

Why Do Millennials Love Vintage Jewelry So Much?



To speak the words “vintage trend” is, in a sense, to speak nonsense. Trends unfold in the present, while vintage things hearken back to the past. As a writer, I feel it falls to me to fathom the rationale behind such apparent malarkey. So I’m here to poke at the word “vintage” a bit. And much like the intricate vintage-inspired floral designs that fly off shelves, the word itself has twists and turns, and all of those meanings are relevant to the question at hand.

Why vintage?

People have always (*and will always*) look to the past in order to create meaning in the present. It’s how culture works. It’s how people work. Nostalgia sweeps us back into the past, but it also propels us forward, cuing powerful memories and associations that we build our identities around.

All of that being true, there’s no denying that so-called millennials have a pronounced fascination with styles of the past. Whether this manifests in your officemate’s brazenly grizzled beard and glistening pomaded hair, or your young cousin’s newest exciting pastime, knitting, the ways of the past are increasingly with us thanks to our beloved millennial co-workers, friends, family, and customers.

Here are three possible explanations:

1. Vintage culture provides a stable refuge from contemporary digital culture, which has no vintage

The appeal of vintage things isn't just about their old-fashionedness. It's that styles of the past had the chance to come to maturity, evolving a unique flavor and form. To attain a certain vintage. Today's fast-paced digital culture leaves little time for authentic styles to evolve and flourish. Thus, vintage styles keep us grounded and help us find our footing.

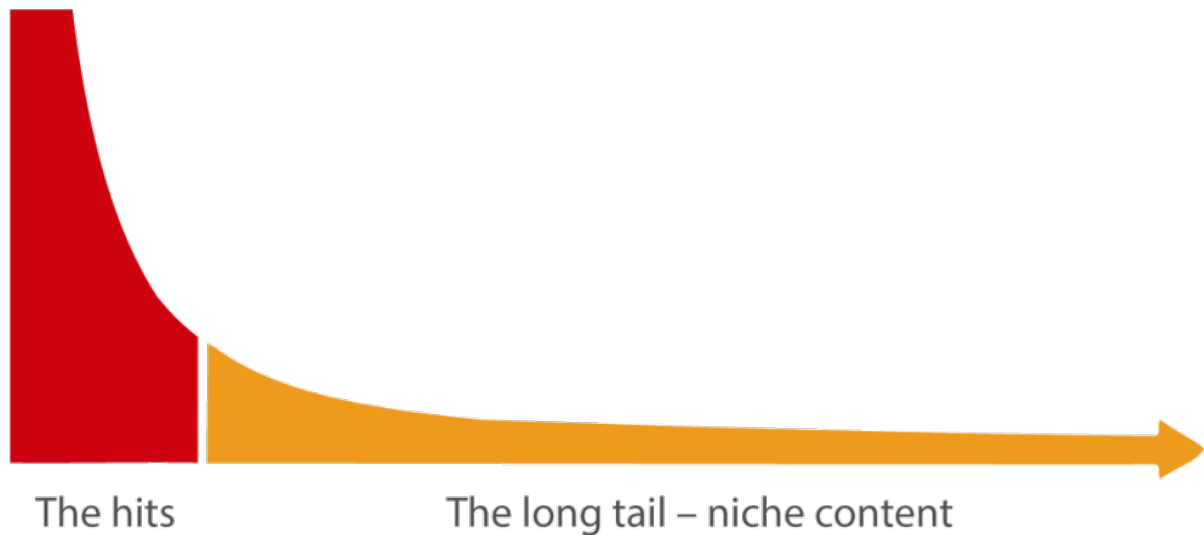
2. Millennials want context and back-story

Perhaps this also derives from modern digital technology, which allows for rapid research about not only products, but about the businesses that produce those products. Millennials expect there to be a comprehensible story behind the things we buy. Vintage things are easy to contextualize, because their time has come and gone. Their context within history is easily comprehensible. They were born, they lived, and they expired. In other words, their story has been told. Vintage jewelry offers not only style, but also settled historical context and built-in narrative. For context-hungry millennials, this is an irresistible package.

3. The Internet provides easy access to a universe of niche products

The endless search for unique and curious items has made companies like Etsy and Ebay so wildly successful. Niche is the new norm in some ways, and generations that come of age

online simply have easier access to the products and styles of past eras. Used to shopping across not only decades but often centuries, millennials expect choices that aren't simply run-of-the-mill manufactured trends.



Why should jewelers care about millennial vintage jewelry trends?

