

Something old, something new

IN THE WORLD OF WEDDING RING GEMSTONES,
vintage TAKES ON A *contemporary twist*

BY KARON WARREN

No jewelry means more to a woman than her wedding and engagement rings. After all, these precious pieces represent the true love and commitment between husband and wife. And while many couples may add personal touches like special messages engraved inside the bands, it's the gemstones that take center stage. In the newest selection of vintage-inspired settings, these natural wonders shine brighter than ever.

LITTLE IS BIG

Local jewelers and national manufacturers concur: The biggest thing in wedding jewelry is also the smallest—namely, micro-pavé, which is the technique of setting very tiny stones, usually with the aid of a microscope. According to Ray Carpenter, general

manager of Houston's Select Jewelers, micro-pavé stones are showing up in the ring shank—the bottom and lower sides of the ring—and alongside the center stone. "It's a Victorian or retro look that's brought back and done in a modern way," he says.

Tom Markle, owner of Houston's

Thomas Markle Jewelers, agrees, saying you can count on these rings to be the heirlooms of tomorrow, with their antique feel and very delicate filigree patterns. He notes that Tacori and Hearts on Fire are two companies doing a beautiful job of using micro-pavé in their designs.

In fact, in its Dantela collection, Tacori actually uses a halo of pavé-set diamonds around the center stone—what Tacori's Michelle Ravan calls a "bloom" of diamonds.

In tandem with the influx of smaller stones, Brandee Dallow, vice president of national jewelry design firm Ritani, says she is seeing settings with a higher center stone. "The higher setting emphasizes the center stone and allows for more detail on the shank," she explains.

Perhaps your fiancé proposed with his grandmother's wedding ring, which you both love for its sentimental value. But at the same time, you want something a bit more contemporary. What to do? "Establish what is missing," Markle says. "What would you like to see different?" Do you want to add color? Switch to a different metal? Maybe enhance your stone with today's popular pavé side diamonds? The answers to these questions will guide you to a setting that you can call your own.

WHITE HOT

Although recent years have seen quite a color boom in engagement and wedding gemstones, the demand for colored stones seems to be waning, many experts observe. While Dallow says she continues to see requests for colorful gemstones, Carpenter says the new focus is pure white. "It's all about the diamond," he notes. "Even the accent stones are diamonds."

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For engagement rings, the round solitaire continues to reign supreme, but it's sharing the spotlight with the cushion cut, which features rounded corners and larger facets. "The cushion cut has definitely replaced the princess cut," says Judi Bufkin, owner of Houston's Judith Ann Jewels. "The emerald cut is starting to become popular again, too."

However, the princess cut hasn't disappeared entirely. "The princess cut is huge with our Facebook fans," Ravan says, while Carpenter contends that the classic square princess still attracts plenty of bridal customers.

BAND TOGETHER

As if the engagement ring didn't offer enough sparkle, now wedding

bands are getting into the gemstone act, with a new range of not only matching, but also very detailed and designed styles. "Our band sales are up," Ravan says. "We have matching bands with signature details such as the Tacori crescent."

Bufkin says she is seeing clients purchase bands that can be stacked together. For example, the bride chooses a wedding band to go with her engagement ring. Then she chooses another band for her first wedding anniversary. Maybe he gives her a third band for her birthday.

Perhaps the wedding band has diamonds, the anniversary band features emeralds and the third band contains mixed stones. Like each bride, "Each band is a little bit different," Bufkin says.

THE PERFECT CHOICE

Shopping for engagement and wedding rings always involves a lot of fun and excitement, but when decision time rolls around, it's time to get serious. To make sure you get what you pay for, jewelry experts advise that you choose a reputable dealer, and know that trust is the first step to finding and purchasing a quality engagement and wedding gemstone. "If you don't know jewelry, know the jeweler you're working with," Markle says. "Sit down with them to understand [what you're buying]."

Also, study the four "C's" of diamonds: carat, color, clarity and cut. Each aspect plays an important role in the overall quality of the stone. Dallow suggests deciding which "C" is most important to you, as a starting point.



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