



ENGAGEMENT AND WEDDING RINGS

ARE DIAMONDS REALLY A GIRL'S 'BEST FRIEND'?

BY BELINDA DE LAUTOUR

AT THE END OF the last article in Femme issue 29 'Wedding Traditions – then and now' the topic was the different ways an engagement ring could be given, so I thought I'd follow with the history of the engagement, wedding rings.

Your engagement and wedding rings will be the most important pieces of jewellery you buy. This jewellery will signify that the wearer is in love, committed and spoken for and for the rest of your life these rings will be the first thing any person, who is romantically interested in you, will notice. In fact, they will be a signal to everyone you meet – a friend, employer, or shop owner for example, and will indeed express to them your personal taste in jewellery and this will last throughout your life. It is important that your engagement ring suits your lifestyle – for example: work and sport.

Are diamonds really a girl's 'best friend'?

The stone was first discovered in India around 800 BC and was named from the Greek word *adamas* meaning unconquerable. But the scarcity of this stone

meant that diamond engagement rings were almost impossible to purchase until after more mines were discovered in Brazil and latterly in Africa. It was only in the 20th century that the diamond became widely enough available to be the official engagement jewel.

When you are looking for a diamond it is important to be aware of the 4 Cs: cut, carat, colour and clarity.

Cut: A diamond's cut is its most important feature. A poorly cut diamond will 'leak' light out the back, reducing the stone's value. Well cut diamonds have brilliant sparkle.

“ You can't put a price tag on love, but you can on all its accessories

- Melanie Clark

Carat: A diamond's weight is measured in carats. One carat is equal to a fifth of a gram. A precision scale is used to weigh a diamond – a mere fraction of a carat can mean the difference between hundreds or thousands of dollars.

Colour: White diamonds are the most common and appear transparent but most have yellow, grey or brown tint. The diamond is graded by the jeweller on a letter scale beginning with D (colourless) to Z.

Clarity: The greater clarity of a diamond, the more brilliant it appears. Nearly all diamonds contain flaws and a flawless diamond is extremely rare and valuable. Small flaws will probably not be visible to the naked eye and are unlikely to hinder the stone's beauty.

Diamond shapes – the shape is the silhouette of the diamond when looking at it from above. These shapes are named: Brilliant, Cushion, Emerald, Square Emerald, Half Moon, Heart, Kite, Marquise, Pear, Octagon, Oval, Radiant and Princess.

Saul Spero, a New York diamond appraiser, spent 25 years interviewing over 50,000 people to determine whether there was any correlation between a woman's personality and her preference for diamond shape. His book, *Diamonds, Love, & Compatibility: So You Think You've Got a Gem*, published in 1977 has become a worldwide classic.

Shape Spero's Personality Traits

- Round** Family-centred, dependable, non-aggressive.
- Pear** Conforming, considerate, adaptable.
- Oval** Individualistic, creative, well-organised, willing to take chances.
- Princess** An efficient leader, disciplined, highly organised.
- Marquise** Extroverted, aggressive, innovative, career-centred.
- Emerald** Disciplined, conservative, efficient and honest.
- Heart** Sentimental, feminine, sensitive and trusting.

But if diamonds are not your 'best friend' and you would rather a gorgeous gemstone to set you apart from the crowd and express your individuality, there will be one in almost any colour you desire and the same 4 Cs can apply. Emeralds, rubies and sapphires are very popular or you may like to choose a stone that marks your birthday or indeed yours and your fiancé's.

Traditionally, birthstones were considered to have magical powers that would bring the wearer good fortune. Each birthstone also represents the positive qualities of those born in that month as the following chart shows:

Month	Stone	Personality
January	Garnet/Coral	You're constant and faithful.
February	Amethyst	Your sincerity shines through.
March	Aquamarine	Oh, courageous one!
April	Diamond	Purity and Innocence.
May	Emerald	You're successful and live in hope.
June	Pearl	You enjoy good health.
July	Ruby	You know passion and contentment.
August	Jade	You'll be happily married.
September	Sapphire	You're wise and repentant.
October	Opal	You're lovable.
November	Topaz	You're always cheerful.
December	Turquoise/ Lapis Lazuli	You have an unselfish nature.

There are hundreds of precious stones to choose from – every colour imaginable and many metals can be used for the making of the ring, but there are only a few basic ways in which the stones can be secured in the ring. This is called the setting – more decisions! The various ways of setting are: claw, bezel, channel, flush, tension, bar, cluster, pave, invisible and semi-mounting.

It would be most unusual to have a wedding without having wedding rings included.

As a celebrant I always have a spare pair of plain rings with me at the ceremony just in case the original rings are forgotten. It is usually the best man's responsibility to be in charge of the wedding rings and usually just after the bride and groom have said their vows to each other the best man is asked for the rings. This ring role can also be shared with the chief bridesmaid whereby the best man gives the bride's ring to the groom to slip on her finger and the groom's ring is given to the bride by her 'best lady'.

The other option is for a page boy / ring bearer to walk up the aisle with the rings on a ring cushion.

Wedding rings serve as a symbol of the vows that are made at a marriage ceremony. They are the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible love that binds two people together.

The rings are made of the finest of earth's materials, as the couple's love is of the richest of human values. As rings are without edge and seam, having no beginning and no end, so they symbolise the perfection of love which knows no end.

The early Roman gentleman gave his betrothed a simple iron band – some centuries later this iron ring became a plain gold band. The precious yellow alloy of gold, hardened with copper, tin and bismuth is what is most commonly used for wedding rings today. Platinum and white alloys of gold are also used and titanium has recently become a popular material for wedding rings due to its durability, affordability and grey colour. Stainless steel is beginning to be used for rings as it has the same durability as platinum and titanium and also has a finer finish than the latter. Silver, copper, brass and other cheaper metals are not used because they tend to corrode over time and therefore do not represent that 'forever' aspect!

Aluminium and poisonous metals are almost never used to make wedding rings.

There are also the hand crafted Celtic rings which can each have the symbolic meaning of infinity, wisdom, circle of life, hope, dreams and love to name a few.

So look after this beautiful piece of jewellery and try not to wear your ring when doing the gardening or using chlorine as the latter can cause pitting and discolouration. Don't handle your rings by the stone but instead by the shank (metal) part. Do store your rings so they can't be scratched by other jewellery preferably in a jewellery box that has separate compartments and use a jewellery roll when travelling. Do take your rings to have a regular 'check up' at the jeweller. This will ensure the stones are securely in place, the metal will be examined for wear and breakages and your new 'best friend' will be given a professional clean.

Remember to choose jewellery that you fall in love with and when you glance down at your left hand you will be reminded of your love - every day of your life.