

Forbes

How To Shop For Natural Diamond Jewelry Like An Expert

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[Watches & Jewelry](#) *I cover upmarket jewelry, timepieces & ethical, sustainable jewelry.*

As Valentine's Day approaches, lovers and others are shopping for natural diamond jewelry, or dreaming about it, because no gem embodies romantic symbolism, sparkling beauty and eternal value more than a natural diamond. While you're swimming through oceans of information online and visiting jewelry stores, how can you be certain that you're getting a natural diamond and not a lab-grown one? Here's what you need to know about their differences.



Waving to celebratory crowds on her 2018 wedding day, the Duchess of Sussex showcased her natural diamond ring, which was designed by her husband Prince Harry and custom made in yellow gold by court jewellers [Cleave and Company](#). The jewel is centered with an ethically sourced, cushion cut diamond from Botswana that appears to be about three carats, and is flanked by two smaller diamonds that the Prince inherited from his mother, the late Princess Diana. PHOTO BY JAMES DEVANEY/GC IMAGES

According to Soraya Cayen, owner of the [Cayen Collection](#) in Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA., "Most people who buy natural diamond

jewelry are buying pavé (very small stones) or single stones less than 1 carat, so these diamonds won't have a diamond grading report specifying the diamond's carat weight, cut, color and clarity grades." If you're shopping for a smaller natural diamond, Cayen suggests, "Request a jeweler's loupe so you can view the diamond under magnification. Looking at a diamond through the loupe," Cayen explains, "will reveal inclusions, which are small imperfections created within the diamond's crystal structure as a result of extreme pressures and heat experienced during formation." Certain types of inclusions are more characteristic of natural diamonds than synthetic, lab-grown stones, Cayen notes, and these range from tiny black spots to needles to clouds, fluids and crystals. "Inclusions are a sign of a natural diamond and they shape a diamond's uniquely beautiful character," Cayen says. "Examining a diamond, even pavé diamonds, through a jeweler's loupe is the smart thing to do."

When shopping for natural diamond jewels of any type, "It's also important to define how the piece will be worn," Cayen relates. "Will the diamond jewel be worn every day, or only for special occasions as a 'cocktail jewel?'" Asking your jeweler for his/her opinion regarding how the setting of a diamond jewel will hold up under long-term wear can help ensure that you purchase a piece that stays in great shape over the long haul."

For instance, Cayen advises, "If you are looking for a natural diamond ring that you or your loved one intends to wear while gardening, a 1-carat Princess cut diamond set in a traditional 4-prong mounting may be a less than ideal choice." A jeweler's small but strategic adjustments to the design, Cayen notes, can ensure the diamond is set securely enough so that the wearer can enjoy the ring throughout their lifetime," Cayen says.

Besides being dramatically and sometimes astronomically more valuable than synthetic diamonds, it's a fact that natural diamonds are getting rarer. Mining industry reports indicate that the number of recovered diamonds peaked in 2005, and has decreased with each passing year. What's more, the ancient, underground volcanic kimberlite pipes, inside which diamonds are found, are very difficult to locate. The majority of diamonds recovered today come from kimberlites discovered decades ago, which is why diamond production is waning and diamonds are becoming rarer. "Natural diamonds, even ones smaller than one carat, are more valuable than lab-grown ones, which hold virtually zero resale value," Cayen asserts.

“Buyers need to be aware that lab-grown diamonds are sometimes advertised and sold as natural diamonds,” says luxury brand advisor Converse Roberts, who works with jewelry designers like Temple St. Clair, K. Brunini, Paul Morelli and Oscar Heyman, all of whom use responsibly sourced natural diamonds. “Establish whether the collection you are considering includes natural or lab-created diamonds before making any assumptions,” says Roberts, whose clients include Belle Cose, the Jackson Hole, Wyoming and Vero Beach, Florida jewelry, interior décor and furniture store.



This [Forevermark](#) by Precision Set Round Solitaire Ring set in platinum is a classic choice for an engagement ring. Forevermark diamonds are responsibly sourced from a handful of carefully selected mines that benefit the environment, community and country where they are located. Because of their sustainable origins, Forevermark diamonds are favored by retailers and shoppers who seek superb natural diamond jewelry FOREVERMARK

Better jewelers always disclose the truth about their diamonds and routinely provide lab reports and/or documentation regarding their origins, Cayen notes. “The first thing I ask for when evaluating diamonds or a designer collection for potential sale in my boutique is documentation indicating that the diamonds are responsibly sourced and conflict-free,” she says.

