

The ring: Choosing a setting that dazzles with the diamond

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When shopping for an engagement ring, the diamond is often the focus of attention for brides and grooms looking for the right balance of cut, color, clarity and carat at the right price. But the precious metal one chooses for the setting is equally important.

While the selection of gold or platinum may be mostly about personal taste, each precious metal has different qualities that make it attractive.

Here are some tips to keep in mind from the Jewelers of America on choosing and caring for gold and platinum jewelry. For more information, visit www.jewelers.org.

Going gold

Look for the quality mark. Since pure gold is generally considered too soft for making jewelry, you'll see 18-, 14- and 10-karat gold on the market.

■ Eighteen karat is 18/24ths, or three-quarters, pure gold. Jewelry of this fineness is marked 18k or 750, the European designation meaning 75 percent gold.

■ In the United States, 14-karat gold is used most commonly for jewelry. Fourteen-karat gold is 14/24ths, or slightly more than one-half, pure gold. Jewelry of this fineness is marked 14k or 585, the European designation meaning 58.5 percent gold.

■ Nothing less than 10-karat gold can be legally marked or sold as gold jewelry in the United States. These pieces are marked 10k or 417, the European designation meaning 41.7 percent gold.

Gold care

While lasting and durable, gold jewelry can be damaged by household chemicals or even just improper storage. Some care tips:

■ Avoid chlorine at all costs, it is gold's worst enemy. Repeated exposure can weaken its structure, which will lead to breakage. Keep your jewelry away from chlorinated cleaning products and out of swimming pools and hot tubs.

■ Keep gold jewelry free from dust, moisture, perspiration and makeup.

■ Store your rings safely by wrapping in a soft cloth when not being worn. This will help protect them from being scratched.

■ Clean your gold jewelry with a cleaning solution of sudsy lukewarm water, or bring it to your local jeweler for professional cleaning. Dry and polish jewelry with a chamois or soft cloth after cleaning and rinsing.

■ Inspect your gold jewelry for weakness or damage and bring it to a professional jeweler for immediate repair. Your jeweler will be able to restore it for you.

About platinum

Because of its durability, platinum is an excellent choice for engagement rings and wedding bands. It is generally 95 percent pure (18-karat gold is 75 percent

pure), which makes it hypoallergenic — an ideal match for those with sensitive skin.

Platinum does not wear away, but it does scratch. A scratch, however, is only a displacement of the metal, not a loss.

Pampering platinum

Avoid exposing your platinum rings from chores such as gardening or home projects, and they should last you a lifetime. Some tips from Jewelers of America:

■ To avoid scratches, store pieces separately in a jewelry box or chamois bag.

■ Have your platinum jewelry sufficiently insured. If you are unsure about the value of your piece take it to your local jeweler for valuation.

■ Periodic cleaning will ensure your jewelry's fine appearance and help it last. Clean platinum with a jewelry cleaner or by soaking it in a mild solution of soap and warm water, then gently rubbing it with a soft cloth. Or have your rings professionally cleaned twice a year.

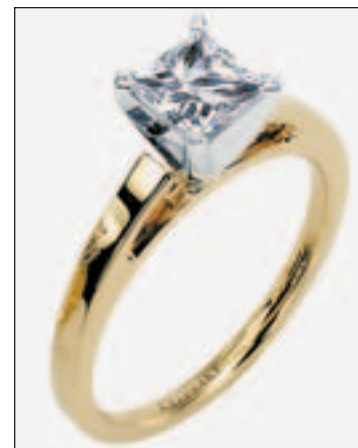
■ Over time, platinum develops a natural patina that many people prefer over the "just polished" appear-

ance. Your jeweler can restore the high-gloss look with polishing.

■ Avoid bleach or harsh chemicals when wearing platinum jewelry. Although they won't hurt the platinum, chemicals may discolor diamonds or gemstones.

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Treasured since ancient times, gold offers a classic look that appeals to traditional brides.



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