

# Diamonds

Choosing a diamond engagement ring is very exciting, but unless you know what to look for in a diamond, the process can be confusing and even intimidating. To learn about diamonds and engagement rings, Martha visited Tiffany & Co., which has been in the business of setting and selling diamonds for more than 160 years. Melvyn Kirtley, vice president and general manager of Tiffany & Co., explains the fundamentals of choosing the diamond (or diamonds) and settings for an engagement ring.

According to the ancient Greek legend, diamonds were splinters of stars fallen to earth. What they are, in fact, is a volcanic mass, harder than any other natural substance, one hundred times harder than rubies or sapphires, with a melting point several times greater than that of steel. Nonetheless, they blaze with reflected and refracted light, marrying beauty and toughness.

It takes about 250 tons of ore, mined and processed, to produce a one-carat polished diamond of gem quality. Comparatively few diamonds are large enough to be polished into anything much bigger than the head of a match. What's more, not all diamonds are of gem quality; some 50 percent don't measure up and are used for industrial purposes. Nevertheless, not all diamonds are astronomically expensive. While there are stones that cost thousands, or millions, there are also many that are \$1,000 or less.

Size is no measure of price. There are one-carat stones that sell for \$1,000 and others of the same size that are \$18,000. A fine-quality one-carat blue stone can cost well over \$200,000. Price depends on four factors: carats, clarity, color, and cut—the four Cs.

Carats refer to the weight, because diamonds were originally weighed against the seeds of the carob tree. One carat is .2 grams and is divided into one hundred points. A twenty-five-point diamond is a quarter of a carat.

Clarity is the second of the four Cs. Almost all diamonds have minute imperfections, called inclusions (and sometimes poetically described as nature's fingerprint), but most are invisible to the naked eye. The fewer the inclusions, the rarer the stone. A stone is termed flawless if it is without surface blemishes or internal imperfections.

Can an average buyer see clarity in a stone? Not to the same degree as an expert. But even an amateur can spot some imperfections and judge brilliance and light-factors that are certainly as important as size. When looking at diamonds, put several next to each other and compare. First, look for marks, almost like the slashes in ice cubes; marks mean the diamond is less valuable. Then, look at the cut. Better-cut diamonds will sparkle a lot; less well-cut diamonds will look glassy and flat.

Most gem diamonds are referred to as colorless. Chances are, however, that even so-called colorless stones contain a nearly invisible pinch of yellow or brown.

Nature dictates carat, clarity, and color. People control the fourth C: cut. It is human skill that determines the brilliance of a stone. The more precisely a cutter lines up facets, proportion, and depth, the better the chance that the stone will be superb brilliant.

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There are seven basic diamond shapes. The round brilliant is the most popular; it is generally cut with fifty-eight facets, or small planes, that give the diamond its brilliance. The oval is simply a round adaptation but, in identical carat weight, generally appears larger. The marquise is a long, vertical cut, pointed at both ends, while the emerald cut is rectangular, with stepped facets on each side and across the corners. The heart, pear, and square (princess) cuts are just the shape that their names indicate.

Although diamonds are impervious to most things (they cannot be scratched except by another diamond), a hard blow or a hard surface can chip them. It's never advisable to wear a diamond while doing housework or in the bathtub. They can be dulled by skin oils, soap, cosmetics, and cooking grease, and should be cleaned periodically. A mild liquid detergent in warm water and a soft toothbrush are all that you need. Put the ring in a strainer so it doesn't slip down the drain, rinse under warm water, and pat dry with a soft, lintless cloth. A cold-water soak is also effective—use half cold water, half household ammonia, soak for thirty minutes, and drain on paper.

And where did the diamond get its name? From the Greek word *adamas*, which means unconquerable.

Sources:

Tiffany & Co.  
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1-800-843-3269  
[www.tiffany.com](http://www.tiffany.com)

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