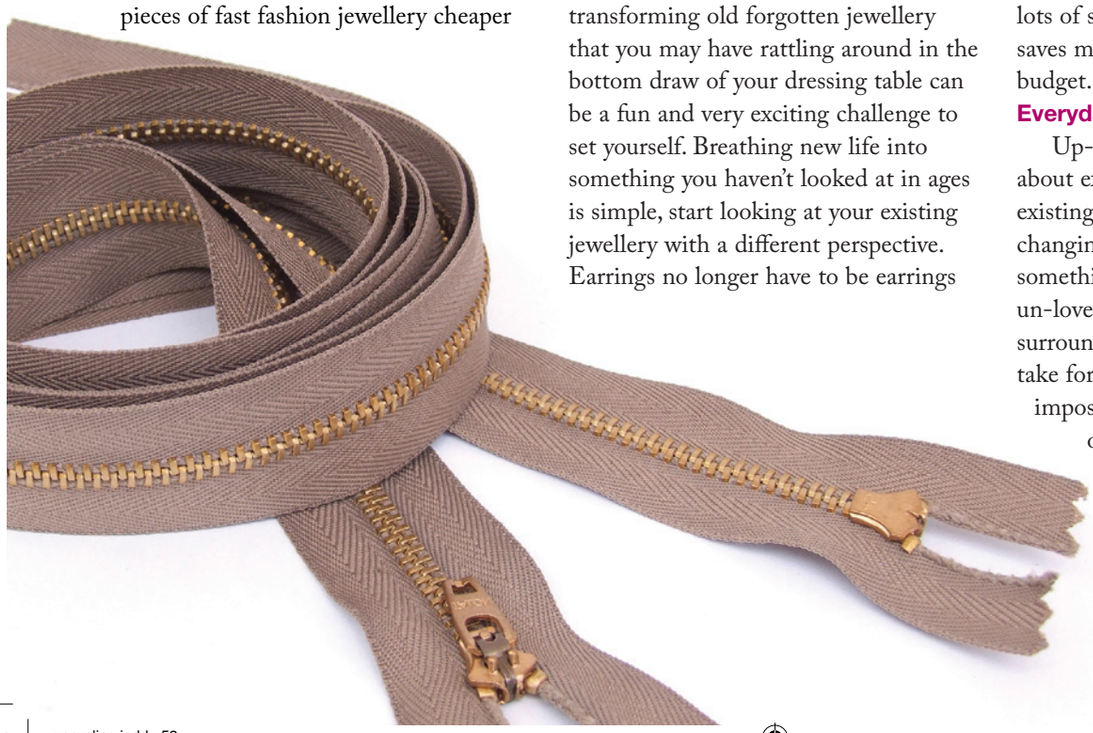
By
Lisa Mair

Give it a go! Up-cycling

Use up old and broken jewellery and even things you would never have thought of using to create stunning new pieces, Lisa Mair tells us more about the craze of up-cycling.

Most of us have incorporated re-cycling into our everyday lives as we try and do our bit to support the environment and the communities we live in, but up-cycling is something you may not be so familiar with. If you type the words up-cycling into a search engine you will find the following definition 'Up-cycling is the process of converting waste materials or useless products into new materials or products of better quality or a higher environmental value'.

As with many things in modern life jewellery and fashion are becoming increasingly disposable. Some goods currently being manufactured for fashion retailers are expected to have a short life span. Some High Street chains are selling pieces of fast fashion jewellery cheaper than a daily loaf, making it easy to think of them as worthless. The whole up-cycling ethos lends itself perfectly to extending the life of cheap, fashion jewellery. As well as extending the lifespan, up-cycling can turn jewellery from ordinary into extraordinary. It's easy to start making interesting, original, up-graded creations for yourself. Invest in some basic or cheap High Street jewellery and play around with the design, it isn't cheating its enhancing. Embellishing it with beads, findings and charms you've selected from your stash at home will allow you to put your own creative slant on a piece and make it look unique and different.



Old and forgotten

Embellishing, de-constructing and transforming old forgotten jewellery that you may have rattling around in the bottom draw of your dressing table can be a fun and very exciting challenge to set yourself. Breathing new life into something you haven't looked at in ages is simple, start looking at your existing jewellery with a different perspective. Earrings no longer have to be earrings and bracelets no longer bracelets, look at the individual components of a piece of jewellery, rather than as a whole. Never throw away an odd earring, put it somewhere for safe keeping, it could make a striking pendant or an unusual charm when added to a bracelet.

When you start de-constructing old jewellery the possibilities become endless, just add your own creativity and imagination. Often with costume and fashion jewellery the life of the beads or crystals far exceeds the life of the plated findings they are mounted in. The sad demise of plated finishes is inevitable, however carefully you look after them. Removing your favourite beads from worn out, tired settings and using them to make new exciting jewellery gives you lots of sparkly beads to play with plus, saves money too, great if you're on a budget.

Everyday objects

Up-cycling doesn't just have to be about extending life or up-grading existing jewellery, it can also be about changing everyday objects in to something wonderful. There are so many un-loved, abandoned and ordinary items surrounding us every day - junk that we take for granted. You may think it impossible to turn some everyday objects into wearable pieces, but when you add a little imagination almost anything can be transformed into

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Ann Ellis' award winning piece from last year's British Bead Awards was a fantastic display of up-cycling. It included plastic bags, drinks cans and bottles!

One of Lisa's own up-cycled creations.

stunning jewellery and fabulous accessories. Focusing on items that are traditionally un-related to jewellery making and seeing them with fresh eyes can really get your creative juices flowing. Once you get in the mind-set that almost anything can be manipulated and transformed you'll see beauty in all sorts of things. Old keys from broken locks, odd foreign coins from those past holidays, broken ceramics, fabric scraps and watch workings are just a few objects to think about.

Where to start

If you are a total up-cycling beginner and not sure where to start, fabric and haberdashery shops are a useful place to browse and find inspiration. Buttons, lace, ribbon and fabric embellishments work wonderfully with beads and jewellery findings - if you can thread a needle you're off and running. Sewing related items have always been my favourite to work with. It takes very little cash to get going, plus fabrics and buttons are very versatile to work with. We can all lay our hands on an odd button and pretty ribbon right now, for free. A nerdy tip of mine is every time you buy a new piece of clothing, carefully cut out the loops of ribbon used for securing the garment on to the hanger. Keep these and the spare button somewhere safe. These odd buttons look fantastic threaded on to jewellery wire, making great necklaces or bracelets. If you want to add some extra embellishment tie on those freebie garment ribbons – fabulous! Old wrapping paper, magazine pages, vintage postage stamps and decoupage papers can be turned into pendants, cuffs and earrings, all is needed is a good quality laminating machine, scissors, hole punch and some basic jewellery findings. If you don't have your own laminator at home, search local print or stationary shops they often offer a laminating service at a small cost.

As you progress you may find that there is additional equipment you may need to buy to be able to turn your chosen junk into wearable jewellery. A mini drill, small hand saw and basic soldering set are the most common tools needed. The best advice I can give is, shop around before you buy and do some research. There is always lots of help online and in your local library regarding what tools are best suited to the project you have in mind. Pay a visit to your local craft or hobby shop, you'll find grilling an expert, great help. If you want some inspiration, ideas about materials and information on how to get started there are many interesting books around to help guide you. One I would recommend highly is 'Fabulous Jewelery from Found Objects' by Marthe Le Van. It left me amazed at the creativity and the beauty that can be found in junk and unconventional materials. B

Lisa loves to use zips in her jewellery pieces.

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