



The Cutting Edge

Diamonds' New Facets Continue to Captivate

By Kristen Chanley

Grace Kelly used them to lure Cary Grant in *To Catch a Thief*. Marilyn Monroe had an affinity for them in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. And Elizabeth Taylor showed them off every chance she got. Diamonds have always been able to cast a compelling spell—and right now that spell is stronger than ever.

“Forget about minimalism,” says Elizabeth Florence, spokesperson for the Jewelry Information Center. “Right now we are seeing diamond hoops, three-stone rings, diamond drop earrings, and lots of glittering bracelets—from large, beautiful wide cuffs to the ever-classic diamond line bracelet.” As fashion forecaster David Wolfe of The Doneger Group explains, “Jewelry is now so important it’s become as big a statement as clothes.” Earlier this year, Heather Graham, Lucy Liu, and Charlize Theron were just three of numerous celebrities who were draped dazzlingly in diamonds at the Academy Awards.

Left, photo courtesy of Engagement and Wedding Rings by Antonette Mauns (Gemsone Press); this page, courtesy of 22 carats.



Classic Carats



Brilliant



Marquise



Oval



Colored Rectangular



Emerald



Pear

A diamond's value is determined by its rarity and measured by four main criteria:

CARAT One carat equals one-fifth of a gram. A carat is divided into 100 points; a 50-point diamond weighs 0.50 carats. **CLARITY** Most diamonds contain characteristics called "inclusions" (internal) and "blemishes" (external). The Gemological Institute of America grades diamonds in a range from flawless (FL) to those with larger inclusions (I3). **CUT** Proportion, symmetry, and polish result in cut, affecting how much light a stone reflects. **COLOR** Diamonds exist in every color of the spectrum. Nearly colorless (or white) are most common; body color is rated from D (colorless) to Z (light yellow).



Heart



It's not only the value but also the beauty of diamonds that influences trends.

In fact, according to the Diamond Information Center, we're more dazzled by diamonds than ever. Total sales of diamond jewelry increased by 12.1 percent from 1998 to 1999. The value of diamonds in general increased by 17.2 percent within the same time frame. Yet, according to Antoinette Matlins, gemologist and author of *Jewelry & Gems: The Buying Guide*, it's not only the value but also the beauty of diamonds that influences trends. And right now that beauty is reflected in unique cuts and striking colors. Sophisticated consumers are making less-traditional choices when they're selecting diamonds because, says Matlins, "There is a certain sophistication in wearing something apart from the norm."

Trends in Cutting

Within the past decade, diamond cutters have begun to experiment. As a result, the six traditional diamond shapes—Round Brilliant cut, Marquise, Oval, Pear-shaped, Emerald cut, and Heart shaped—have been slightly altered and augmented.

A perfect example is the Radiant cut, which is faceted like a round stone underneath, but shaped like a rectangle or square. The Princess cut, a radiant cut with sharp corners, is now the second-most popular cut, next to the Brilliant-cut round-shaped diamond.

The American "ideal" cut (a precision 58-facet round diamond) was developed by Marcel Tolkowsky in 1919. Today, the "Lazare Kaplan" ideal and the "Hearts on Fire" ideal (which produces reflections that form a hearts-and-arrows pattern visible with a special viewer) are popular variations of Tolkowsky's formula.

Dream and Royal cuts are excellent choices for those who want a larger look for their money. These "thin" cuts use extra faceting and precision cutting to bring out an unusual brilliance for their depth. For example, a Dream cut or Royal *Duchess* cut marquise will look much larger than a traditional marquise of the same weight. These cuts are popular in shapes resembling the marquise, pear, and oval.

Diamond cuts like the ones popular in the 1920s and '30s are once again in demand. "The jewelry from this time period has a quiet elegance that is timeless," says Frank Pollak, a third-generation jeweler specializing in estate jewelry. Three of the most popular antique cuts are the Antique Cushion cut (Brilliant cut combining oval with emerald shapes), the Asscher cut (antique Emerald cut as were those prior to 1930, in the shape of a square), and the Briolette cut (faceted all around and shaped like a teardrop).

Finally, among the most unique diamond cuts this season are the Chrisscut (created by Christopher Designs as a more lively version of



the Emerald cut with a special facet arrangement), the Gabrielle cut (designed by Gabi Tolikowsky, featuring 105 facets instead of 58), the Leo cut (designed by Leo Schachter Diamonds, with 66 facets), and the Lucida (created by Tiffany as a bold square shape with wide corners).

Matlins notes that proportion and precision are key elements of a truly beautiful cut. “It is cutting, not clarity, that affects the brilliance, liveliness, and sparkle that give your diamond personality,” she explains.

