

Keeping the piece

Six creatives choose the mementos that they treasure the most



MIMINAT SHODEINDE
Founder of London-based interior architecture and design studio Miminat Design

I bought this ring before a talk that I had to do last year. It was in a market in east London. I was just having a stroll, I didn't go out to buy anything. I just saw it and I thought it resonated with me and where I was at that time in my life.

I'm a designer, I just stay in my office and draw all day. I'm very shy and I like to be by myself – I'm very introverted. Public speaking is my biggest fear. [The day I bought it] I was so nervous about [giving] a talk. The day before, I had been drawing and writing notes down and throwing them in the bin.

The ring is a scrunched-up piece of paper in cast aluminium and, for me, it is a metaphor for letting go, that not everything is that deep and you can always renew. You can crush the paper, throw it in the bin and start again.

I'm often really moved towards brutalist jewellery and this ring is something that is not conventional, but it has that sculptural element, which is really similar to my work. Narrative is also very important to me and when I am buying jewellery, I wouldn't buy it for no reason. That just goes with anything I do in life.

Ever since I did that talk and ever since I bought that ring, I've stepped into a new era. I got more grounded and accepting of who I am, my journey and my place within the industry.

I wear it often because it is a constant reminder to myself that there is always room and opportunities to start over, be better, grow and evolve. Every day is a new chapter.

As told to Annachiara Biondi

It is a constant reminder there is always room to grow



Above: a pin and a necklace that belonged to Yulia Mahr's grandmother

Below: Yulia Mahr

Both photographed for the FT by Christian Cassiel

YULIA MAHR
Visual artist exploring themes of memory, identity, trauma and belonging

Clothes-wise I'm a minimalist, but not with jewellery, and I think that's rooted in my grandmother, Judit Weiner. She spent 20 years in South America, which is why all the jewellery she wore was South American and, although I was raised in Budapest, I was brought up speaking Spanish in this house that felt like it came out of Santiago, Chile.

My grandmother was born in Budapest too, but she lived for 20 years in Santiago with my grandfather. They were doing social housing projects. She was a multilingual internationalist, an incredible lady with so much passion in life. She spoke nine languages fluently and she was a simultaneous translator who worked with Che Guevara and Castro and Pablo Neruda, and all these people.

One of the things that I remember the most about her is the fantastic jewellery and brightly coloured things that she would wear. Whenever I think about these things I'm instantly transported back into her warm embrace and the smell of her perfume.

I was raised on the stories of her time in South America. The brooch is a funny little thing. It's of its time, it's a stereotype. It's a locally made brooch [of a man] with a sombrero and a poncho and boots that was given to her. I remember how important it was to her, but I don't really remember the story of who gave it to her and why. But I very much associate it with her time there and with the stories that she used to tell me, and that's why it means so much to me. It's not the figurine [itself], it's the connection to those stories.

The necklace is more something that she would wear. She would always wear these very brightly coloured necklaces. I remember her like a ray of sunshine, all the colours would come out of her and if you imagine Budapest in the 1970s, it wasn't really like that. But she would walk around with this Frida Khalo-esque sense of colour.

I don't wear them because they feel like a part of the past. To me, they are a memento of this human being who I adored so much. But I don't really feel like they are my story, so I keep them in a box that was also from her, this beautiful, very simple jewellery box that she brought over from South America. It's the one thing I kept from her when she died. I was asked "What would you like?" and that was the one thing, her jewellery box, because that's what I remember the most about her – her jewellery.

As told to Annachiara Biondi



I'm instantly transported back into her warm embrace

Left: Miminat Shodeinde with her memento ring, photographed for the FT by Christian Cassiel

MAAYAN ZILBERMAN

Artist and founder of New York-based candy brand Sweet Saba



I don't feel connected to delicate pieces or very precious jewellery or gemstones. I love to see them in a jewellery store, but I don't feel the urge to put them on my body or to live with them. I had a friend, Ilona, who was 101 when she died a couple of years ago, and she gave me some of her jewellery pieces that she made out of garbage. Those are very precious to me.

The piece that I want to talk about is a resin ring. I'm developing a jewellery collection and it was the first thing that I ever made for it. It's a good-luck charm, an Egyptian scarab. The red part is made of clay that I fired and painted with my red nail polish. It's so special to me because [as a prototype] it's the only one that will ever be made in this way. My daughter asked me to make her one, so I made her one in kid's size. The reason it's significant is that I made it from one of my candy moulds.

When I was about eight or nine, I dreamt that I took all of my very special belongings, I dug a hole in the ground and buried them. When I went back to find them, they were all made of sugar. I wanted to revisit that idea, so I started taking my jewellery pieces and any kind of physical thing that was very important to me and I cast them in sugar.

Afterwards, I would give them away. I would say, "I have been making these pieces and I would like to let go of these memories." People would eat them and it was as if these things that were so important to me would become part of them.

I started by turning my very important jewellery into candies and now this ring is the first piece that I have made [from that candy], bringing it back into its permanent existence. It's important for me to go through this exercise to make things more permanent.

This ring is the catalyst for my next chapter and I wear it all the time. People ask me if it's sugar and I always say, "No, for once it's the real thing that I can shower with."

As told to Annachiara Biondi

This is the catalyst for my next chapter



LUCAS CASTEX

Self-taught woodworker whose sculptural designs follow modern, clean lines

Above: Lucas Castex wearing his memento earring inspired by the first wooden sculpture that he made

Below: Lucas Castex

My most treasured piece of jewellery is this earring. It's made by an atelier in Biarritz, near where I live in Les Landes, in the south-west of France. Inspiration for it comes from the very first wooden sculpture that I made in 2016, which has the form of an African necklace.

