



# HOLIDAY *Gift Guide*



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CHARM BRACELETS ★ 2003 BEST TOYS ★ MUSIC FOR GIVING

# A Charmed Life

## A customized, collectible charm bracelet makes an endearing gift

BY PAULA L. MOLINO

ONE of the most endearing gifts I have ever received was given to me on my sweet sixteenth birthday by my boyfriend, Tom. It was a silver link bracelet with a *Happy Birthday 16* charm dangling from its center. As each birthday rolls around, I am reminded of this thoughtful gift and the nice boy who gave it to me.

My charm bracelet is my jewelry journal. If this bracelet could talk, it would reveal the history of how each unique charm came to occupy space on its silver links. Mine acts as a passport as it mirrors the countries and cities where I have traveled: a gondola from Venice, an Eiffel tower, a German beer stein, a hula dancer from my marriage in Hawaii. It also introduces my personality, hobbies, and passions as replicas of these suspend from its chain: Scorpio symbol, Italian horn, sewing machine, typewriter, ice skate, skier and a rose.

Tom's gift sparked my interest in this collectible and has me browsing through gift shops and flea markets in search of more. A conversation opener, I am drawn immediately to the melodious jingle of other women's trinkets, for every charm bracelet tells a story.

This classic piece of jewelry has made a comeback, both in the old-fashioned charms swaying from a link bracelet and the contemporary version of the Italian charm bracelets.

The history of charms extends as far back as Egyptian times when shields and identification tags measured one's status in life. During the reign of Queen Victoria, charms were decorative fashion jewelry, as chains dangled with family crests and locket. Post World War II, handmade ornaments fashioned in Europe and the Pacific Islands were take-home gifts for sweethearts.

Must-have accessories for many girls during the 50s, charms marked momentous occasions such as Sweet 16, graduations, weddings and anniversaries.

Charm bracelets made the fashion scene again in the 90s when vintage jewelry erupted into a cool, new collectible.

"Charm bracelets have never gone out of style. The double link charm bracelet has become more popular over the last few years," says Michael Kanoff of Michael's Jewelers in Yardley and Fairless Hills, Pa.

One of the original founders of the Italian charm bracelet is Nominations, in Italy, who produce a stainless steel, stretchy wristband charm bracelet. These can be custom designed to suit the wearer's personality by easily attaching rectangular charms such as international flags, hearts, zodiac signs and initials.

"Some of the modern charm bracelets like Nominations and Zoppini are unique and were extremely popular three years ago; now they're tapering off," Mr. Kanoff says. He indicates that a favorite item for grandmothers and moms are the silhouettes of small heads with children's names and birthdates engraved on them. The most popular occasion for selecting charm bracelets as gifts are for Sweet 16 birthdays. Sports motifs, animals, and travel ornaments are always in style. Travelers may enjoy buying charms as mementos because they make great souvenirs, can be found anywhere, and are small enough to carry.

Elsie Hulin, 98, of Berkley Heights, wears her charm bracelet as a necklace. Her daughter

gave her the bracelet over 30 years ago with an anniversary charm attached. As the bracelet became too crowded, her husband transformed it into a gold necklace. There hang various

symbols, each engraved with birth dates of three generations.

Charm bracelets are often passed down from generation to generation. If you plan to start a charm bracelet tradition for

someone, choose charms that represent the person's favorite hobby or interest (telephone for a teenager, baby bootie for a new mom). Any theme can be satisfied from *Alice in Wonderland*, *Care Bears*, racing motifs, *Faberge* eggs, pet breeds and women's accessories. Hallmark sells *The American Girls* collection charm bracelet that represents the eight girls in the series.

Celebrities have turned up the charm to raise money for the United Cancer Front. By teaming up with designer Louis Vuitton, stars designed limited edition charms as inspirational emblems for cancer patients and their families (for more information call 866-884-8866).

Charm bracelets are chic gifts that continue giving through the years. A wonderful starter present for girls, mothers, and grand-

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# Collecting Charms

BY PAULA L. MOLINO

**S**TARTING yourself or a special someone with a charm collection is as easy as buying the bracelet and attaching the first charm. The classic double link bracelet is ideal for adding charms. Yet what's the best way to hang charms — from the bottom or top side of the bracelet?

"The beauty of a charm bracelet is you can do what you want to do," said Michael Kanoff of Michael's Jewelers in Yardley and Fairless Hills, Pa. When the charms lay one way, they are easier to see, but eventually the links will fill up; then the charms can hang from both sides. Double jump rings are recommended to secure the charms. A basic, medium width chain works best so as not to detract from the interest of the charms.

At Michael's the price of a double link bracelet in sterling silver ranges between \$20 and \$30; 14k gold starts at \$150 and goes up to \$500. Sterling silver charms range between

\$10 and \$40 for three-dimensional; some have working parts. Gold charms start at \$20 and can be priced at a few hundred dollars apiece if custom made.

Depending upon the interest or theme, charms are found anywhere: hotel gift shops, airport and newspaper kiosks, museum shops, department stores, boutiques, jewelry stores, home shopping channels, e-Bay, and more. As a collector or a giver, consider these tips:

- Decide on the metal preference of gold or silver for a clean, consistent look. Sterling silver is a more inexpensive way to start a collection.

- Let your family and friends know that you collect charms.

- Keep a journal of when, where, and how each charm was obtained.

- Select charms that express the person's personality and interests.

- Periodically spot check charms to ensure that they are securely fastened.



A sampling of charms for bracelets from Italy.

## Charms

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mothers, charms can mark special events in their lives such as the birth of a child, a milestone birthday, a wedding, or a special anniversary.

Thanks, Tom, for the *charming* memories.

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