

Stone Age

by Stephanie Han

Say your woman is the type who has complained that you're buying her yet another colorless rock. Maybe what she is really saying is that you need to expand your palette. Try tickling her fancy with the unexpected, a fancy colored diamond in brown, yellow, pink, or blue, or if you have the bank book, one in red or green.

While colored stones will probably never usurp the position of a sparkling colorless diamond as a symbol of marriage, a beautiful fancy colored diamond is fast becoming the status symbol of the very elite women who already have a good collection of diamonds and who therefore want to branch out into fancy colors. "If you have one diamond, you go for a colorless diamond. If you have your colorless diamonds, then you get the fancy colors," says Tayma Page Allies of Tayma Fine Jewellery.

Fancy colored diamonds are a natural occurring diamond of color and have nothing to do with fancy cut, which refers to a shape. Fancy colored diamonds come in yellows (champagnes or canaries), browns (cognacs), blues, pinks, greens and reds, the latter two are very rare and hardly seen outside of an auction house. Like all diamonds, fancy colored diamonds are produced from heat and pressure beneath the Earth's surface, and the yellow and browns are found in many of the same mines that regular diamonds are found. The exact cause of the color is still a mystery but is said to be due to the substitution of different main group elements for carbon. Some colors occur due to various levels of irradiation (green diamonds, in particular), nitrogen, or general impurities which result in different types of crystal formation. True fancy colored diamonds are rare and usually smaller than colorless diamonds.

One rough estimate says that only one out of every 10,000 natural diamonds is a fancy color. Like most natural substances, there is a finite supply of diamonds but remember, the amount of diamonds on the market has more to do with the reserves that are held back courtesy of DeBeers to keep the market price where it is.

To the woman who was uncertain about whether or not to purchase a fancy colored diamond, Fawaz Gruiosi of de Grisogono says, "from the point of view of an investment, it's an excellent choice because they are rare."

According to Bulgari, the big difference between a yellow sapphire, which may indeed be spectacular, and a yellow diamond, besides the price tag and a few zeros, is the brilliance. "The brilliance and fire of the diamond is much more rare than a sapphire," agreed Cartier. They also add, "in terms of hardness, for a diamond it's 10, a sapphire, 9."

It's true that there are many treated diamonds out there that look good, but are not the real thing. Unfortunately, the fact that you're asking says you might be going to jewelers who are reputable.

Perhaps you have eclectic taste and you're the type that prefers antique jewelry; then you should watch out for backing. The backing is the reflective colorless metal behind the diamond that might be painted. You should always have the stone taken out to verify the color of your fancy

colored diamond. This method of doctoring a ring is rarely used today, but older pieces might have it.

Bulgari advises that you “ensure that a gemological certificate accompanies the gem. The certificate must define the color intensity as well as that shape cut and purity. The GIA certificate is the most complete and reliable certificate.” Better yet, understand a little of the certificate. Diamond wholesaler Erez Zion of Ephraim Zion International says, “the certificate will have a line where it says ‘distribution’ and it will say ‘uneven, even, or not applicable.’ Most will say ‘even’, even some that have areas of washed out color.”

The best way to prevent any mishap is to buy from a reputable jeweler. Zion puts it in concrete terms. “If you shop around and three people give you a price within 10%, and another is 40% cheaper, you have to be a little suspicious. Go to someone reputable who you feel comfortable with.”

How To Choose A Fancy Colored Diamond

Color should be your main priority. A colorless diamond suits everybody. White light is pure light and hence its draw is its absence of color. With fancy colored diamonds you have to take into consideration your skin tone, your color preference, and the depth and strength of the diamond. There are stones that are losing color, or those that have color that is not evenly spread.

Ronald Abram of Ronald Abram Jewellers is frank, “you need to look for what pleases your eye and forget what other people are telling you. There is also the price factor to consider and you want to be able to trust the seller. But basically you need to choose what is best for you. If someone tries to convince you how rare it is and it doesn’t please you what’s the point?”

Yellow is the most popular color here in Hong Kong, as well as around the world. Blues and pinks are also sought after. Pinks come from the brown family of diamonds and various Hollywood celebrities have been seen sporting pink diamonds from the Argyle mine in Australia. Personal preference should override peer pressure and film star trends when choosing a fancy colored diamond. Jennifer Lopez’s engagement ring and Argyle’s 1996 decision to strike out on their own and leave DeBeers should not be the reason you settle on an Argyle pink. Famous colored diamonds have also come from India and Brazil.

Ronald Abram prefers the Brazilian pinks and suggests putting one beside an Argyle pink to compare the difference. The blue Hope diamond is valuable for its color and history and the fact that it also fluoresces red. And the woman dripping in red and green diamonds? She’s shopping in a different league altogether than the one sporting a fabulous canary diamond on her finger.

Fancy colored diamonds haven’t really taken off in Europe compared to Malaysia, Brunei or Saudi Arabia. The women in those countries love fancy colored diamonds and some of the world’s most famous and beautiful stones are said to be found bedecking the ladies in those regions.

