



# What's Love Got To Do With It?

Tips on buying your first engagement ring

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Sketch of Rhodes by Violet Manners



White gold ring with an oval aquamarine, 2.21ct and 24 brilliant-cut diamonds totalling 0.27ct

White gold ring with an oval emerald from Colombia, 1.26ct and two pear-shape diamonds totalling 0.63ct

AH MONOGAMY— THAT most beautiful and noble of endeavours. It's the very bedrock of cultured society. Nay! Of civilisation itself. A leading indicator of whether your offspring will rejuvenate the economy and thus familial coffers, or subsist as council-housed rats is whether, growing up, he or she knew the love and security of having a married mother and father. Marriage even reduces the probability of child poverty by 80%. So yes, work hard, apply for a mortgage and get hitched. It might be your single greatest act of patriotic selflessness. But you don't need my reasons. If you're reading this, chances are high you already have your very own 'he' or very special 'she' in mind. Or perhaps a non-binary peculiarity of some sort.

Before you get the inside scoop on successful diamond purchases, I'd like to offer several names to curse if you're confounded by the popularity of these shiny lattices of carbon atoms. Why are diamonds even desirable?

When the heck did an inanimate object become a girl's best friend? It's rather telling that the next most popular use of these rocks are as industrial abrasives.

Firstly, I blame the vexatious obsession common folk will always have for aristocracy. Frederick the Third, a.k.a. Frederick the Fat a.k.a. Arch-Sleepyhead of the Holy Roman Empire, was the first emperor of the House of Habsburg, Austria. He wasn't so much concerned with leading Catholics on the straight and narrow than accumulating real estate. So in one fell swoop, he married off his son Maximilian the First to the daughter of chief rival, Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, staving off deadly competition and bringing Burgundian lands in France under his son's control. To distract from the politics and lend an air of sincerity, Maximilian gave his betrothed a diamond ring in 1477, the first recorded in history. And as it ever will be, upon receiving some form of material wealth, the female countered with the promise of sex— she



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tantalised him with an offering of her stockings.

While that sparked chatter among peasants and fellow nobility, diamonds hadn't yet caught on as magnificently as they sparkle. Successful proposals were still signified by a ring, but it was more popular to attach birthstones instead. Take Prince Albert who gave Queen Victoria—a May babe—an emerald ring for their 1840 proposal. Apparently two garters were sent back as a sign of acceptance. A beguiling tradition if only chastity were still a virtue.

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Still, poor financial decisions aside—especially when you're struggling to establish your own household—a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. And like Beyoncé hypophorically asks, "Who run the world?", you could do much worse than a diamond. Everyone knows they're tough, so

## ENGAGEMENT RING

Platinum ring with a step-cut diamond, 6.20ct, as well as four pear-shape diamonds totalling 0.17ct, 10 diamond baguettes totalling 0.23ct and 68 brilliant-cut diamonds totalling 0.32ct



White gold ring with three brilliant-cut diamonds

Platinum ring with an Asscher-cut diamond, 5.75ct, as well as four pear-shape diamonds totalling 0.19ct, 10 diamond baguettes totalling 0.25ct and 68 brilliant-cut diamonds totalling 0.29ct

these rocks are less wearing than other gems or pearls for instance. But as expert gemologist Mink Ong, will tell you, diamonds aren't indestructible.

"You can chip a diamond if you knock it at some unfortunate angle. They're cut to allow the most amount of light of sparkle through them, so while they're hard, you still have to be careful," explains Mink, who's also managing director of Mystique Universal which manages brands like Gübelin and Garrard in Starhill Gallery. The former is a centuries-old family-owned Swiss gemstone and luxury jeweller, while the latter designed Princess Diana's engagement ring and has been royal jewellers of choice for many generations, as well as the oldest jewellery house in the world.

Mink herself has been selling jewellery all her life. She's seen a tonne of power-suited men walk through her doors, stressed as cats, with no idea what they should be looking for. So it's safe to assume she has an idea or two about the industry.

And pointedly, even after my virulent diatribe, nothing tops watching your

girlfriend's face light up like it's Christmas in July, when you drop on bended knee with a velvet box in hand. That was one hell of a heist. Adding insult to injury, *Advertising Age* in 1999 rightly declared the grammatically incorrect 'A Diamond is Forever' as the slogan of the century.

Plus, and this is a massive point, a shiny rock shuts up annoying relatives. Not that my girlfriend's were particularly difficult, but you know the types I'm talking about. Aunty So-And-So, Cousin What's-Her-Face, and even the occasional Uncle Why-Does-He-Have-An-Opinion-On-This will undoubtedly drop a comment or two ie. "Oooh... is this the one you really wanted ah?" and squint their beady eyes like they're struggling with the onset of premature cataracts. Screw me sideways with a nail gun, but it's easier to scale the Everest on a broken leg than conquering the psychology of shiny rocks.