As it happens, Googling or hash-tagging “Canadian diamonds” or “certified conflict-free diamonds” can lead you to many brands that carry natural diamonds as well as conflict-free diamonds. Roberts explains that, “While ethical jewelry brands like [Ana Katarina](#) use only Canadian diamonds, [Maria Canale](#) personally chooses every diamond in her collections and refuses to buy diamonds that lack Kimberly Process certification.”



Glittering natural, round brilliant diamonds enhance the dramatic style and substance of an 18-karat rose gold and morganite cocktail ring by [Karma El Khalil](#). Her jewels are available at www.roseark.com PHOTO COURTESY OF KARMA EL KHALIL.

While it is impossible to say with total certainty what percentage of diamonds in the marketplace are conflict-free, diamonds from such countries Canada, Russia, Australia, Botswana and various other African countries are conflict-free and so are vintage and estate diamonds. As Roberts relates, "In 2002, a coalition of governments, non-governmental organizations, and diamond industry leaders established an international program, the Kimberley Process, to control the export and import of rough diamonds in an attempt to eliminate conflict diamond trade. The Kimberley Process Certification program," she continues, "specifies regulations and requirements that participating countries must follow to ensure a diamond is mined and shipped in a humane, legitimate way. Diamonds meeting these regulations are exported with the Kimberley Process certificate. Before buying a diamond, request this certificate. An absence of Kimberley Process certificate is a major red flag that the diamond you are looking at is something different from what the jeweler claims it is."



This [Forevermark](#) by Premier Gem Princess Cut Three-Stone Ring set in 18-karat white gold FOREVERMARK JEWELERS

In the case of black diamond jewelry, be sure to ask whether the dark diamonds have been enhanced with a treatment or are *natural, untreated* black diamonds, says Susan Oster, the designer and owner of the Los Angeles-based [Feral Jewelry](#). “The dark color of black diamonds is caused either by dark inclusions, or, more often, by color treatment,” Oster says. (Most black diamonds are treated to become a green that is so dark that it appears to be black.) “I only use natural, untreated black diamonds in my pieces,” Oster notes. “While natural black diamonds are valuable yet less expensive than colorless diamonds of similar grade, they’re dramatically more valuable than lab-grown ones.”

When shopping for estate diamond jewelry, your first step, especially if the stone is 1-carat or larger, is to ask for a diamond grading reporting or have it appraised so you know exactly what you’re considering buying. “Following close behind are design and craftsmanship,” agree jewelers Mariana Antinori, Lee Essex Doyle and Juan Prieto, who are the principals of DomusAurea <https://www.domusaurea.us/>, which is membership-based online marketplace where customers can find unique, high-end contemporary and estate jewelry as well as bespoke pieces from a hand-selected group of top designers from around the world. “The values of many diamond estate pieces are less dependent on the quality of their stones, unless these are important, high carat diamond pieces,” the DomusAurea experts agree. “While traditional, old mine and rose cut diamonds are less flashy than

round brilliants, they are lovely, romantic cuts that add great character to a jewel.” Noting that, “2019 is a particularly good time to be buying unsigned Art Deco diamond jewelry as prices are way down from where they were five to ten years ago,” the DomusAurea principals report that designs from the 1970’s are up, while 1980’s pieces are still a buy.”



Designer [Karma El Khalil](#) created this moonstone and natural diamond, 18-karat white gold "Constellation" necklace for her Rock Hall collection. Her jewels are available at www.roseark.com PHOTO COURTESY EL KHALIL

Regardless of whether you’re buying a classic diamond solitaire engagement ring or a natural black diamond pavé heart-shaped pendant this Valentine’s Day, take the time to research natural diamond jewels and designers. When dealing with sales associates, establish that you’re being shown natural diamonds rather than lab-grown ones. (Reputable jewelers and their suppliers use diagnostic detection instruments and record results in a computerized log to ensure they are only selling natural diamonds.) Ask a reputable jeweler for documentation of your diamond’s origins. Finally, as New York-based designer Karma El Khalil says, “When considering a diamond jewelry purchase, you should only buy what you love, or what your loved one loves!”