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May 2026

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Putting the spring in your step

With spring in the air and summer just around the corner, we look ahead to a season that promises renewed energy, fresh design inspiration, and many reasons to feel optimistic. In this issue, we delve into the ever-evolving landscape of bridal jewellery, combining timeless traditions with contemporary innovations, including the timeless allure of pearls.

Couples today are moving away from conventional choices and seeking pieces that express their individuality and resonate with their personal stories. Sonja Sanders delves into this growing trend, revealing the historical significance of various gemstones and examining modern designs that reflect today's couples' desire for meaningful jewellery.

"Even though we offer gemmological expertise to advise clients on gemstones with higher hardness on the Mohs scale or more durable for everyday wear, potential clients have their own reasons for the gemstone choices they make," Sanders writes in her article on page 58.

And with the resurgence of unique gemstones making headlines in 2026, Diana Jarrett, on page 30, discusses the transition towards modern designs that prioritize personal expression over conformity.

"Naturally, the promise of commitment is still foundational to an engagement ring's message," Jarrett writes. "But today's imaginative designers are in lockstep with the shopper's desire for personal expression with their bridal jewels. It's a moment for retailers to respond by offering a broader selection of bridal jewels for couples who crave individuality with their rings," says Jarrett.

Security remains a key issue, especially amid rising incidents of organized crime. Scott Hayes highlights this in his article on page 22.

"Being able to control your store entrances is critical to prevention," Hayes shares. "Every jeweller has some form of alarm system to be alerted of a potential crime; however, you have to wait until a sensor is triggered, which means an attempted entry has already occurred."

For those who didn't make it to the Tucson Gem Show, we've got you covered. In her article on page 18, Lauriane Lognay explores how the evolving dynamics of this event echo wider market trends, influenced by geopolitical developments and shifting buyer motivations.

"Gemstones, rocks, fossils, jewellery, beads, lapidary supplies, mining equipment, anything related to the gemstone world can be found in Tucson," says Lognay. "If anything, this year demonstrated not weakness, but resilience."

With their rich symbolism and adaptability, pearls remain a celebrated choice for brides. As you cultivate your collections, how can you leverage the appeal of pearls in contemporary designs that resonate with today's consumer values around sustainability and customization? Olga Shevchenko discusses just that on page 34.

Speaking of pearls, Duncan Parker on page 10 invites you to consider the potential of pearls as heirloom pieces that can be modernized and speaks to the fusion of the traditional and contemporary.

"I once asked one of my daughters whether they would like a pearl necklace. The answer was a firm 'No, if I want to wear pearls, I can borrow grandma's.' Grandma is where pearls come from," shares Parker.

This issue also covers how technology influences the jewellery industry and how artificial intelligence is transforming personalized design processes.

Be sure to peruse our sneak peek at the JCK show on page 56, featuring a few pieces you'll find in the aisles, along with our roundup of select bridal jewellery on page 48.

As you explore this month's offerings, we hope you find inspiration to turn these insights into practical strategies that help your jewellery business thrive in this lively, ever-changing environment.

Until next time, stay well and be safe. 🌍

Linda

Linda Dalke
Publisher

"You can cut all the flowers, but you cannot keep spring from coming."

~ Pablo Neruda



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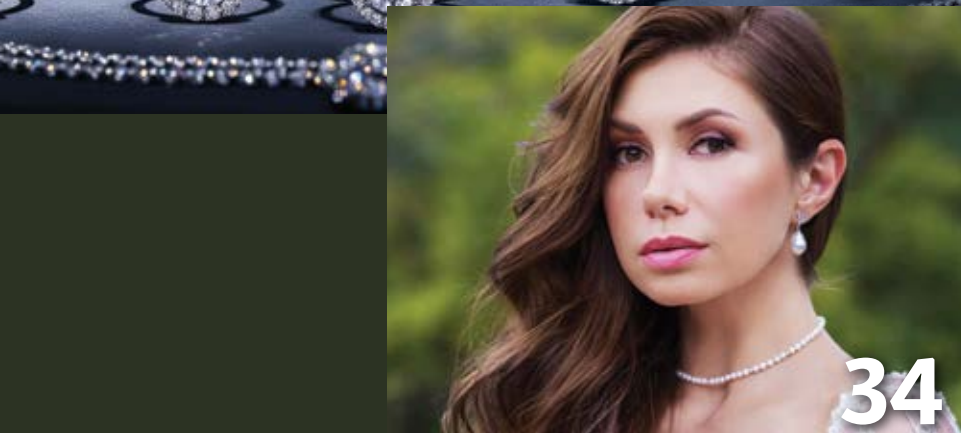
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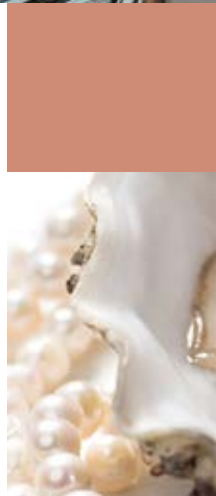
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Contributors: Danielle Walsh, Diana Jarrett, Duncan Parker, Jinagna Shah, Karen Howard, Lauriane Lognay, Megan Crabtree, Olga Shevchenko, Sara Belyazid, Scott Hayes, Sonja Sanders.