I showed Florent and Stéfanie, who own the atelier, a picture of the sculpture and asked them to translate it into an earring I could wear. It has the same etches and detail along with a solidity that is also apparent in my sculpture.

I didn't want a pair of earrings however. I only wanted a single earring to wear as I subscribe very much to the idea of only ever making unique pieces, and in my own work — I'm a self-taught wood turner — I never make the same thing twice.

I chose to have the earring made in silver because I'm not a fan of yellow gold, I find that too showy as a material. It doesn't relate to my work, which is more nuanced and understated. What I like about this piece is that it sits parallel to the face so there's a more streamlined look and it doesn't stick out. It also doesn't bob about. It's quite fixed.

I love wearing something that might have been my idea — the piece of sculpture as a starting point — but has evolved. Stéfanie and Florent are really skilled craftspeople, they don't just churn out the same old stuff. They are incredible artists and what we have in common is that they work with the same passion in trying to create something that is bespoke, beautiful and highly considered.

The love and craft process that went into making this piece makes it even more precious and I often feel as if I'm wearing a portable sculpture. But what I really love is that I asked a fellow artisan to make it. It's great to have that synergy and like-mindedness. I'm an enormous fan of Christophe Lemaire and his aesthetic, so putting it out there, who knows, I would love to do a jewellery collaboration with him one day.

As told to Carolyn Acome

Above left: Maayan Zilberman's memento, a ring shaped like an Egyptian scarab that she made with clay

Below: Maayan Zilberman

Both photographed for the FT by William Pippin



I love wearing something that was my idea



PEONY LIM

London-based digital creator

For me [jewels] are the physical representation of a moment in your life, or a memory or a person or a feeling. Prior to having children, I had my own jewellery brand and I loved the idea of creating pieces for other people to put their memories and meanings into.

This piece is a relatively large set of pearls that I inherited from my Chinese grandma. She died when I was a teenager and I wasn't able to go to her funeral. At the time there was a Sars outbreak and we were told we might not have been able to get back into the UK in time for me to do my exams, so we weren't able to go.

She had a huge collection of jewellery and in her will she left a small amount of [it] to specific people. This was for me, to be worn on my wedding day. At the time, it was a long way away but I kept them and then I did wear them on my wedding day. And having now two daughters, I hope that they will wear it on their wedding day.

Above: Peony Lim with her grandmother's pearl necklace

Below: Lim's memento

Both photographed for the FT by Christian Cassiel

I inherited them from my Chinese grandma



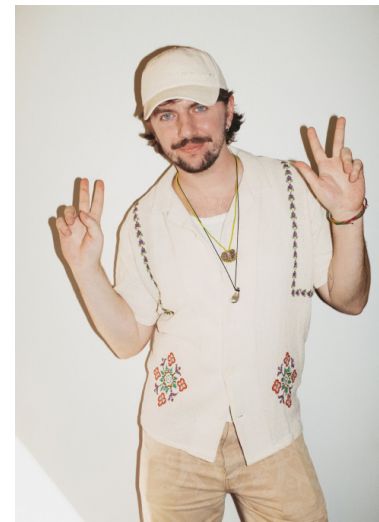
Because she couldn't be there on the day it made it a more meaningful gift. I have no pictures, and no recollection, of her wearing them, so I don't know if she bought them for me and never wore them or if she did. They are a bit of a mystery. But I like to think that she wore the pearls, and I think there is a part of her in them and there will be a part of me, and then, I hope a part of my children.

Another piece that I wore on my wedding day, which belonged to my mother, is a pair of pearl earrings. They are made of one large baroque pearl with vine leaves wrapping around them, which means good luck. I wore my grandma's pearls for the religious service and I wore my mother's pearls for the social blessing. There is something multigenerational that adds meaning to pearls.

As told to Annachiara Biondi

RUSLAN BAGINSKIY

Ukrainian hat and accessory designer whose headwear has been worn by Madonna, Taylor Swift and Pamela Anderson



My jewellery is part of me and it's about big memories from different moments of my life.

This handmade necklace is from my jewellery line. It's super traditional because in Ukrainian heritage we use a lot of glass beads.

It's an abstract version of a natural form, and how you interpret it depends on your imagination. The name of the necklace — Kvitka-Tsybulka — is Ukrainian for "onion flower", and for me that's what it is, but for someone else it might be a sea creature. We use a lot of techniques in Ukraine, I want to show people how talented my country is.

My hat and accessory brand Ruslan Baginskiy was founded in Ukraine in 2015 and we are still in Kyiv. When the war started we relocated our production and 100 people to my home town of Lviv but now we have mostly come back to Kyiv. My mum is the head of production, so she manages everything. Let's just say production has been affected a lot [by the war].

My Cartier Juste un Clou bracelet is a symbol of big dreams. When we started our brand, my partner and I said that when we have success we would buy the Juste un Clou, so I got it after my debut couture show at the Crillon Hotel in Paris.

This Elsa Peretti silver bottle necklace is also special because my best friend gave it to me for my 31st birthday. It was a surprise because she didn't know that I am a big fan of Elsa's work. It's super vintage and I don't know where she found it. I wear it almost every day.

Another friend gave me this hippy friendship bracelet four years ago, in Ibiza. It was the best time in our life because we didn't have the full-scale war and Covid, and it reminds me about happiness and that life can go on and be easier. We did a symbolic ceremony, making wishes. When I look at it, I remember the place and I remember these pure feelings amid these mad times.

As told to Carola Long ●

It reminds me that life can go on



Top, middle and right: Ruslan Baginskiy wears his mementos: a handmade necklace from his own jewellery line, an Elsa Peretti silver bottle necklace, a friendship bracelet from Ibiza and a Cartier Juste un Clou bracelet

