

Put a ring on it

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Special to Newsday

Whether he goes it alone, she compiles a secret stash of photos or they brave diamond shopping together, choosing an engagement ring is perhaps the most significant purchase a couple will make — and the first step toward their wedding day. But while a diamond ring is still a symbol of tradition, it's no longer just a traditional center stone with two baguettes. What's on fire? The pros share the scoop on the rock stars of 2012.

Colored stones

From chocolate diamonds to emerald gemstones, more couples are committing to color. "People aren't afraid of colored diamonds anymore," says jewelry and style expert Michael O'Connor, who cites rocks like Carrie Underwood's canary yellow sparkler as an influence. "You can't be in the checkout line of the supermarket without seeing what celebrity got what ring." Other gems like sapphires (think of Kate Middleton's classic blue dazzler) and rubies (Jessica Simpson's stone of choice) are on fire, too, beloved for their brilliant hues and lower price tags. "People are really starting to look into lesser-priced gemstones for their ability to give a big, impressive engagement ring," O'Connor notes.

Three-stone rings

The diamond trinity — featuring a center stone with two slightly smaller ones — is replacing tapered baguettes as an "it" setting.

"We've seen 30 percent of people getting engaged with three-stone rings," says Sally Morrison, chief marketing officer of Forevermark, the new diamond brand from DeBeers. Create a variation on the theme with a trendier mounting — border the stones with micro-pave diamonds or place them in bezel settings. That's what designer Vera Wang did in her new LOVE Collection for Zales, which includes eye-catching iterations of the three-stone style, with round-cut diamonds framed by diamond accents or sapphires.



Delicate diamond trio by Gottlieb & Sons

Back to basics

A diamond is indeed forever, so most wearers want something that won't go out of style. "The absolute classics prevail," Morrison notes. A standard solitaire with classic mountings is "always most popular," says Scott Udell, president of Two by London, London Jewelers' new engagement shop in Manhasset. And so is the classic white gold or platinum setting. Morrison says: "That whiteness really brings out the relative colorlessness of the diamond and gives it that extra glow."



Solitaires, like this from Forevermark, are still No. 1.

Make it yours

Skip the cookie-cutter and infuse more of your own personality into a custom setting. Port Washington jewelry designer Glenn Bradford works with couples to create modern designs for, say, a passed-down pear-shaped diamond. Similarly, he'll engrave a dreamed-up family crest into the setting, or intertwine his-and-hers zodiac signs — each style is named for the woman who wears it. "It's all about her sensibility," he says.

Responsible sourcing

Just like free-trade coffee and recycled paper goods, diamonds' origins are becoming more important. "Particularly the younger generation of consumers is more aware of that, and they're more willing to pay a premium to feel confident about those issues," Morrison says.

High-tech shopping

No matter how simple the design, the process of purchasing a ring is getting pretty high-tech.

Two by London offers computers where shoppers can sit with a specialist and design a ring. They also offer touch monitors to teach about diamonds, platinum and gold, and a special microscope that lets couples see their diamond in larger-than-life scale. "It's a very interactive experience, meant to be hands-on so the customer feels excited about it," Udell says. Forevermark offers a virtual try-on application on its website, and the company codes each diamond with a unique serial number that's visible through a special lens available at a retailer. After all, reassurance is forever, too.

A double-pave setting by Vera Wang for Zales



Dainty diamonds

A delicate antique look is still attainable, even if you don't have an heirloom from Grandma. Brides-to-be are opting for vintage-inspired styles with hand engraving or a halo setting that uses small diamonds to surround the center stone. Bradford incorporates elegant metal lacework into engagement rings, a trend trickling from fashion to fine jewelry. "Big, heavy, bold rings you saw a few years ago are out of the picture," says Jerry Gottlieb, whose firm, Gottlieb & Sons, has been manufacturing platinum wedding jewelry for 63 years.

Fancy shapes

Cushion cuts reign as the second-most-requested diamond after solitaires, says Brad Gross, vice president of H.L. Gross & Brothers in Garden City, which carries about 30 bridal designers, including Tacori and Verragio. The square-yet-brilliant princess cut also remains popular because "you can get a larger cut for a smaller price, because it wastes less of the rough diamond," says O'Connor, who also predicts that rose cuts and diamond slices will rise in popularity.



Every surface dazzles on Glenn Bradford's "Gail" ring.



Canary yellow diamonds, the centerpiece of this Michael M sparkler, are white-hot.

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