials, correct findings, correct date, and a close documented match. If only one clue fits, describe the piece cautiously instead of forcing a famous name.

Materials and Construction Glossary

Stones, settings, metal, coatings, and what their use can reveal

Materials can separate jewelry that looks similar in a photograph. Begin with the stones. Traditional rhinestones are glass, often with a reflective foil backing. They may be round, square, baguette, marquise or navette shaped, pear shaped, oval, or cut into specialty forms. A navette is an elongated pointed oval commonly used as a flower petal or leaf. A rivoli has a pointed, faceted profile that creates intense reflection. Molded glass cabochons may imitate moonstone, jade, turquoise, coral, or carved gems. Lucite and other plastics can form clear centers, petals, fruit, and lightweight sculptural elements.

The way a stone is held is equally important. Prongs are small metal tabs folded over the stone. Bezel settings surround part or all of the edge. Cup settings support the stone in a metal cavity. Glued stones may sit in shallow recesses with no visible prongs. Wiring can pass through drilled beads or around components. Rivets can connect moving layers. No method is automatically superior; the question is whether it matches the maker, period, and design.

Foil condition changes appearance. Moisture can enter behind a rhinestone and cause darkening, spotting, or a dull gray center. Replacing one damaged stone with a new crystal may create an obvious mismatch because modern stones can have different cuts and coatings. Aurora borealis stones have an iridescent surface treatment associated with mid-century and later jewelry. Their presence helps establish that a piece is not earlier than the introduction of that treatment, but a single replacement stone cannot reliably date the whole item.

Metal gives additional clues. Pot metal or white metal can support large rhinestones and may feel substantial. Brass and other copper alloys can be stamped, cast, plated, or left with an antiqued finish. Sterling silver appears in wartime and higher-quality production by several makers. Rhodium-finished surfaces often have a bright white appearance and good resistance to tarnish. Gold-tone finishes vary from bright polished plating to deliberate antique gold. Trifari's branded metal terminology, Boucher's sculptural castings, Haskell's filigree foundations, and Juliana's linked settings all use metal differently.

Faux pearls require special care. Their coating may be applied over glass or another core and can peel when exposed to moisture, perfume, cosmetics, or friction. Haskell-style pearls may be wired into complex arrangements, making replacement difficult. Enamel can be cold-painted or fired depending on the piece, and chips along raised edges are common. Plastic can craze, shrink, cloud, or react to heat.

When identifying a maker, do not ask only, 'What is this stone?' Ask how the material was used. A large clear stone in a Trifari jelly-belly animal functions as a sculptural center. A cluster of navettes in Weiss may form a vivid flower. In Eisenberg, clear rhinestones may imitate a diamond jewel. In Haskell, pearls and beads create texture and volume. In Juliana, unusual stones may be combined into projecting, mobile layers. The material becomes meaningful through construction and design.

Common Identification Mistakes

How to avoid over-attribution, damage, and repeated online errors

The most common identification mistake is starting with the front and stopping there. Search engines can produce dozens of visually similar brooches, but many mid-century companies used the same flowers, leaves, bows, birds, and stone shapes. Turn the piece over before choosing a maker. A correct back can support an attribution; an inconsistent back can disprove a tempting visual match.

A second mistake is trusting an online listing because several sellers repeat the same claim. Marketplace titles are not peer-reviewed references. One incorrect attribution can be copied hundreds of times. Give more weight to specialist books, museum or archival material, established collector research, old advertisements, catalogs, patents, and confirmed marked examples. Sold listings can be useful for observing the current market, but they should not be the main source for historical identification.

A third mistake is treating every company as a single quality level. Coro made jewelry for different lines and prices. Kramer and Trifari produced both highly distinctive designs and more commercial pieces. A brand name does not erase condition problems or make every item rare. Evaluate the particular object.

A fourth mistake is cleaning before research. Aggressive polish may remove an intentional dark finish. Liquid cleaner can reach stone backs. Silver dip may damage mixed metals and glued components. An ultrasonic machine can loosen stones or break fragile wiring. Photograph and identify first.

Finally, avoid absolute statements when evidence is incomplete. Terms such as 'attributed to,' 'in the style of,' 'possibly,' and 'unsigned' are useful, honest descriptions. Careful uncertainty protects both the owner and the history of the piece. A later catalog discovery or exact marked match may strengthen the identification, while a construction inconsistency may require it to be revised.

Sorting an Inherited Collection

A safer process for photographs, storage, and preliminary identification

When sorting an inherited collection, work slowly. Place each piece on a clean tray and keep matching earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and brooches together. Do not discard unsigned jewelry merely because the back looks unfamiliar. Some of the most researched costume jewelry is identified through construction rather than a permanent signature.

Use a phone camera in bright indirect light. Photograph the entire front, the entire back, the clasp or earring finding, every stamp, and any unusual stone. A close, readable image of a signature is more useful than ten distant photographs. If a piece has a patent number, design number, country mark, sterling mark, or copyright symbol, record it exactly.

Do not use silver dip, jewelry cleaner, toothpaste, baking soda, or an ultrasonic machine on mixed costume jewelry. These methods can strip plating, loosen glue, cloud stones, dissolve foil, or damage imitation pearls. A soft dry brush and gentle dusting are safer starting points. Separate pieces so rhinestones and projecting metal do not scratch one another.

Finally, remember that maker is only one part of interest. Condition, design, rarity, material, completeness, and current collector demand all matter. A common signed piece with heavy damage may be less desirable than a striking unsigned piece in excellent condition. Identification should be careful, transparent, and open to revision when stronger evidence appears.

1	Work over a clean tray or light-colored cloth so stones and small components are not lost.
2	Keep matching earrings and coordinated pieces together before researching the maker.
3	Photograph the front, back, clasp, earring hardware, and every stamp in bright indirect light.
4	Record marks exactly, including punctuation, copyright symbols, patent numbers, and country marks.
5	Do not soak or aggressively polish mixed costume jewelry.

6	Compare construction with confirmed examples, not only with similar-looking sale listings.
7	Use condition, completeness, design, and rarity in addition to the maker name.

PRIVATE APPOINTMENTS IN LAGUNA HILLS

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Selected References and Further Reading

Printed as plain text; no live links are embedded on this page

The following references were used to cross-check company histories, marks, construction terminology, and commonly documented design characteristics. Maker marks and date ranges can be complex; consult specialized books and confirmed examples when authenticating an important piece.

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- Collectors Weekly costume jewelry maker guides: collectorsweekly.com/costume-jewelry
- The Trifari company history: thetrifari.com/about-us
- Morning Glory Jewelry and Antiques research galleries: morninggloryjewelry.com

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