While millennials' online shopping habits may cause understandable anxiety for brick and mortar retailers, I believe that independent jewelers have significant cause for hope. The jewelry business has tremendous built-in appeal that can and should attract vintage-crazed millennials. A few reasons why:

1. Millennials idolize DIY (do-it-yourself) culture and its associated values

Handcrafting is in vogue, whether this means increasingly popular maker fairs, home and micro brewing, or traditional domestic handcrafts like sewing and knitting. The jewelry business, of course, is already full of makers. In fact, the

jewelry shop has been one of the most resilient bastions of skilled retail handicraft. There aren't too many cobblers, blacksmiths, and bakers walking around these days. In other words, the bench jeweler remains—one of the last bastions of traditional tradesmanship left in Main Street retail.

The challenge is that most millennials probably don't know the first thing about what a bench jeweler does. (And it doesn't help that the bench jeweler may be hidden in the back of the shop.) But I guarantee you—put that grizzled and pomaded upper-middle-class millennial in the room with a real live bench jeweler, and you'll have a jewelry fan for life.

2. Millennial nostalgia is directed toward the golden ages of jewelry

The eras of the prodigious beard are also the eras of fantastic and historic jewelry. The satirical TV show *Portlandia* nailed this, in a way, with the sketch, "The dream of the 90s," in which Portland hipsters sing about how "the dream of the 90s is alive in Portland." The joke is that "the 90s" they're singing about aren't even the 1990s, but the 1890s. This is good for big beards, as I said, but it's also good for big, beautiful jewelry. The Victorians were obsessed with jewelry. Millennials are obsessed with Victorian-era sensibilities. It's a win-win.



3. Millennials seek out and expect a certain level of creative control over their goods

They don't necessarily want branded items. They want to be able to self-brand, customize, and personalize everything. This doesn't mean that they are highly original. It may just mean that they are rejecting the current mass-marketed product for something that conjures the quaint appeal of a less profane era. Jewelers can and should be able to accommodate them. By their nature, professional jewelers deal in precious, well-made, beautiful objects meant to stand the test of time. Part of the appeal of vintage goods is simply a belief (or realization) that things were made better in the old days. Independent jewelers have retained both a respect for the quality of handcrafted goods as well as an awareness of the importance of customization and personalization. Jewelers are well-equipped to create millennial vintage jewelry that cures the cravings for personal and individual goods.

4. Millennials can be self-absorbed

Don't forget: They are also called the "Me Generation." This is not to say that they are horrible people, just to note that

their individualism and drive for personal expression also leads to self-adorning tendencies. In other words, they may be hipsters, but they aren't hippies intent on jettisoning the things of the world in favor of communal living and mere flower bracelets. They often have strongly articulated personal styles, and they realize those styles by accessorizing accordingly. If we play our cards right, millennial vintage jewelry will be part of their rugged and carefully curated individualistic ensemble.

5. Millennials increasingly have money

The youngest millennials are entering their twenties. Yes, they may have spent their youth exploring their whimsy rather than building corporate empires and accumulating capital. BUT—adulthood has arrived; they are settling down and padding their wallets. They may even be contemplating the most novel proposition of all—matrimony! In other words, millennials will increasingly have adequate incomes, which should translate into satisfying outcomes for jewelers who can anticipate their needs and reach out and educate them about the world of jewelry. As they age, millennials will seek out more expensive hobbies and habits, with more sophisticated and adult tokens of their own vintages. When they start searching around for something more refined to take the place of retro video games and hand-woven iPad case covers, jewelers will have an opening.



What more can be done?

The pieces are in place for a great generation of millennial vintage jewelry consumers. But what are the right steps to make this happen? This subject could be an entire article to come (stay tuned), but a few very quick thoughts:

1. Customization is a no-brainer

Millennials obviously want it. Be ready to give it to them. And yes, while they may dress like your grandparents, they are also, ironically, computer geniuses. Use the incredible customization tools now available to jewelers, such as the various customization software solutions (and yes, you guessed it, [Stuller carries the best design software on the market](#)). Guide them to the vintage halo wonderland that they never knew they were dreaming of.

2. Celebrate the bench jeweler

The bench jeweler is an unheralded hero of maker culture and an undiscovered millennial superstar. Sing his song. Tell her tale. Buy him a drink. Put your bench jewelers in the window instead of the darkened recesses of your shop.

3. Plumb the vintage depths

Sooner or later, halos may lose their halo effect. Subtle nods to classic vintage styles may not always be enough. Be ready to go deeper into rich and interesting, even odd, jewelry customs of yesteryear. For instance, if halos could be such a success, what about Victorian mourning rings, or fede or gimmel rings? Two-stone rings are suddenly all the rage, but why not obliquely ride the trend with a hip and vintage twin heart design? It could be the perfect thing for that well-dressed albeit heavily bearded young man who just can't seem to find what he's looking for.

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