

FASHION & STYLE

Carats at Cannes

By MARIA DOULTON MAY 13, 2015

What would a red carpet be without jewels? And where better to observe them than under the soft spring sun at the Cannes Film Festival, the two-week movie industry marathon that began Wednesday.

It was in 1946 when the small, sleepy city of Cannes awoke to the dazzle and razzmatazz of the stars and their jewels along La Croisette, the waterfront promenade. Today, some 5,000 members of the press alone gather for the festival, and a stepladder chained to a palm tree to reserve a prime snapping spot is a common early-morning sight.

Bikinis, bow ties and big diamonds set the tone from the start, although there also were candid moments, as in 1956, when a tight-lipped and imposed-upon Ingrid Bergman was snapped adjusting her earrings. Elizabeth Taylor appeared that same year in a regal antique tiara, a gift from her then-husband, the producer Mike Todd.

Today, personal jewelry is rarely seen on the red carpet. Naomi Watts, who appears in “Sea of Trees,” the Gus Van Sant film in competition, will be wearing a borrowed Bulgari creation.

“I always want to own them of course!” Ms. Watts wrote in an email interview. “It’s not easy to hand them back the next day. But I would be too scared to wear such amazing pieces anywhere else in my day-to-day life off the red carpet.”

What happens in Cannes...

The daily highlight at Cannes is the *montée des marches*, the stars' climb up the steep stairs of the Palais des Festivals for the screenings and awards.

Jewelry house staff members will have final consultations with the stars' stylists. Then, around 5 p.m., the corridors of the big hotels will begin to buzz, as staff members move from suite to suite delivering jewels, security in tow.

Stylists are the key to getting jewels onto celebrities. Jeanann Williams, who dresses Ms. Watts, answers the inevitable "dress or jewels first?" question: "For Cannes it's all about the sparkle, so it's jewels first. Necklaces do limit the dress options, but they are always worth it."

Ms. Williams said that sometimes she has had to be creative, as in layering a necklace over the heavy metal detailing on a gown and sewing bracelets to a dress's sleeves. "Ideally I would like to see the jewels at least two months out, because that allows us to do a custom gown with a designer," she said. "But clearly that is not always possible."

Cannes and jewelry

"The red carpets are incredible places to build brand awareness," said Caroline Scheufele, co-president of Chopard. In 1988 Ms. Scheufele negotiated an official festival sponsorship, and Chopard redesigned and now manufactures the gold and crystal *Palme d'Or* prize each year. "Cannes has become a part of Chopard's DNA," she noted.

The jewelry house, which has its festival headquarters atop the Hôtel Martinez, empties its vaults for Cannes, and its jewelers work throughout the year to make special pieces. This year, 68 items — one for each year of the festival's history — will be taken to Cannes for red carpet wear and to show clients.

Over the past decade, other jewelry brands, including Bulgari, Avakian, de Grisogono and Harry Winston, also have loaned gems to celebrities for the festival. Haig Avakian, a niche jeweler from Geneva, said that living in Los Angeles for four years has helped him to meet stylists interested in his exotic style. And, while he noted not all clients want to buy jewels that have been worn on the red carpet, but being at Cannes is good for business. "I bumped into a top

client in the hotel lobby on the first day of Cannes last year and sold a necklace on the spot,” he said.

And this year?

Wearing one large jewel or statement piece has become a trend in recent years, replacing the elaborate matching sets of past decades.

Stars such as Jessica Chastain and Jennifer Lawrence have been choosing just a dramatic pair of earrings or necklace, usually worn with a simple hairstyle and natural makeup. Some personalize their appearance by wearing a necklace down the back or jewels in their hair.

Color also is popular, as diamonds have made way for emeralds, sapphires and other brightly hued stones.

And many stars favor campaigns such as Eco-Age’s Green Carpet Challenge, established by Livia Firth, which encourages celebrities to use their public profiles to raise awareness of sustainability issues.

For the third year at Cannes, Chopard will offer some stars the chance to wear its Green Carpet Collection jewels made of gold certified by the Fairmined organization in Colombia and ethically sourced gems.

“Actresses are more and more aware and interested in sustainable issues,” Ms. Scheufele said. For example, “Marion Cotillard has always been sensitive to the issue of sustainability, and this year she has worked alongside me to design pieces for our Green Carpet Collection inspired by the Palme d’Or, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary. ”

As for red carpet preparations, Ms. Williams said: “Do not overkill — these statement pieces can be a lot for a woman to pull off — so choose earrings or necklace. With a statement necklace, wear a small stud, nothing more.”

Certainly advice that Elizabeth Taylor never would have taken.

Ms. Doulton is founder and editor of The Jewellery Editor, an online luxury magazine.

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