Color Trends

The famous 45.52-carat Blue Hope Diamond and the 41-carat Dresden Green Diamond are the largest diamonds of their respective colors in the world and illustrate the inherent beauty of colored stones. In fact, only one in 10,000 diamonds possesses color intense enough to be placed in a separate category—

“fancy colored diamonds”—and this group includes stones in every color of the rainbow.

The most important factor in considering colored diamonds is, of course, the richness of color. A colorless diamond is cut to maximize the stone’s brilliance, while a fancy colored diamond should be cut to enhance the intensity of the stone’s color. As a result, square radiant

and ovals are the most beautiful cuts for fancy colored diamonds. Fancy colored diamonds tend to be smaller stones, usually weighing less than a carat—so the value of colored diamonds is basically determined by the color and weight of the stone, since these characteristics have the most impact.

Matlins recommends paying particular attention to three things when you review the certificate for the diamond you intend to purchase: The color



Diamonds Are an URL's Best Friend

The Diamond Information Center found that most diamond customers are using the Internet for research and education before they buy—and that most would consider actually buying diamonds online. Cecilia Gardner, executive director and general counsel for the Jeweler's Vigilance Committee (www.jvclegal.org), says that although you need to be cautious, your experience with online companies can be as satisfying as those with brick-and-mortar stores. In fact, she notes that, "With diamond sales, there is not a predominance of fraud online in comparison to retail stores." Gardner offers these tips for shopping online:

CHECK THE WEB SITE FOR AFFILIATIONS with accredited organizations, such as the Jeweler's Vigilance Committee, to confirm that the company abides by industry policies and standards.

LOOK CLOSELY AT THE RETURN POLICY, which should be clearly displayed and permit full returns, no questions asked. If you have any trouble locating the policy on a site, consider purchasing elsewhere.

MAKE SURE YOU RECEIVE A CERTIFICATE from an accredited laboratory along with the diamond. For example, a Gemological Institute of America certificate will include a graph of the diamond and a GIA hologram.

Also note that there are many different types of diamond sites. Most offer visitors complete explanations of all aspects of diamond buying. However, many sites cater to consumers who know exactly what they want—down to specific carat weight and clarity grade. As a result, these sites typically offer only an order form with which you can search for a particular gem. According to Gardner, unless you are a professional jeweler, the information-intensive sites will probably serve you better, especially with regard to customer service.

For more than just an order form, check out these great diamond sites for research and shopping:

www.gia.edu

The sample certificate on this site will show you what to look for when you receive a certificate with your diamond. But our favorite part of the GIA site is their "How to Buy a Diamond" tutorial. Take this approximately 20-minute tutorial to feel like a diamond-buying expert.

www.diainfo.com

This independent public service diamond information site takes you through basic diamond-buying procedures and explains what to watch for when shopping online.

www.theknot.com

If you are specifically shopping for an engagement ring, check out their diamond finder, which lets you look for a diamond based on cut, color, clarity, carat, and, most important, cost.

www.adiamondisforever.com

Sponsored by DeBeers, this site answers all your diamond-buying questions—from traditional jewelry and stones to the most stylish diamond jewelry and cuts.

www.bluenile.com

Blue Nile offers a great site both for education and for buying. Includes free FedEx shipping and the option to buy insurance arranged through Chubb.

www.ashford.com

This site offers a broad array of diamonds and free insurance with Jewelers Mutual on diamonds for the first year after purchase.

www.mondera.com

Log in to a chat room while you're shopping, and a customer service representative is immediately assigned to you to answer all of your questions.

www.diamond.com

This resource cuts, polishes, and sells the stones themselves, cutting out the middleman—hence it offers great prices.



description should be "natural," the intensity of the color should be specific (will range from "faint" and "light" to "deep" and "vivid"), and the modifiers of color should be evident. A diamond that is brownish-yellow versus yellowish-brown will be much more expensive, because yellow is more valuable than brown.

The vivid red are the rarest of colored diamonds. In fact, 13 years ago, a fiery red diamond weighing just over .95 of a carat was sold at auction for about \$900,000. However, among the most popular colored diamonds are pink ones. Heather Locklear glowed in pink diamonds at the Golden Globe Awards. And at this year's Academy Awards ceremony, Julianne Moore and Salma Hayek displayed pink and yellow fancy colored diamonds, while Tyra Banks draped herself in an 81.62-carat fancy intense yellow cushion-cut diamond set in a pendant.

"Deciding what kind of personality you want your diamonds to have takes a little research," Matlins explains. "But it's worthwhile. And personality can only come from the cutting with its resulting brilliance and fire." •

