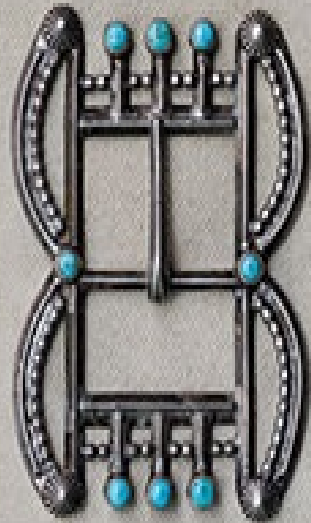




# ART of the BUCKLE

JIM ARNDT & MARY EMMERLING





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Jim Arndt & Mary Emmerling



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ART OF THE BUCKLE

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*To Nathalie, the Queen of the Buckles, and also my number one supporter, biggest fan  
and best friend. She makes every good day better, and every bad day good. It is  
inconceivable that this could get done without her.*

*Merci beaucoup!*

—JA

*To my wonderful family, Samantha and Jonathan, who I have tried to make into cowboys  
and cowgirls, though they are truly NYC kids!*

*To Reg Jackson, who has made the last sixteen years truly Western.*

—ME

# Art of the Buckle

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# Introduction

**THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES**, men have usually needed an accessory of some type to hold up their trousers. In the cowboy culture, suspenders were practical for vigorous outdoor work, while belts were not.

However, styles began to change in the 1920s with the advent of the rodeo trophy buckle. These were costly to make, so being awarded a championship or commemorative buckle was like winning a pot of gold! This was the beginning of the buckle as a statement of pride among working cowboys, an icon that said, "Here I am. I'm a winner, a force to be reckoned with!" Such big, flashy buckles weren't for everyday; they were for best dress, for wearing to the Saturday-night dance in town.

Buckles entered the mainstream popular culture via Hollywood film star cowboys of the 1930s and '40s, and pretty soon wannabe cowboy kids could buy a ranger set with a holster and a gun at the five and dime. Big boys were attracted to big buckles, too. Here was another accessory that one could give a man besides a tie or belt. Silversmiths and jewelry makers put artistry into one-of-a-kind and custom buckles, spinning out a fabulous genre of gentlemen's jewelry.

The buckles we see today are the creations of numerous extremely talented artists, jewelers, silversmiths, bead workers and leather workers. If you can think of a buckle that would be just your style or bear icons that show people who *you* are, there is a buckle artist who can create your dream and bring your message forward. Although there are tens of thousands of buckles out there, some of my favorites are from when my love for the art of the buckle began.

When I met my cowboy, Reg Jackson, who grew up in the West, he showed me his rodeo buckles, western fringe jackets, bandanas, cowboy belts, and Navajo silver jewelry. I was hooked! I started looking for and collecting rodeo buckles and belts. I loved the trophy buckle that had bucking horses, bulls, ropers, and barrel racers—all of which were highly engraved or inlaid with gems or from towns that I loved visiting.

I had spent a lot of time going to Cheyenne Frontier Days in Wyoming, shooting my *American Country West* book. On the other end of the spectrum, I even attended the Rodeo Days in Montauk, Long Island, New York. In every magazine—from *Vogue*, *English Vogue*, and *Côté Sud* to *House and Garden*—I would look for fabulous layouts on western clothes and settings.

Then I met my favorite French cowgirl, Nathalie Kent, and was also introduced to Jim Arndt,

who had shot a lot of the western commercials and ads. Nathalie and Jim were both fabulously well dressed in Santa Fe western style, and Nathalie had a namesake store in Santa Fe, where she sold a lot of clothing and jewelry of the type they wore. I started shopping there, as well. I would wear my turquoise jewelry everywhere I went, but in New York, people would ask, "Have you been out West?" When I flew on airlines and had my rodeo buckle on, I would be asked, "What's your best time?"

I love all of my collections now, starting with rodeo buckles, ranger sets, conchos, trophy buckles, denim, Chimayo weavings, cowboy boots, Levi's, bandanas, cowboy hats, turquoise jewelry, coats, and RRL and RL clothes that I have worn since Ralph Lauren's first western collection entered the market in 1978. I look for buckles at all the antique shows, flea market, and antique malls. What do I look for? Definitely I look for buckles that commemorate cities, ranches, or other places; that have people's names or initials; and I look for buckles with stones. I like the buckles BIG!

Now that you know all the details, which style of buckle do you want to start looking for? Western style is *my* style. I can't imagine being without my favorite pieces of jewelry—including my buckles!

As Gene always said, "Happy Trails!"

—Mary Emmerling



(Mona Van Riper.)



(Sherwood collection.)



(Richard Stump.)



(Doug Magnus.)



(Vintage.)



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