Jewellery

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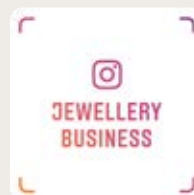
The model wears a statement set of bridal jewellery—a modern pearl necklace choker featuring freshwater pearls of various sizes and shapes, including highly lustrous Keshi pearls with organic baroque shapes.


The look is finished with dangling earrings featuring rare flower-shaped pearls repeating the pattern of the gown's embroidery.

The pearl jewellery is designed and created by Jewelry Olga, Montreal.


PHOTOGRAPHER: OLGA SHEVCHENKO

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Antique natural pearl
and diamond ring.

Something old, something new, something borrowed

By Duncan Parker

If you ask your elderly family members, “What are your most memorable jewels?”, you might be surprised to discover that “pearls” is the answer. Remember that you didn’t ask them what their most valuable jewels are, that might be different.

Many of us think of the most valuable jewel in our house as a diamond engagement ring (after the tiara, of course). With the unpredictable fluctuations in the price of diamonds, we might discover that grandma’s diamond engagement ring is, perhaps, no longer the most valuable jewel in the house.

However, that elegant yet simple cultured pearl necklace that’s migrated to the back of the drawer, or to the lowest tier of the jewellery box, probably has more stories preserved in its shiny nacre than any other jewels in the collection.

PHOTOS COURTESY DUNCAN PARKER



Antique natural pearl
snake-form brooch.

I once asked one of my daughters whether they would like a pearl necklace. The answer was a firm “No, if I want to wear pearls, I can borrow grandma’s.” Grandma is where pearls come from.

That same daughter later told me that pearls could, and would, be borrowed from grandma if a friend was getting married. I was informed, “Everyone wears pearls to a wedding.”

It’s a certainty that if you go to a wedding, there will be a lot of pearls. Almost without fail, brides wear pearls.

In planning the wedding outfit, pearls are among the first things acquired, at least once the neckline of the outfit has been decided. A plunging neckline will require different pearls from a high neckline, or a shirt and jacket. So, the clothes might come first, but the jewels certainly come next.

We may see the bride and groom both wear pearls. Larger South Sea cultured pearls are often seen on people of any gender; look at the red-carpet parade during awards shows. This trend is translating to lots of people, and not just superstars. That’s always how fashion travels.

We might also see two brides, or two grooms, both wearing pearls. In this case, they often select complementary strands, purchased

together, and often exchanged as wedding (or pre-wedding) gifts. Alternatively, these pearl necklaces are commonly received from mothers or grandmothers as gifts.

Pearls go with any outfit, of any colour, perfect at high society weddings at a luxury space, or in a modest event at a registry office, followed by a nice lunch. You can wear your pearl necklace down to the local coffee shop for a quick espresso, but the same pearls are a perfect fit at the opera later that night. Nobody will look oddly at your jewel choice in either case; either way, it will be perfect.

The idea of pearls being “old fashioned” is prevalent, but it is interesting to see how this evaporates when a wedding rolls along.

A classic wedding saying is, “Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.” I don’t know where that phrase originated, but at least three of those items could be (and often are) pearls. Mom may offer pearls for her daughter to wear: Something borrowed. While not all moms wear those pearls often these days, you might be surprised to see many people wearing pearls regularly; sometimes we just grow into things.

If mom is coming to that wedding, she may not loan her own pearls to the bride, because what do you wear to a wedding? Pearls. Mom probably has inherited grandma’s pearls, and that necklace can be bestowed on the bride, while mom wears her own pearls.

