

The significance of the diamond engagement ring **Emergency spotcleaning tips for your wedding dress**

Since the turn of the century, the solitaire diamond ring has been the American engagement symbol. Even today, as many traditions are toppling, the diamond ring tradition is stronger than ever. Where did it begin and how did it evolve?

Jewelers of America, Inc. (JA), the national organization dedicated to consumer information and education about fine jewelry, offers the following historical notes about the engagement ring:

The ancient Romans were the first civilization to use finger rings as a sign of betrothal and marriage.

Solitaire rings were popular, as were bands of "opus intarsiate," the Roman's technique of open-work chiselled from sheet gold (much like contemporary "filigree" designs), and rings similar to today's popular "eternity" ring with stones set all round a simple band.

However, it was not until 1477, when the Archduke Maximilian of Austria gave a diamond ring to Princess Mary of Burgundy, that the tradition of the diamond engagement ring began.

The reason a woman wears it on the third finger of her left hand is traced back to the early Egyptians who believed that the vena amoris (vein of love) ran directly from the heart to the top of the third finger, left hand.

The Greeks believed the fire in a diamond reflected the constant flame of love. The name "diamond" comes from

the Greek word "adamas" meaning unconquerable. Is it any wonder that the diamond has come to symbolize the eternity of love?

This year, brides and grooms will spend over \$1 billion on engagement and wedding rings. And, because the diamond engagement ring is usually the first piece of diamond jewelry a woman owns, it is important to solicit the assistance of an expert—your local jeweler—to counsel you about the qualities that should be considered when purchasing such a gift.

Diamond cuts as well as ring styles have changed throughout the years since Maximilian made his presentation to Princess Mary. Before the invention of the diamond saw in 1910, diamonds were polished to give them their shine. When the saw was used to break up the crystal, experts created optically efficient diamonds that held more brilliancy and dispersion than ever before possible.

Today, lasers enable diamonds to be cut not only as rounds, marquises, pears, ovals and rectangular shapes, but also to be fashioned into such unique designs as horse heads, stars and initials.

Styling changes have been subtle and gradual. In colonial days the engagement ring was a diamond hoop called the "keeper ring," because it was worn over the wedding band, acting as its "keeper." The next style was the cluster ring, designed like an old-fashioned bouquet with a rose (of rose-cut diamonds) in the

center. The Victorian rings were more ornate, sometimes using black enamel with gold in the diamond settings. Then came the princess ring, with three to five diamonds in a row across the finger. This was popular for many years, until the turn of the century and the introduction of the solitaire setting.

Whether you select a round or one of the "fancy" cuts, such as marquise or pear shapes, you should have your jeweler explain the importance of the "Four C's" which determine the quality of the gem—carat, color, clarity and cut:

• **Carat**—refers to the weight, and therefore the size, of the gem. One carat is divided into 100 points, so that a diamond of 150 points weighs 1.5 carats.

• **Color**—Totally colorless diamonds are very rare and represent the highest color grade. The various gradations, from exceptional white to yellowish, are barely perceptible to the untrained eye.

Occasionally, diamonds with strong colors such as green, red, blue and amber are recovered. These "fancy color" diamonds are rare, fetching commensurate prices.

• **Clarity**—refers to the degree to which a diamond is free of interior blemishes or inclusions. The size and position of inclusions affect the value of a stone according to whether they interfere with the passage of light through the diamond.

• **Cut**—The art of cutting a diamond is so refined that a precise mathematical formula was developed. It called for most stones to be cut with 58 facets, each placed at a precise angle to one another.

How much should you spend for this gift of love that lasts forever? Consider the fact that most of your purchases depreciate in value and may not even last over the years.

A diamond, on the other hand, has lasting value, will always be the enduring symbol of your love, and will surely become a family heirloom for generations to come. It can be remounted in another ring, pendant or pin in the future and enjoyed over and over again.

