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The Bygone Beauty of BEADED PURSES



Attired in a Victorian royal blue velvet ensemble, Jo Addie is a portrait of past elegance at the *Somewhere in Time* Weekend at the Grand Hotel.

COLLECTOR JO ADDIE'S PURSES HEARKEN BACK TO A CHARMING, ROMANTIC TIME.

Time travel has been the theme of many books, plays, and movies. The notion of voyaging across the centuries — and finding or losing the love of one's life — has kept fanciers of H.G. Wells, Jack Finney, and Connie Willis enthralled. For many cinephiles who love the notion of a modern man or woman journeying to a different era, the best example of this motif is the 1980

release *Somewhere in Time*. Written by Richard Matheson, directed by Jeannot Szwarc, the vehicle costarred Christopher Reeve (at his most handsome and earnest) and Jane Seymour (never looking lovelier or more winsome).

When the film was first released, it didn't set the box office world afire. However, a group of devoted fans have promoted the beauty of this movie, have championed its sweeping romantic nature, and have practically traveled across all dimensions to make this cinematic saga a memorable, well-regarded treasure.

One of the indefatigable devotees is antiques collector, dealer, and author Jo Addie. She is immersed in keeping the legacy of this movie alive as the president and editor of the International Network of *Somewhere in Time* Enthusiasts (INSITE), the creator and publisher of INSITE's quarterly magazine, and a producer (along with her husband) of six full-length documentaries that chronicle the classic film's allure.

Unlike many admirers who have caught the title on TV or on DVD and have become smitten as a result, Addie was personally immersed in the pro-

duction back in 1979. While filming her scenes as a 1912 extra, she fell under the spell of the bygone costumes, furnishings, lifestyle, and etiquette. Once garbed in her

A popular purse motif in the mid 1920s was the peacock. This one features a peacock's tail plumage extending 6.5" past the bag's bottom. Likely made in America, it has a French celluloid tortoiseshell frame.



"Wearing period attire for 15 and 16 hours a day, waking up to the clip-clop of horses' hooves on the street, riding around in carriages, I really felt like I lived for three weeks in 1912. It had a truly powerful effect on me."

historically accurate togs and handed a beaded purse for her first scene, Addie's life took on a unique, unexpected course. Twenty-two years after *Somewhere in Time* debuted, the Illinois resident has surrounded herself with a home that speaks to turn-of-last-century charm and meticulously preserved accessories that nod toward past perfection.

"Wearing period attire for 15 and 16 hours a day, waking up to the clip-clop of horses' hooves on the street, riding around in carriages, I really felt like I lived for three weeks in 1912. It had a truly powerful effect on me. When I returned home, I wanted to find a few mementos of that experience, so I started wandering into antique shops and markets. One of the goals I initially had was to find a beaded purse like the one I was given to carry the first night I worked on the film. It was a French steel beaded purse, created on a loom. Knowing every bead had to be threaded by hand, I thought someone had gone blind making such a phenomenal treasure," Jo opines.

In the days before eBay®, the aficionado had to rely upon legwork, detective work, and tireless energy to track down and locate pristine examples of antique beaded bags. "I first started searching in local shops and markets, and better antique shows," shares Jo. "The finest



ABOVE: A typical pre-Civil War purse, ca. 1830s, this was made of tiny glass beads in an array of color. The style's popularity would endure for over 30 years. Bead-knitted, it is the reticule, or drawstring, style.

RIGHT: French steel beaded purses were all created on looms and were a popular souvenir for American tourists at the start of the last century, ca. 1910. (This purse is similar to Addie's movie costume prop.)

beaded purses have never been, and still are not 'thick on the ground,' so I also placed occasional want ads in publications for them. Everywhere I traveled, I scouted antiques — and acquired them one at a time."

Bright and driven to educate herself, Jo absorbed every morsel of information that



she could devour. She knew that her collection would benefit from understanding the provenance and the pedigree of what constitutes a well-made antique: "The first book on beaded purses wasn't published until 1984, and it was only a photo book with values. There was no history or pertinent information, but I had already learned plenty by then," the collector explains.