Being a poor soul, I spoke to a series of jewellers with a sprinkling of peer advice. Everyone recited interpretations from the classical 'Text of the Four Cs'. Stupefying stuff when you're struggling to keep up. Thankfully, as a former salesman who still knows his way around a cold call, I know sales spiel with I hear it. Mink just seemed more... candid. She strides into the Versace-designed Gübelin boutique, every inch an old-school sales matriarch,

decreeing edicts for fresh coffee and flip charts. Staff scurry to tidy up and make way as she invites me to sit across a small discussion table. First thing on her mind? "You have to try our coffee. People come in just for the espresso." I agreeably order an espresso and the presentation gets underway.

### STEP 1: EVERYONE SHOULD DECIDE ON THEIR OWN TRADITIONS

Potential suitors can shake things up if they like. If you're an uncommon man, or more importantly, if you're dating an uncommon lady, engagement rings need not be diamond alone. There are emeralds, rubies and sapphires to consider. Like I've highlighted above, royals like these kind of things. Kate Middleton's blue sapphire ring had previously adorned Princess Diana's hand, before being reset by Garrard. But if a diamond it must be...

### STEP 2: WHICH OF THE FOUR CS ARE MOST CRUCIAL

Mink wisely spells it out, "When it comes to diamonds, do you know which is the most important 'C'? It's cost of course!"

First determine how much you're willing to part with, and adds, "Use the figure as a guide and ask yourself, what is it you really need? Once you have a rough idea, you can look at the first C, carat." Why? Because unless you're



Mink Ong, managing director of Mystique Universal which manages Gübelin and Garrard

carrying a pocket-sized fluorescent torch and accompanying loupe, no one's going to be debating clarity and colour. Asian, white, black, brown—people will be people according to Mink, driven by the same superficial logic that size equals sincerity.

### STEP 3: DETERMINING CLARITY

But if you're fussy with details, the sort that Googles, welcome to the rabbit hole. You already know diamonds need a lot of pressure, a lot of heat and a long time to form—apparently between one to three billion years. Phase one of the sorting process determines if all that cooking time has left internal 'inclusions' or external 'blemishes'. Highly marked stones are relegated to group 'I', followed by 'SI', 'VS', 'VVS', with the clearest diamonds given an 'Internally Flawless' or 'Flawless' designation. This is what they call clarity.

### STEP 4: ASSERTING COLOUR

Next up we consider colour. Using an alphabetical scale, with the best and most colourless stones under groupings D, E and F. Tier two is designated for near colourless stones, in groups G, H, I and J. It goes all the way to Z, and for reasons that escape logic, there isn't any A, B or C.

### STEP 5: RESOLVING THE CUT

Diamonds need to reflect as much light as possible to come alive, and quite frankly, to

make sure you've got your money's worth. Experts rate cut on three levels: grade, polish and symmetry. There's a whole branch of science dedicated to cutting and polishing diamonds, but for the sake of brevity, a triple excellent rating sees all three levels receiving top marks. A double excellent means two out of three levels got flying colours ie:

- Grade: Excellent,
- Polish: Excellent,
- Symmetry: Yeah, that'll work.

### STEP 6: A DIAMOND THAT SPEAKS TO YOU

To recap, your budget determines size (carat), then you fine tune your choices via shininess (clarity + colour + cut). Got the right size but too costly? We go down in clarity perhaps. Set on the right colour but it isn't sparkling enough? Go up on cut then. Or so the logic goes.

"The naked eye can hardly differentiate between VS and VVS. Instead I always tell my clients to go for a diamond that talks to them, one whose sparkle catches their eye. That's the most important factor," says Mink.

### STEP 7: BRAND OR NO BRAND

Now that you've got that ideal combination of Cs, there's only one last hurdle to negotiate. Will you opt for a branded diamond or a local selection? According to Mink, International brands like Gübelin and Garrard are well recognised in markets worldwide, but they also command a higher price in exchange for the superior quality as well as the prestige reputation that comes along with it. Local brands also have their own signature traits like patented cuts that promise maximum brilliance that they charge a premium for as well.



Kate's royal engagement ring, a total dazzler that first belonged to Prince William's late mother, Princess Diana. It's a Ceylon sapphire ring created by former Crown Jeweller Garrard & Co, with 14 solitaire diamonds surrounding the 12ct centre stone, all set in 18k white gold"

"All in all, if you don't want to get confused, use the four Cs to guide you and opt for a triple excellent cut," she concludes. That way you can ensure maximum bling for your buck, and enough of your partner's contemporaries will fake blindness at the brilliance of such a special rock.👑



The interior of the Versace-designed Gübelin boutique in Starhill Gallery