



THE HEDGEHOG

A SPIKY TAKE ON WHAT'S NEW

Prepare to be dazzled

Sarah Hue-Williams was always fascinated by shiny things. 'Mum and Dad called me the magpie when I was little because I was always making necklaces out of milk-bottle tops,' she says. Later, after studying at Cambridge, she trained as a gemmologist — a ten-year apprenticeship of studying in London, California, and Antwerp — and later wrote *Christie's Guide to Jewellery* in 2001. Now she has co-written (with Raymond Sancroft-Baker) a 300-page book with 200 illustrations called *Hidden Gems* (Unicorn Press, £35), which lifts the veil on some of the world's most famous jewellery, such as the enamel snake bangle/watch by Bulgari from circa 1965 (pictured).

'For a lot of people, jewellery seems inaccessible,' she says. 'It's in a bank vault, it's for royalty and the super-rich — it

has no bearing on their world. Most of the jewellery books I pick up are huge, glorified academic tomes. I wanted to tell the stories behind the jewels: anecdotes to bring the jewellery to life, a little glimpse behind the scenes.'

The book combines tales about much-married celebrity jewel-hounds such as Elizabeth Taylor and Zsa Zsa Gabor with more quirky stories. For example, there was a duke who had contacted Christie's about selling a family heirloom. When they asked what time would be best for them to call him back in California, the 13th Duke of Manchester said 4.30am, explaining that he had to be up for the early shift at McDonald's, where he happened to work flipping burgers, because he got paid more for working that shift. The Manchester Tiara, a Cartier creation containing 1,400 diamonds, went under the hammer in lieu of inheritance tax.

Then there was Mrs Marsden, the pensioner who lived in a modest bungalow and sold various pieces that had been given to her mother by a South African diamond tycoon for £7 million, holding back what she called 'the Big One', which was reckoned to be about 50

carats. Unfortunately, she later realised she had inadvertently thrown it out with the rubbish.

Hue-Williams's favourite story concerns a man from a Scottish island who was interested in bidding for the very first lot in the Princess Salimah Aga Khan sale in 1995, an aquamarine necklace of no great worth. 'I asked what had prompted him to bid for a royal necklace, to which his response was: "Wives are princesses, too." That summed up for me how jewellery can make you feel. Like royalty — like the Queen of Sheba. It doesn't have to be a hugely expensive thing.'

Pesky brogues

The *London Review of Books*, edited by majority shareholder Mary-Kay Wilmers, an American heiress, is famous for heavyweight articles that

ramble on for page after page in quadruple columns with minimal font size. A connected characteristic it's known for is its intellectual snobbery.

A typical article will signal to the reader that its author has been educated in all the right places while demonstrating implacable hostility to the source of this privilege. Apparently you are allowed to analyse the intricacies of the British class system to your heart's content, as long as you show first that you belong to it by birth, and second that you hold it in contempt.

These twin characteristics have always been on display — to an almost caricatural extent — in the writings of the cultural historian Marina Warner. In a recent issue she delivered a four-page sermon on her immediate family history that takes as its starting point a meditation on the bespoke pair of English 'brogues' that her Italian mother received as a gift from Warner's father on her arrival in England just after the war.

The article is illustrated by a colour photograph of said footwear: 'a plain flat lace-up pair in deep chestnut calf, with ten-point criss-crossed lacing and a short tongue... Ilia [Warner's mother] realised >>

