

Trend that's a real head case: Skull skulks way to fashion fad

Clothes, jewelry, belts, plates wear the inner man

By Laura Petrecca
USA TODAY

Being bad to the bone may prove good for the bottom line.

Hoping to capitalize on the "skull chic" trend — as well as Friday's release of *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* — marketers are plastering skulls, with or without crossbones, on everything from T-shirts and belts to dinner plates and jewelry.

Urban Outfitters offers more than a dozen skull-stamped products such as a \$20 dopp kit and \$88 rolling suitcase online. Dior's fine jewelry collection includes a diamond-encrusted skull pendant for \$19,385 — with rubies or other gems in the eye sockets extra.

Disney hopes to hook consumers with a bounty of licensed products that tie in with *Pirates*, including skull necklaces, rings, belt buckles and T-shirts at Target, Kmart, Wal-Mart and tween and teen accessory store Claire's. Disney also has a "couture" line of *Pirates* jewelry at killer prices — from \$150 to \$4,000.

"Skull and crossbones are really hot," says Donna Sheridan, Disney consumer products' general manager of softlines. "It's a great way to be edgy and relevant in a fashion piece and at the same time be fun for kids."

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie dressed baby Shiloh Nouvel Jolie-Pitt in a skull and crossbones shirt for her first public photos, in *People* magazine. Others spied in the look: Lindsay Lohan and Ashlee Simpson.

New Yorker Joe DeBono, 40, has a Ralph Lauren skull and crossbones belt and also gave his 10-year-old



Deakin & Francis, left;
Disney Couture, above

Sarah Cihat

Eat hearty: A dinner plate designed by Sarah Cihat.

Wearing your skull on your sleeve: A Disney Couture T-shirt, above, and skull and bone cufflinks by Deakin & Francis.

nephew, Connor, a skull and crossbones tie. DeBono said he wore his belt with a seersucker suit to an event for MBA Corps, a charity that recruits business graduates to do volunteer work, and it stood out in a corporate crowd. A bartender told him: "I wouldn't have pegged you for a skull and crossbones type."

That touch of surprise makes the trend fun, says Candy Pratts Price, executive fashion director at Style.com, online home of *Vogue* and *W* magazines. A hint of a dark side looks "cool and irreverent," she says.

How marketers are trying to get ahead with skulls:

► **Accessories.** Director Henry Deakin of cuff links maker Deakin & Francis says gold skulls with diamond eyes, rolled out two years ago, are "the most successful cuff links we've ever made." The 220-year-old company's skulls sell for up to \$3,900 at Bergdorf Goodman. "We can't make them fast enough," he says. "We've probably sold close to a thousand pairs in 18 karats."

Deakin says the first *Pirates* film, 2003's *Curse of the Black Pearl*, wasn't the inspiration. "It was my father's

idea. . . . It definitely wasn't *Pirates of the Caribbean*."

► **Clothes.** Designer Deborah Lindquist, who sells her pearl-and-skull-adorned cashmere cardigans and sweaters at high-end boutiques, gives a nod to Disney. "I have been doing the skull and crossbones since last fall," she says. "Johnny Depp in the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* inspired me. He was so cute. . . . It's one of the most popular items that I do."

Among more midmarket retailers, H&M is selling

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\$24.90 skull-covered swim trunks and has more bone designs on the way in its fall goods. "It's becoming more mainstream, and we're seeing it more in everyday garments," spokeswoman Lisa Sandberg says.

Steve Cardino, a fashion director for Macy's East, says the skull trend is "exploding" in all clothing areas. "It started fringe, more downtown. Now, we're seeing it as much in the kids' market as with men. For girls, you will see a pink skull or rhinestone skull."

► **Home Goods.** Sarah Cihat has a tough time keeping in stock her colorful, skull-decorated dinner plates that go for around \$60. "I can't make enough skulls," she says. "They are continuously selling out. . . . I'm beginning to wonder if the trend will ever end."

At Brooklyn, N.Y.'s The Future Perfect, unusual \$95 skull-covered throw pillows from EAT are huge sellers, manager Amanda McCreary says.

Sara Ruffin Costello, creative director at design magazine *Domino*, says that an unexpected skull in home decor adds a bit of whimsy. "It's ironic, it's done with a wink," she says. But she cautions that in decorating with skulls, less often is more. "It could go wrong, and you could look like (serial killer) Jeffrey Dahmer."

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