If we have grandma’s pearl necklace, it might need to be complemented with other accessories, earrings, of course, plus possibly a bracelet and ring. When I say “of course” about earrings, surely, one of the most common pre-wedding gifts is pearl earrings. The participants in a wedding will often wear pearl earrings. Bridesmaids routinely wear pearl earrings, and those earrings are often a gift from the bride.

The modern cultured pearl necklace is usually a uniform strand, meaning that the pearls are all about the same diameter along the whole length of the necklace. However, until the 1960s, most pearl necklaces tended to graduate with the largest pearls in the centre,



Baroque South Sea cultured pearls.

and tapering to the back, where the clasp is usually found. One way to modernize grandma's pearls is to suggest a clasp or make a clasp that matches the current owner's style. Re-stringing with the new clasp at the front or on the side is a great way to change it up, too.

When we talk about cultured pearls, these are, of course, almost all the pearls you see in the retail market today. However, until just over a century ago, nearly all pearls were natural. There had been experiments with pearl cultivation for a long time, and for several centuries, Chinese growers had cultivated blister pearls grown on the inside of shells. Still, spherical "cyst" pearls were first routinely cultured (grown intentionally) in 1921. The first producer was Mikimoto, using methods developed by fellow Japanese experimenters Mise and Nishikawa.

After the introduction of cultured pearls, there was a massive increase in the availability of pearls and they became available to so many more people. In the culturing process, we help the oysters out by introducing conditions to induce pearl growth. Prior to culturing, pearls were accidental, were very rare, and tended to be the property of the rich and powerful. Now we can almost all afford some kind of pearls.



Belle Époque pearl, diamond, and synthetic ruby brooch, sold for \$2,000 at auction.

In the hierarchy of pearls, natural (non-cultured) are the rarest and most precious. Natural pearls have been found in oceans (saltwater), and lakes and rivers (freshwater). All other things being equal, saltwater pearls are generally more valued than freshwater pearls, whether they are natural or cultured.

Cultured pearls are traditionally "akoya," Japanese pearls, mainly white in colour, measuring from a few millimetres up to about 9 mm. South Sea cultured pearls can be white from various locations, including Australia, black from Tahiti, or golden from several places, including the Philippines. South Sea cultured pearls are generally larger than akoya. Freshwater pearls, mostly grown in China, were once thought of as small things resembling a popular rice-based breakfast cereal, but they are now available in a wide range of colours, can be round, bright, and compete with saltwater cultured pearls in both appearance and size.

A major trend in the pearl industry today is keshi pearls. Keshi pearls are baroque (irregularly shaped) pearls that form as a by-product of the culturing process. When pearl farmers are harvesting conventional cultured pearls from saltwater oysters, sometimes the inserted bead is rejected, but a pearl still develops, or an extra pearl might accidentally form. There is strong demand for keshi pearls coupled with a limited supply, making them quite expensive.

It's interesting to find a small, delicate necklace tucked away somewhere in the back of a jewellery box, made of a single row of tiny pearls that gradually increase in size. This necklace may have belonged to grandma, or even great grandma. Such delicate necklaces often look like they should be worn by a child, and they frequently were. These were commonly "add-a-pearl" necklaces. An "add-a-pearl" was often



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South Sea cultured pearl brooch sold for \$7,000 at auction.



South Sea pearls in four colours and diamonds in a pendant, sold for \$8,000 at auction.

a family project, with grandma, an aunt, or parents visiting their local jeweller to buy a chain with a single pearl for each birthday and family celebration, gradually adding one pearl at a time until the necklace was complete. Interestingly, some of these necklaces were made from natural pearls, even up until the 1950s or later.

Many add-a-pearl necklaces were left unfinished, as family members forgot about them after 10 or 15 years. The result is a necklace with 20 or

30 pearls at the front, attached to a chain that holds the jewel, waiting possibly forever for the remaining pearls.

Add-a-pearl necklaces typically feature pearls around 2.0 or 3.0 mm at the ends, graduating to about 5 mm in the centre. Given their modest size, most of us might prefer larger pearls, but these lovely little necklaces are ideal jewellery for a small child, just as originally intended. They are perfect for the flower carrier or ring-bearer at a wedding. Even if the pearls are natural, they are small and generally modest in value, perhaps around a \$1,000 if sold at auction.

Pearls tend to be passed down through generations. When jewels are handed on, their value is more about family connections than monetary worth. A gift from an earlier generation is an unmatched treasure.

