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Do You Hear Wedding Bells?

By Tanya Blok

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So you've been in that perfect relationship for some time now. You've been dropping hints about the future and he is receiving you loud and clear. It's time to do a little "window shopping." After all, you don't want to leave one of the most important decisions in your life entirely up to him, do you? He WILL lose sleep over finding that perfect engagement ring, even though he will not admit it. So why not help him out a little, give him some guidance and direction.

There are so many choices when it comes to shopping for engagement rings and you and he will hear a lot of advice from a lot of "helpful" people. His "Uncle Charlie" will know a guy who knows a guy. Your sister will tell you that you have to get your ring where she got hers. Your co-worker will tell you about this really cool website. And on and on, there will be advice around every corner.

Let's go through some of the available options and identify the pros and cons of each. This should help you both figure out what the best option is for you.

Your Local Jewelry Store:

Definitely a great place to start. A jewelry store will have a small selection of pre-set engagement rings for you to see in person, and try on. If you run into a helpful sales associate that is willing to spend some time with you and explain all of the nuances of buying diamonds, it will be well worth your time.

PROS

Seeing the diamond in person. Nothing beats the feeling of seeing diamonds sparkle on your finger!

Talking to a knowledgeable human being and getting answers to questions face to face.

CONS

Limited selection. Most local jewelry stores do not have the financial resources to carry a large inventory of diamonds. However, many stores do work with suppliers who are able to send them goods on memorandum (like consignment) if they have a customer who is looking for a particular diamond.

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Price. You will pay more at a jeweler, period. Sure you can try and negotiate and feel like you got a better price, but a jeweler will not sell you that diamond for less than a substantial profit. Most jewelers need to make a "keystone" markup on every item, which is double what they paid for that diamond. This markup covers the high overhead costs of running a store including insurance, rent and sales commissions.

Antique Shops:

If you are looking for a ring that is truly unique, this is the place for you. You'll need to do some leg work and visit many different stores to see what's available, but it could be worth it in the long run.

PROS

Most likely to find a one of a kind ring. If you have the need to be an original, stick to your search and you will find that proverbial "diamond in the rough."

CONS

Unless you get lucky, expect a long search. You may only find a handful, if any rings in the shops you visit.

Most rings will not have any type of certification or appraisal. Unless you know a great deal about diamond grading, it is possible to get taken advantage of very easily.

The Internet

The Holy Grail and the Bottomless Pit of information, all wrapped in one. By far, you will find the largest selection of diamonds and engagement rings here, but that can be quite overwhelming. Start with the basics and work your way through this checklist.

1. Shape – Diamonds are cut into 10 most common shapes, but there are countless other "designer" shapes popping up in the industry on a regular basis. Most of the shapes are self explanatory (round, oval, pear, heart), but do you know what a Marquise or a Radiant looks like? Take a look at the most commonly available diamond shapes and decide what you like best.
2. Size – Bigger is better, right? Not necessarily. Unless your fiance has very deep pockets, you will not be getting a 5 carat boulder to weigh you down. Too many men are convinced that it has to be big. Would you like to have a big ugly rock that is dull and lifeless on your hand, just so you could tell everyone it's 3 carats, or would you rather have a beautiful, sparkling beacon of light catching all of your friends attention. You won't have to wave your hand in front of them to notice, they will come to you!
3. The 4 C's – The most common phrase in the diamond business and the most important when shopping for a diamond online. The 4 C's represent a diamond's cut, color, clarity and carat weight. **CUT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF A DIAMOND'S FIRE AND BRILLIANCE.** So many people buying diamonds focus on color and clarity, that cut is often overlooked. You can spend a fortune buying a flawless clarity and perfect color (white) diamond, yet if it is poorly cut, it will be dull and lifeless.

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4. The Mounting Metal – This is basically a matter of personal preference and what looks best on you. Yellow gold is classic and works best for a solitaire engagement ring. Yellow gold is also better for mounting diamonds with a lower color grade (yellowish tint), because the yellow from the diamond blends into the setting. White gold and Platinum give a modern look and work best with three stone rings. Be sure to choose a diamond with a high color grade, otherwise the white mounting will negatively emphasise a yellowish diamond.

5. The Online Engagement Ring Builder – The most fun part of buying a diamond online is being able to build your own ring. Choose a diamond and a setting, then email it to your fiance. Even if he doesn't buy it online, he will know exactly what style to look for when he goes shopping. No surprises, and everyone is happy!

There are hundreds of diamond and jewelry web sites out there, but my advice is to stick with the leaders in the field. On their sites, you can browse thousands of diamonds as well as build your own engagement ring and see how different settings look with different shape diamonds. They both have

highly knowledgeable and very friendly customer service staff that can answer questions about diamonds and settings, and offer a no risk 100% guarantee and return policy.

You can also browse our site for weekly updates to

and more in depth diamond

education. We also maintain a searchable database of

from leading online jewelers so you

can compare similar diamonds from multiple sources.

Good luck and CONGRATULATIONS!

For more information visit:

Wedding Favors Ideas You Want To Know

By "Amy K. Spade"

Sending guests home with a little something to remember the night by is a classy touch to any wedding. And they don't have to be extravagant gifts to make a nice impression.

Do you buy or do you make?

When it comes to the list of things to do for a wedding, you may already be feeling overwhelmed. So why make another chore for yourself with homemade wedding favors? Favors can be easily bought

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from local craft stores—all you have to do is make them personalized, or don't.

Of course, homemade wedding do feel more special. Sachets and small tokens are simple to create in an afternoon. You may even decide to enlist the help of the wedding party. A little food and wine will get them to help. The usual suspects

If you've ever been to another wedding, you may have already seen these suggestions for wedding favors.

Small bags of candies or nuts are always nice to place next to each person's placeholder. On the same vein, small boxes of chocolate with a nice ribbon or card indicating the wedding date are nice favors too.

Many brides and grooms have chosen to give personalized wedding favors. Match books, candles with holders, champagne glasses, and even CDs can be inscribed with the couple's name and wedding date as a way to commemorate the day.

If you want to be unique

For the non-traditional bride and groom, you may want to give a little something different. If you have a themed wedding, you can try to give a gift that incorporates that theme. A Vegas wedding might necessitate giving decks of cards or poker chips.

If you're having a more renaissance style affair, then you can give small sachets of herbs or flowers (such as lavender). And for an outdoor wedding, small bells might be a great gift to give.

The altruistic couple may want to make personal donations in the name of their guests. These can be designated on small cards at each person's seat. Or the couple may decide to offer each guest a picture from the wedding that they can choose from the ones that have been taken.

In any case, wedding favors are a great way to commemorate a special day for both the couple and their guests. Thank your relatives and friends for supporting you and loving you enough to be with you on this happiest of days.

Amy Spade is an expert on planning weddings, and she has written an amazing totally free minicourse

on how to make sure that you have the day of your dreams, and avoid wedding day disaster! Get the free course "Your Special Day from Start to Finish" now at at

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