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ROCK RULES

FOLLOW THESE 4 EXPERT TIPS
FOR CHOOSING AND BUYING
YOUR PERFECT DIAMOND.

An engagement ring does more than sit pretty on a bride's left hand. It tells the story of you and your beloved, and the bond you have with one another. Diamond rings can have just as much personality and be as varied as each couple themselves, which is why it is so important to take the time to find the perfect stone to express your perfect love story. Before you set out on your diamond hunt, take to heart these words of wisdom from top rock experts.

writer JULIE LEMEROND ~ photo LARRY FAGALA

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1. PICK A TRUE PRO.

Before you even start looking at rings, the very first thing you should do is find a jeweler you can trust. Award-winning jeweler Alfredo Molina, CEO and owner of Molina Fine Jewelers in Phoenix, and Black, Starr & Frost in Newport Beach, Calif., prides himself and his dedicated staff on providing a one-of-a-kind experience for each individual client who walks through his door. That kind of personalized service, he says, is the sign of a consummate professional.

When searching for a jeweler, "Do your homework," he recommends. "There are no laws at the state or federal level that protect the consumer. Anybody can become a jeweler." And just like the purveyors who sell them, "All diamonds are not created equal," he adds.

A quality jeweler has ties to the community, a history of good business practices and a reputation of trust. Look for a jeweler who has certification from the Gemological Institute of America (GIA)—a well-respected national organization that trains gemologists to the highest standards of the industry. And keep in mind that finding a jeweler with a longstanding history also means that you can continue to build a relationship over the years, as you continue to add to your jewelry collection in the future.

**2. LEARN THE 4 C'S—
ESPECIALLY THE FIRST ONE.**

There are four main components that sum up what to look for when purchasing a diamond, commonly referred to as the "4 C's": cut, color, clarity and carat weight.

The cut of a diamond is by far the most important of the four, says Gilad Zadok, executive vice president

of advertising, marketing and digital media for Zadok Jewelers in Houston. When it comes to sparkle, he says, "Cut is king. Color and clarity will not make your stone sparkle more; cut is what will do that."

Katelyn Cristoforetti, lead "perfection stylist" for diamond firm Hearts On Fire, couldn't agree more. "Cut is the 'C' that really makes your diamond sparkle, and the diamond industry states that if a diamond's clarity, color and carat weight all remain constant, then cut will affect the value of the diamond by as much as 50 percent or more," she says.

While cut is the biggest player in the 4 C's, color, clarity and carat weight also do have some bearing on a ring's brilliance. Color and clarity are graded on a scale and can vary greatly from stone to stone, and as mentioned above, can be enhanced or dulled by the cut of the stone.

It's not just the shape of the cut, but the quality of that cut, that brings out the hidden features of the diamond. "Even between two diamonds that are the same shape, the quality and symmetry of the actual cut will dictate the brilliance and radiance of the diamonds," says Zadok.

There are seemingly endless cut shapes for diamonds these days, which means it pays to pay attention to what you like—on celebrities' fingers, in magazines and on sites like Pinterest and Instagram. The most popular cut—which also happens to be the most timeless—is the classic round. Yet there are a myriad of other choices as well: cushion, square/princess, emerald, Asscher, oval, heart and pear, to name several (see "Diamond Glossary" sidebar for descriptions).

No matter what shape you select, remember: "You want to get the best sparkle with the diamond you choose," says Cristoforetti. "Having the diamond cut perfectly, you know you are getting the performance you want, meaning the sparkle factor."

**3. DON'T SETTLE FOR
JUST ANY SETTING.**

Finding your ideal stone is one thing—and has much to do with simple science and skill. Choosing a setting for your gorgeous sparkler is another enterprise entirely—one that depends on personal taste, style, personality and desire.

