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Look What Great Presents You Got for Being Friends with Elizabeth Taylor

By Rachel Tashjian | October 14, 2015



Liz on the set of Cleopatra with Joseph Mankiewicz and Richard Burton. From AP Photo.

During the notoriously stormy filming of *Cleopatra*, Taylor and Richard Burton gave the film's director a glitzy cigarette case to help him remember "the glamour of it all."

In the midst of her infamous on-set affair with *Cleopatra* co-star Richard Burton, jewelry extremist—oh, and world-famous actress—Elizabeth Taylor would take refuge in the sparkling environs of Rome's Bulgari flagship, adding diamonds and emeralds to her already mountainous collection, often with Burton in tow. As a new exhibition of the historic jewelry house shows, Taylor didn't just shop for herself: she managed to make one purchase—in cahoots with Dick, quel scandale!—for *Cleopatra* director Joseph Mankiewicz too. (The show opens Thursday, October 15 at Bulgari's flagship store in New York, and will run through November 22.)



Cigarette case in silver with coins of the II and III Century, 1962. Art Of Imaging

Mankiewicz celebrated his wedding to Rosemary Matthews in 1962, during the second grueling year of what would be a three-year process to complete the film. So Liz and Dick put their heads together to commission for him a silver cigarette case, inlaid with bronze coins from the second and third centuries and inscribed with the message:

“To Our Favorite Producer and Wife
Lest we forget the glamour of it all
All love
Elizabeth and Rich”

So there you have it: thanks to Taylor’s generous spirit, Mankiewicz could remember the destructive, scandalous liaisons of his two leading actors; the calamity of directing a script he was simultaneously re-writing; Taylor’s diva antics (including her admirable request not to shoot while she was on her period); and getting fired (though subsequently rehired!) every time he reached for another cigarette (and, all things considered, perhaps a sip of whiskey, too).

On view are a number of pieces celebrating the house’s connection with Rome, including a piece purchased by Barbara Sinatra using a blank check husband Frank left at the store, telling the clerks she could use it to buy anything she wanted.