

Gift of jewelry sparkles and dazzles for a bright holiday season

BY SALLY D. KETCHUM
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Diamonds, a girl's best friend at holiday time — or any time — is often a man's best friend, too. Fine jewelry is always a classic and favorite gift.

This season, a piece of perennial advice rings during the shopping season: In placing custom jewelry orders, the sooner the better.

Diamonds, of course, are treasured the world over. It is interesting to note that jewelry fits in to the Christmaside in different ways in different cultures.

In the Christian gift-giving traditions, the jewelry style often has religious connotations, stars or crosses or gifts associated with rarity and preciousness like the gifts of the Wise Men for the Christ Child, especially gold.

Yet Christmas and jewelry gifts have entered the culture of countries not generally considered Christian.

In Japan, gift jewelry, especially diamonds, is a major part of the rush of materialism that characterizes the Japanese holiday. Christmas there is a romantic time and diamonds figure

big. Advertisements feature diamonds falling from the heavens like stars. Tiffany jewelry is especially coveted, lines often form outside of the Tokyo Tiffany's store.

Michelle Brett, appraiser, jewelry designer and sales associate at Traverse City's Miner's North, says that the range of diamonds that they carry is wide as far as quality and price.

"There is a lot of change happening in the diamond industry right now," she said. "Miner's North works with four of the major suppliers in the industry, including Hearts of Fire."

Much of the change happening is the recent success of a method to "make" real diamonds. Carbon gas is added to a vacuum which contains a seed diamond, about 1/10th of a karat, and a larger diamond is "grown" from the seed.

That's how man-made diamonds that are more or less identical to mined diamonds are coming on the market. The prices, of course, will be lower than the natural stones.

So, will the lady (or gentleman) buy the new diamonds? Most Traverse City jewel-

ers have access to the new stones and opinions about them vary.

Brett says that "the mystique and romance is lost on a synthetic that was made in two weeks."

She points out that the incredible journey that a natural diamond makes is over millions of years.

Nevertheless, a recent survey by Apollo Diamonds of

Boston finds that 50 percent of women would buy man-made stones, 27 percent said they would not, and 23 percent said they were not sure.

Judging quality in diamonds is a new (and often dangerous) venture for most shoppers, but reputable jewelers are patient and helpful. Most jewelers give clients a concise and educational tour through the dia-

mond buying experience.

The Miner's North premium cuts are the highest performing diamonds (on a scale of 0-10, 10 being the highest).

By way of comparison, Brett said, "Our premiums are the Ferrari's and the diamonds in our private collection are the Mercedes."

Jewelers point out that there are other options to buying a new diamond. Many

people have diamonds, perhaps family pieces, with outdated styles.

Diamonds can be re-cut, cut down if damaged or chipped, or re-set. In that case, it is even possible that the setting itself might have value as an antique piece.

Sally D. Ketchum is a local freelance writer.

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