"When you begin a collection, you start buying what appeals to you that you can easily afford. Then, you typically improve your knowledge as to what to look for — condition is extremely important — and upgrade your collection over time. A good beaded purse collection, in my opinion, includes all categories and types, with fine examples of each," says Jo. "The earliest purses developed out of the 'pocket' in a gown/dress, and were made of fabric. This was in the latter 1700s. Some eventually began to be decorated with beads. These were mostly 'reticules,' meaning bags with drawstring tops. Eventually the purse frame appeared on the scene, giving it structure, and the purse came into its own as a lady's essential accessory."

Poised and articulate — Addie has worked as a writer for radio commercials, as well as a voiceover actress — she excels at sharing her passion in both written form (*400 Tips for Antique Dealers*) and as a lecturer ("100 Years of Beaded Purse Artistry, 1830s–1930s"). She is, indeed, a font of information and insight on good costume jewelry, Czech jewelry, and, of course, purses.

"There are four ways beaded purses were created: on looms, by bead knitting (often done by master bead-knitters), crocheted, and then at the end of the era, made by sewing already-threaded (and typically larger) beads onto fabric, which required far less time," the author elaborates. "Though the beaded purse was popular for a century, the real heyday was from the turn of the century, Edwardian period, through the 1920s. During that time, well-to-do people were traveling more, going throughout Europe on 'the Grand Tour,' and often bringing fine examples home from their travels as treasured souvenirs. Fabulous examples of beaded purses were typically made in



Jo Addie is particularly partial to castle designs. Pictured here, circa 1920, a bead-knitted purse depicting Castle Rheinstein, with a knight riding across the bridge. It has a uniquely shaped glass-jeweled frame.



The opening of King Tut's tomb in 1922 inspired the Egyptian Revival. Featuring a French celluloid frame, with hand painting, and a fabric strap handle, this purse undoubtedly belonged to a stylish flapper. Note the threaded beads applied to the fabric.

Germany, Italy, France, Austria, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia. They were also imported from abroad and then sold in U.S. department stores."

In her personal collection, which stands at about 185 offerings, Jo has several that date back to decades before the Civil War, circa 1830s, when the beaded purse began to be popular. "Those were typically American made," she observes. "The ladies would buy patterns and beads offered by companies on a mail-order basis through magazines, and would create them for themselves and also for gifts. My favorite purses are those depicting scenes in the beadwork. Since I love castles, castle beaded purses really get my heart rate up!"

These gorgeous accessories were originally made to be carried and utilized by ladies, so how do these purses fare in the modern world? Are they merely tucked away in drawers, displayed on walls behind protective glass, or actually toted about at special occasions? The answer is as complex as the collector herself.

"I do not recommend sealing up a beaded purse in a shadow-box frame, unless the frame is hinged like a vitrine and can be opened. Bear in mind, beaded purses are basically a textile item. The air can become stale in a frame, which hastens deterioration of the fibers," she cautions. "I have purses hanging on the walls in my home, but not all of them. The only type I do not suggest hanging are the steel beaded purses from France, as they are too heavy, with gravity taking its toll on these 100-year-old gems. Since they were made on looms, the rows can separate. That is a very complicated, nearly impossible repair. These examples should be displayed laying down, in a vitrine case, or just hung for short periods and allowed to 'rest,'" Addie details.

However, the lovely, nostalgic appeal of the purses beckons this collector to invite them out for a waltz every now and again: "I use them when I attend the annual *Somewhere in Time* Weekends at Grand Hotel, in Mackinac Island, Mich. This past October was the 22nd such annual affair, and people come from all over the country to dress in period clothing and honor and celebrate the film in the very place it was made. These events are great fun, and are the closest thing to actual time travel as one can get!"

Jo Addie requests that curious readers visit her website: www.somewhereintime.tv. ♦