Is A Blood Or A Blood Red Diamond The Same As A Red Diamond?

No. “Blood diamond” is a term used to describe a diamond or diamonds used to fund warlords in Sierra Leone as well as in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo through the illegal channeling of funds to diamonds. In 2000, the United Nations imposed an 18-month sanction on diamonds from Sierra Leone unless they were certified conflict-free and banned mining in that area. The Kimberley Process is an international policing system recently implemented by many nations to keep conflict diamonds off the market, but frankly, it’s extremely difficult to ascertain whether or not your diamond is truly conflict-free and not responsible for loss of life or limbs.

My Friends Are All Wearing Black Diamonds...

Are these the same friends who all wore massive padded shoulders in the 1980s? Until recently most black diamonds were known primarily as industrial diamonds and were not considered valuable. There has been a trend of using black diamonds and even oxidizing gold known as black gold so if you want to wear black diamonds, as many do, follow the crowd.

Gruosi features black diamonds in his de Grisogono collection but says, “Real black diamonds are rare and there is always some inclusion; it is never super perfect. But if you look around women are always dressing in black in the evening so why not jewelry? I like the stone because you can mix it with any other color. Mix it with white and it becomes more brilliant with green more happy with red more romantic.” Warning: this is a tricky stone to buy. Ronald Abram cautions people by saying, “Buyers of black diamonds be wary. There are good names a deal in them but in general... Ron Abram doesn’t work with black diamonds.” A real natural black diamond is a hard substance and much more difficult to cut than other diamonds which means there are high labor costs the true bulk of black diamonds sold are inexpensive diamonds treated black.

What About The Cut Of A Fancy Colored Diamond?

Cutting depends on the rough stone itself. Colored diamonds are often cut with the higher pavilion to enhance their shades. The faceting is designed to lengthen the path of light passing through the stone; as a light ray travels through a colored diamond it colors the stone. A cut of a colorless diamond attempts to minimize other colors by shortening the path of light. When you have a white piece of rock you try to show as little yellow as possible as most stones have a yellow tint. With a fancy colored stone you want to bring out the color. According to Bulgari, “In colored diamonds fantasy cuts prevail as they allow the maximum exploitation of the gem: oval, pear, navette, radiant or Princess.”

Any Rules About Fancy Colored Diamond Settings?

There seems to be a great deal of disagreement about this among all reputable jewelers. Some say a simple setting shows off the stone. Others claim there are no rules. There does seem to be a consensus that color needs to be taken into consideration when choosing what metal to work with.

For example, you would probably want to use a white material like a white gold or platinum to mount a blue diamond as opposed to a yellow gold. Be sure to go to a jeweler whose taste and

experience you trust, who knows what percentage of metal materials to use, for example, to make a rose-colored gold.

Finally, Are Diamonds A Girl's Best Friend?

Given that the only thing is liquid as cash is a diamond, the answer is a resounding yes. If Marilyn Monroe were alive today she would probably be including the words "fancy colored" in her famous song. Back then, fancy colored diamonds were known to very few and even today, their exclusivity only adds to their appeal. Any woman who invested in fancy colored diamonds 30 years ago would have seen her net worth rise from thousands to millions. "Women and diamonds are born for each other," declares Peggy Lo of Piaget. What more can we say?

SIDEBAR

Famous Fancy Colored Diamonds

Hope Diamond

Originally from India, this 45.52 carat diamond has been owned by King Louis XIV of France and Elizabeth Taylor. The name derives from the diamond's owner in 1839, Henry Philip Hope. As it passed from owner to owner, it allegedly caused a series of misfortunes and deaths, and is now on display in the Smithsonian in Washington DC.

Hancock Red Diamond

A 95 carat red diamond that has the color of a Burma ruby went for US\$926, 315 per carat on April 28, 1987, setting a new record and getting its owner, Mr. Warren Hancock, out of trouble with the IRS.

Dresden Green Diamond

This 41 carat green diamond originated in India and is in the Dresden Green vaults in Germany. It was purchased in the 1700s by Friedrich Augustus I of Saxony. It's the sister of the Hope Diamond. Like all green diamonds, its lovely green is a result of exposure to radiation.

The Mouawad Collection

When Mr. Mouawad started to make the auction rounds in the early 1970s, prices began to soar to new heights. He's purchased some of the world's best-known diamonds. His collection includes many fancy coloreds like the 21.06 carat Mouawad, a cushion cut, and the 24.44 carat Mouawad Lilac, a step cut.

Tiffany Diamond

Found in 1878 in South Africa, this is one of the largest yellow diamonds ever discovered and originally weighed 287.42 carats. Cut into a cushion shape, it is now 128.54 carats and has over 90 facets.

The Aurora Collection

A spectacular collection of over 260 diamonds amassed by diamond dealer Alan Bronstein, this collection is always growing and now falls into 13 color ranges. It's on permanent display at the New York Museum of Natural History.

(Hong Kong Tatler, 2003)