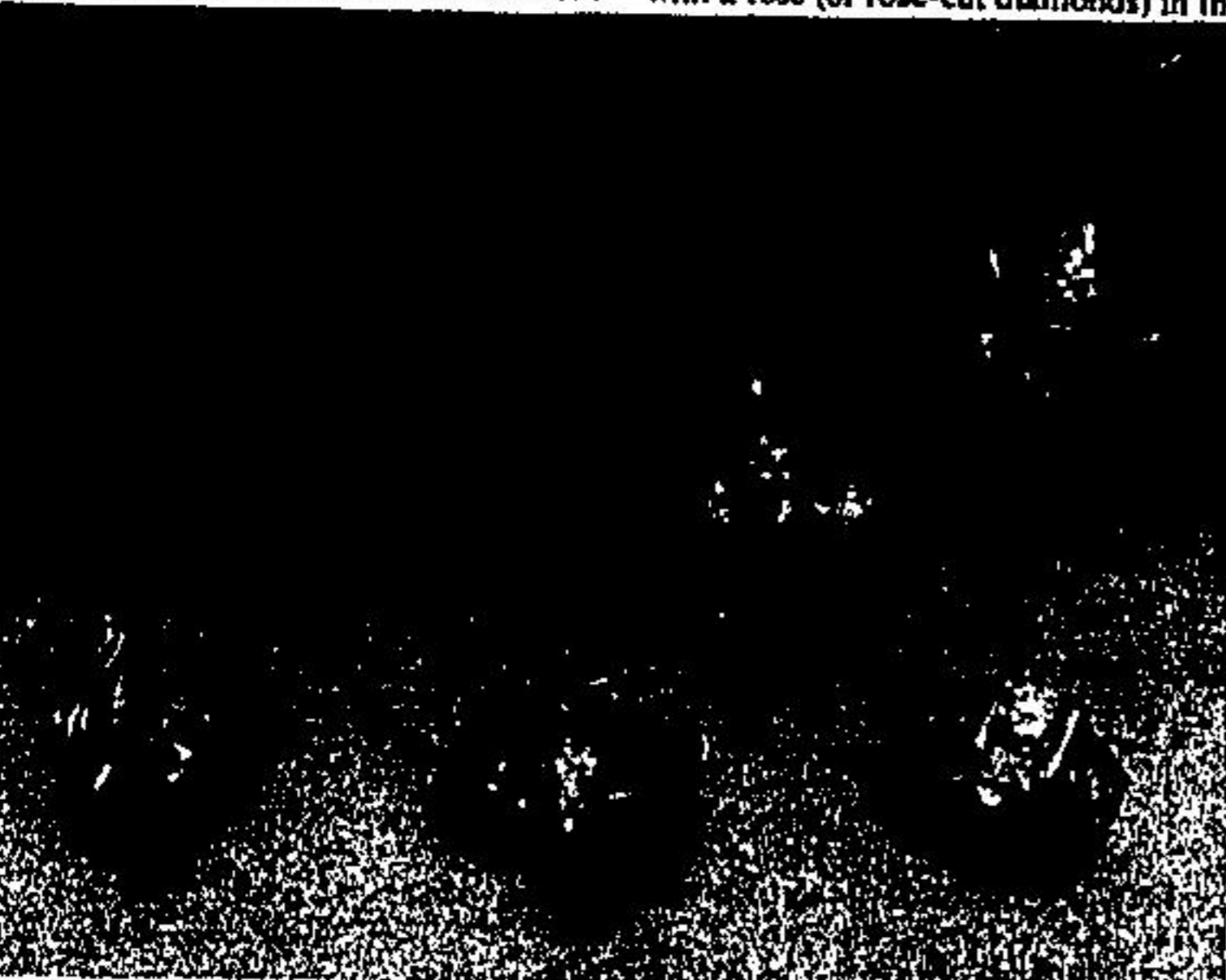
Jewelers of America (JA) recommends a two-month salary guideline, to allow you to purchase the biggest and best diamond that you can afford without straining your budget.

Learn about your dress fabric beforehand. Ask your salon owner or salesperson what your dress is made of and ask for specific cleaning hints. They may suggest dry cleaning only, but you can fix up most spots well enough to get through your ceremony and reception.

Act fast to keep a stain from setting. Don't rub the spill or expose it to extreme heat—instead, a few quick blots

will take care of the worst of the problem. What to blot with? That depends on the stain.

Fight water soluble stains with water. Perspiration, champagne, wine and other beverages are common water-soluble spills. Their cure: Put a towel under the fabric and blot top with a damp cloth, preferably wrung out in a light solution of white vinegar or detergent and water.



BEAUTIFUL SIMPLICITY SETS THE TONE in modern settings. Pictured above, left to right: Diagonal wrap ring in gold with marquise diamond by Concept I; checkmark design holding pear-shaped diamond by Concept I; Marquise diamond is framed with baguettes by Wedding Rings & Co.; Brilliant diamond flanked by four flushed-set diamonds by Thomas Michaels Design; Side step ring with round center by Concept I.

Helpful advice from an expert on how to plan a romantic honeymoon

- Talk honestly with your partner about what your dream of the "perfect honeymoon" is. Don't set yourself up for disappointment by assuming your partner's dream is the same as yours.
- Do your homework! Researching a romantic honeymoon hideaway can be great fun. Read periodicals and guides published by accredited travel writers.
- This is supposed to be your time as a couple to relax and enjoy each other. Make sure the destination you choose is one that encourages privacy and provides all the services you expect.
- Know realistically your budget and work within it. You don't need to start your marriage with a financial pinch. A "romantic hideaway" is defined by the atmosphere—not the price tag.

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