Zadok advises brides: "Go with what you think expresses your sense

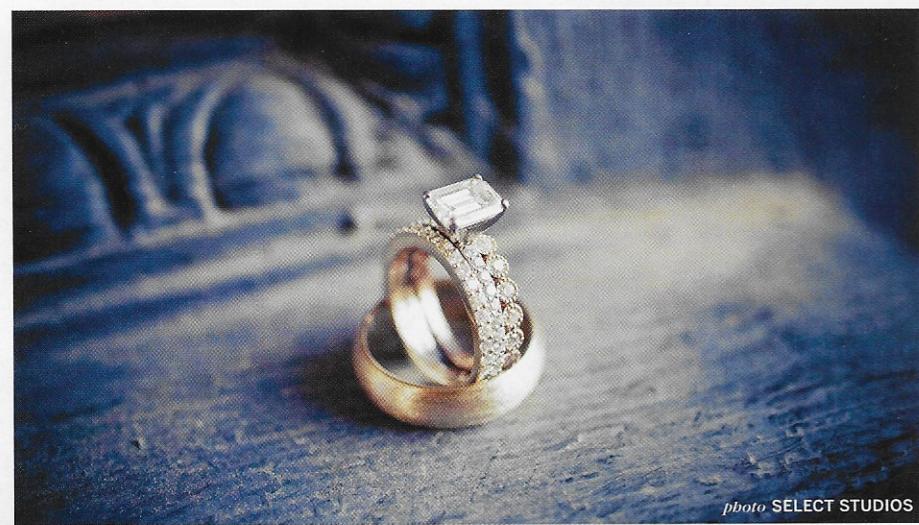


photo SELECT STUDIOS

of style," as each bride's personality and taste may differ. He recommends looking for something that will be "beautiful and desirable for many years to come. Picture looking for a ring that your future daughter will want to wear someday."

Molina breaks it down even further. "There are so many things to take into consideration when purchasing a diamond ring, but remember that this is going to be something that will be worn the rest of your life," he says. He urges couples to be practical when selecting the setting for the gem that eyes will be drawn to on a daily basis. "Jewelry should be selected by the physical attributes of the wearer," he says. "On long fingers, elongated or oval cut stones are very becoming, whereas on shorter fingers, a round stone is more becoming," he explains.

But even more important, says Molina, is the feeling you get when looking at and wearing the ring. "My grandfather used to always say the number one thing to ask yourself, is 'Does it speak to me?'"

4. AVOID CONFLICT.

Any diamond bought in the United States these days should be from a conflict-free source. "Several years ago, leading diamond manufacturers joined with the UN in adopting an international agreement known as the Kimberley Process (KP) to prevent all traffic in conflict diamonds. The KP requires certificates of origin to be attached to all rough diamonds from conflict-free countries," says Cristoforetti.

Molina and Zadok agree, saying that conflict diamonds are a thing of the past, as long as you are purchasing within U.S. borders.

Knowing the provenance of your diamond, and knowing that you have invested your heart and mind in the diamond-buying experience, can ensure not just satisfaction in your purchase, but a true sense of joy. You'll take joy, too, in knowing that you have

found a jeweler who will be with you through life's milestones and celebrations. "Jewelry is the most emotionally charged gift that a man can buy a woman," Molina says. "We are proud to be a part of that process, that part of a family's history."

Diamond Glossary

ASSCHER CUT: A popular, square, eight-sided cut shape.

BEZEL: The upper, faceted part of the diamond.

CARAT: The weight of a diamond.

CLARITY: The presence or absence of inclusions and/or blemishes to the stone.

COLOR: Gemological Institute of America certifications use a scale of D through Z to describe the color of a diamond. Within each letter grade can be variations as well.

CROWN: The top of the diamond after it is cut.

CULET: The point at the bottom of a cut diamond.

CUSHION CUT: Also called pillow cut, because it is shaped like a square pillow.

CUT: The way a rough diamond is finished. This is the most important factor in how brilliantly a diamond reflects light.

EMERALD CUT: This type of cut has long rectangular facets.

FACET: One of many flat surfaces on a cut diamond.

FIRE: The effect of light hitting the stone, creating a dramatic reflection in a rainbow of colors.

GIRDLE: The widest part of the diamond.

MARQUISE CUT: A fancy cut shape; it is elongated with points at each end.

PAVÉ: Tightly placed small diamonds, pieced together so that the metal on the ring is hidden.

PAVILION: The space from the girdle down to the culet of the diamond.

PEAR CUT: This shape is round at one end and tapered at the other.

SQUARE OR PRINCESS CUT: A brilliant cut that can be square or rectangular in shape.

TABLE: The size of the facet at the crown; larger tables may seem brighter but may lack fire.