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A LOCK ON LOVE

Tiffany & Co.'s Lock Collection pieces, available through www.tiffany.ca, range in price from \$95 to \$6,800.

Padlocks have long been a symbol of romance and affection. Now retailers are unlocking their potential



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Ponte Milvio, the historic bridge in Rome, has them, as does the Pont des Arts in Paris. The lookout tower on Namsan Mountain in Seoul is completely blanketed and just because Mount Huangshan in China is a UNESCO World Heritage site doesn't mean it is immune to the weight of love.

Padlocks have been cropping up in clusters around the world thanks to young, starry-eyed couples attaching locks on bridges and lookouts and tossing the keys over the edge. Part graffiti, part initials-carved-in-a-tree permanence, it's the latest way romantics are claiming true love forever.

The origins of using the ordinary padlock as a romantic gesture are murky (some say it began in Asia, some that it started in Europe). But even though there isn't a consensus on exactly how it originated, locks as symbols of fidelity and love have a deep-rooted history.

After Italian novelist Federico Moccia published the cult novel *Tre Metri Sopra il Cielo* (*Three Steps in Heaven*) in 2004,

the act of affixing locks to romantic hot spots (an idea that Moccia introduced through the main characters in the book) surged and only grew in intensity when the movie was released later that year. Since then, the Ponte Milvio and other iconic bridges around the world have been heaving under the weight of the metallic symbols of love.

In New York, the Brooklyn Bridge is just beginning to feel the love with a few scattered padlocks sprinkled here and there. Inscribed with lovers' initials, the locks first appeared last spring but have yet to take over like they have in other locations. Bloggers and local media, however, have taken notice, pondering whether they will pro-

liferate in New York as wildly as they have elsewhere. New York's Department of Transportation, which is charged with maintaining the Brooklyn Bridge, doesn't encourage the act and, every so often, will remove the locks, rendering permanence impermanent.

If the thought of a maintenance worker snipping an everlasting symbol of love breaks your heart, the fashion world has embraced padlocks in ways that lean more toward Romeo than graffiti.

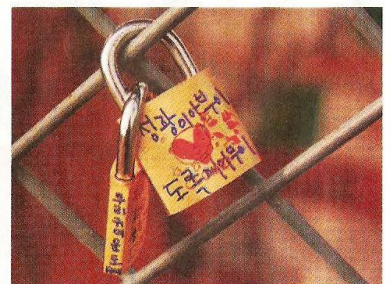
For spring, locks are cropping up on handbags at Banana Republic, on shoes at Marc Jacobs and in the newly launched Lock Collection at Tiffany and Co.

"Tiffany has a long history with locks," says Nella Tobia, the

group director of the store on Bloor Street in Toronto. A silver lock charm first introduced in 1837 has been resurrected from the company's archives as inspiration for the new collection of locks, which are available in a mix of metals including silver, gold and platinum. The company describes the pieces as "chic urban hardware."

Tiffany, Tobia says, is aware of the worldwide lock trend: "Our customers have traveled the world. They have seen these places, definitely."

Regardless of whether your love lock comes in a little blue box or from the hardware store, though, remember to throw away the key. That's how you know your love – and investment – will last forever.



Young lovers have peppered landmarks with padlocks in, from left to right, Cologne, Germany, Florence, Italy and Seoul, South Korea. GETTY IMAGES