Field Guide to Antique Buttons & Vintage Glass

Grandmother's Buttons
**Stamped Brass or White Metal**
*Circa 1870-1918*

These tiny talismans of the past were worn by the dozens on the ornate gowns of the late 19th century. Stamped out of thin sheets of metal by huge, steam-driven presses, they were further assembled with a metal back and twisted wire shank.

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**Cut Steel**
*Circa 1870-1918*

Originally made in 18th century France to imitate buttons of diamonds and marcasites, cut steel was also popular in the late 19th century. These brilliant buttons were created with pinheads of faceted steel hand-riveted into a brass framework.

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**Pewter**
*Circa 1870-1918*

Often the least expensive of antique buttons, pressed pewter buttons can never-the-less still be found with interesting patterns, etching and color.
Fancy Buttons

CREST MAKE

Manufactured in Germany.

Each half dozen fastened separately.
BRASS AND CUT STEEL
Circa 1870-1918

These detailed stamped brass buttons accented with rivets of faceted or “cut” steel are loved for their warm sparkle.

PEWTER AND BRASS
Circa 1870-1918

Among our most popular are these two-tone buttons, most often created with a brass rim around a molded pewter design, usually of a scene or flower.

PERFUME BUTTONS
Circa 1870-1918

These romantic buttons featured bits of velvet that Victorian women used to dab with their favorite perfume. Some say that women would sew perfume buttons under their sweetheart’s lapel when he traveled or went off to war, so that he would always feel her presence.
When it came to buttons, the whimsy of Victorian and Edwardian women evidently knew no boundaries. Gowns were often ornamented with buttons depicting everything from favorite flowers to spiders, Shakespearean heroines to nursery rhyme characters.

French enamels were the deluxe buttons of the Victorian world, often sold in velvet-lined boxes like the fine jewelry (for clothing) that they were. The process was unchanged from the 16th century: powdered glass was applied to stamped metal and then fused with heat. Floral or pictorial decorations were added by hand-painting or decal.
**Antique Jet Glass**
* Circa 1860-1918

These molded glass beauties were created in hundreds if not thousands of patterns in home workshops in late 19th century Bohemia (the Czech Republic today).

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**Jet Glass with Lustre**
* Circa 1860-1918

As with the buttons above, hand-cut iron molds were used with molten glass rods to create these jets, which were then hand-trimmed, polished and decorated with a brilliant silver or gold luster finish.

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**French Jet Glass**
* Circa 1900-1912

We have made this category because of one large cache of jet glass we discovered in a New York Garment District warehouse—boxes and boxes of gorgeous, detailed jet glass cabochons and ornaments all wrapped in pieces of a Paris newspaper from 1912. They may have been made in Bohemia and sold in Paris (we’re not sure), but we think their look is purely French.
Dernière Mode

PEARL

La Mode
CARVED OCEAN PEARL
Circa 1880-1918

The many hues and lustrous quality of these ocean pearl buttons cannot be reproduced today—the Pacific Ocean shells they were made from are now scarce. They were hand-drilled, carved and polished in a multi-step process using steam-driven machines.

PORCELAIN
Circa 1890-1920

Hand-painted as a hobby by young ladies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these porcelain buttons or studs were usually part of a set including a brooch, blouse buttons and cuff buttons. Many still bear the initials of their painters on the back, so marked before they were sent off to a kiln for firing.
Calico
Circa 1840-1890
Calico buttons were made from the mid to late 19th century to accent the popular calico cottons of the day. They were created with transfer-printed, double-fired china and could be bought for as little as 3 cents per dozen.

Stencils
Circa 1920-1940
The cheerful 20th-century cousins of calico buttons, stencils are also made of porcelain or china. They were sold at button counters everywhere in the 1930s, in bags or on cards marked “Made in Czecho-Slovakia.”
CZECHOSLOVAKIAN GLASS
Circa 1920-40
The Bohemian glass button workshops of the 19th century continued into the early 20th, creating an explosion of gold and silver luster as well as colorful Art Deco buttons. The process used was little changed from that of 50 or even 100 years earlier.

WEST GERMAN GLASS
Circa 1945-1960
After World War II, a group of Czech glass workers fled across the newly formed Iron Curtain into Bavaria, soon making Western Germany the center for glass button making until the late 1960s, when the zipper and automatic washers reduced sales.
Czech Glass Cabochons
*Circa 1920-1940*

The same workshops that created Art Deco glass buttons also turned out a wild variety of colorful glass cabochons (flat-backed glass stones) for the costume jewelry industry. We’ve begun incorporating these wonderful vintage cabs into our jewelry along with the buttons (we find them side by side in our searches).

Japanese Glass Cabochons
*Circa 1920-1950*

As in Europe, glass cabochons were made in home workshops in pre- and post-World War II Japan. The Japanese pieces were usually inspired by antique jade, coral and lapis carvings. Many that we find, such as the turquoise rose above, come in tissues marked “Made in Occupied Japan.”
BUTTONS
for
COATS AND TRIMMING
**Celluloid**

*1920s and '30s*

The first man-made plastic, celluloid was created with a mixture of camphor and cellulose. It was a popular button material from the 1870s through 1930s and was used to imitate a host of materials, from ivory to marble to wood grain.

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**Bakelite and Casein**

*1920s-1940s*

Bakelite was invented by Leo Baekeland in 1907 as an insulating material. By the 1920s it was being produced in a range of stylish colors and sliced, laminated and carved into the bold Art Deco buttons that are so coveted by collectors today. Casein and catalyn plastics, introduced in the 1930s, soon overtook Bakelite in popularity because they could be molded rather than just slice and carved.