It's important to encourage clients to use their pearls and to recommend re-stringing when a necklace is stretched or worn. Most pearl necklaces are knotted between the pearls, which prevents the pearls from rubbing against each other, and also means that if the necklace breaks, you won't hear 30 or 40 pearls rolling down the aisle and dropping one by one into the orchestra pit. If a knotted pearl necklace breaks, maybe one pearl might roll away, but the rest will stay in place.

If a client comes in with their vintage pearls, take the opportunity to ask them to put them on, admire their beauty, and suggest some pearl accessories to finish the look. The story behind the pearls continues to grow from generation to generation. A new pair of pearl earrings simply adds another chapter to that story. 🌟



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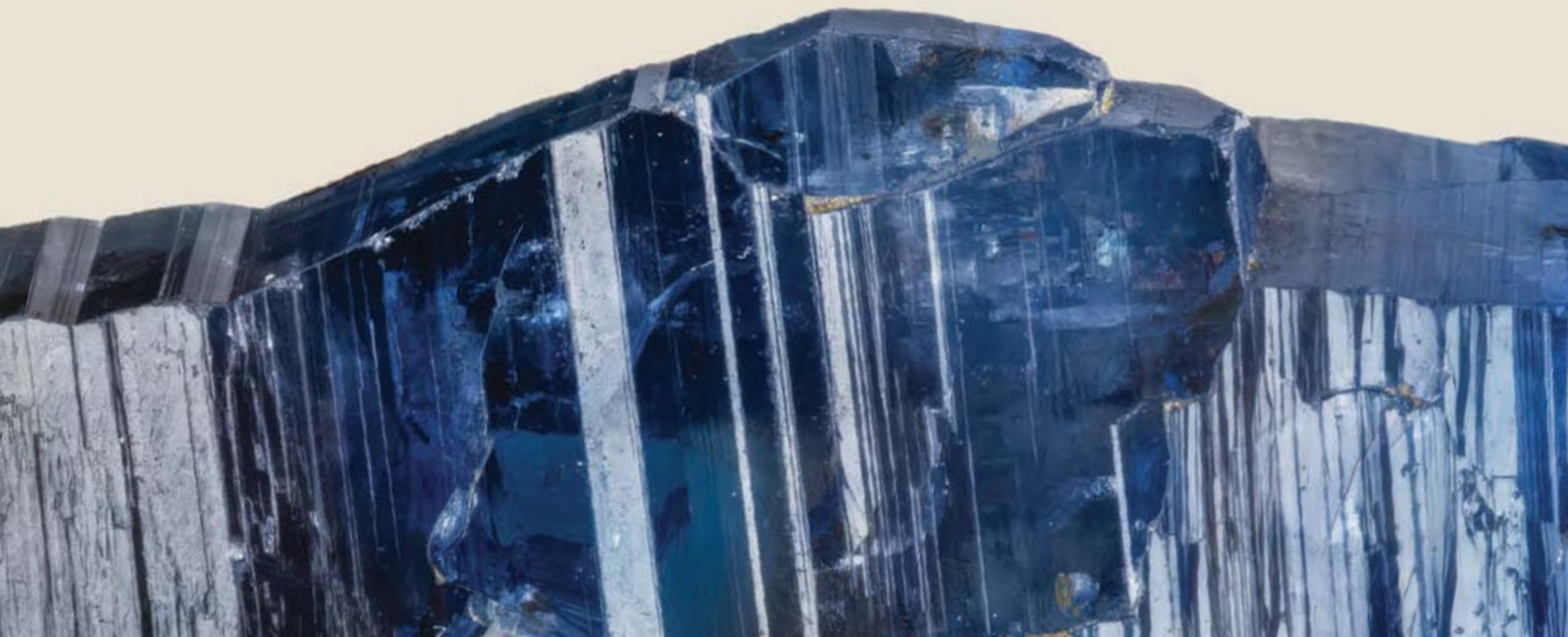
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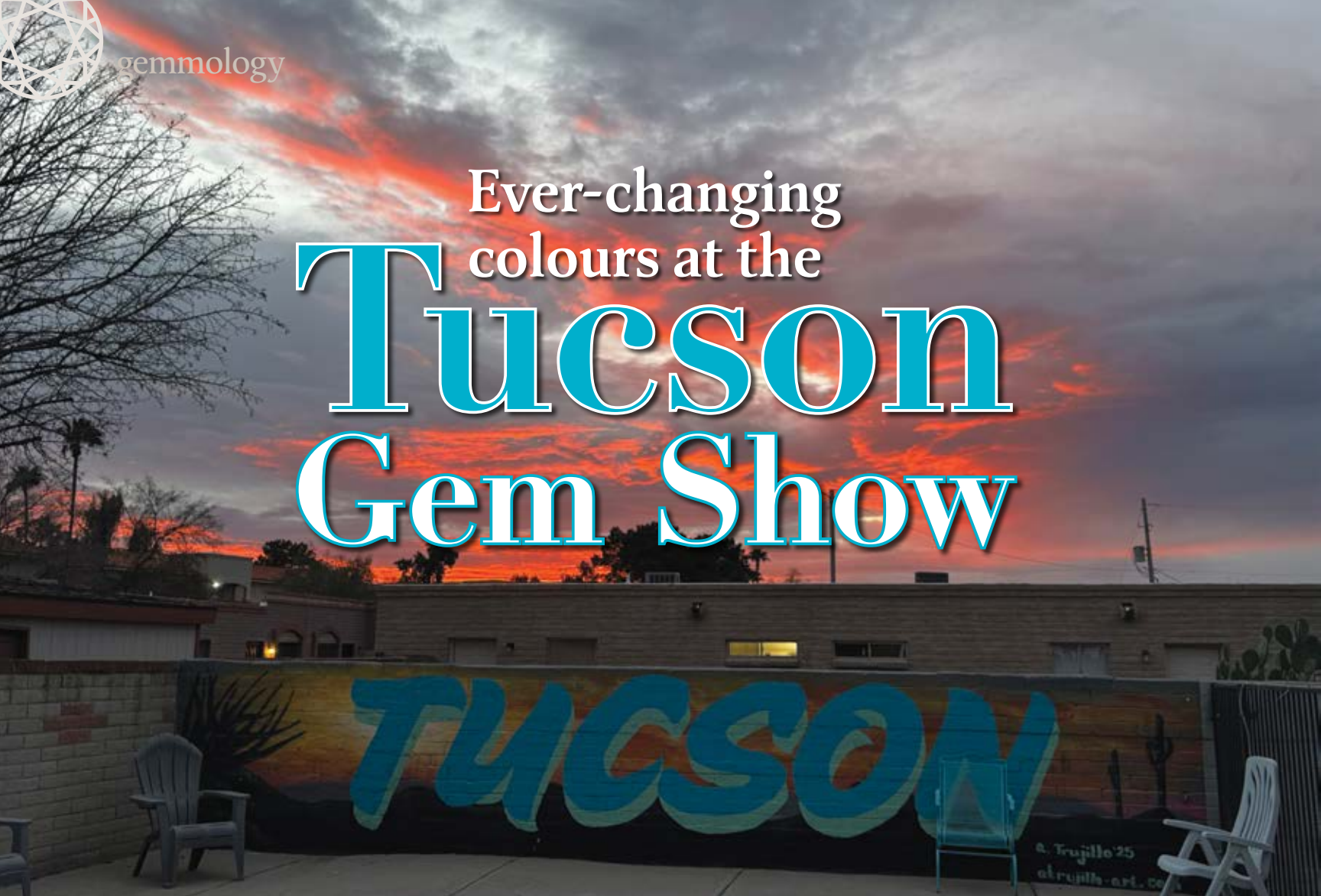
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Ever-changing colours at the Tucson Gem Show

By Lauriane Lognay

The Tucson Gem Show is the world's biggest gem show of the year, a place where people from across the globe gather, socialize, attend conferences, and meet amazing professionals from every corner of the gem and jewellery industry (It's also a great place to party, but that's a trade secret).

Gemstones, rocks, fossils, jewellery, beads, lapidary supplies, mining equipment, anything related to the gemstone world can be found in Tucson.

It is also one of the best places in the world to secure outstanding deals on nearly anything you wish to buy or source. (But buyers beware: finding specific jewellery pieces or gemstones for your clients can be a strenuous task when you don't know where to start; it's like finding a needle in a haystack.)

Since entering the gemmology and jewellery business, I held one certainty: The Tucson Gem Show as an immovable, timeless event where, year after year, the same shows featured, for the most part, the same vendors, each bringing new and exciting gems and jewellery to display in their showcases. Shows such as the American Gem Trade Association (AGTA), Gem & Jewelry Exchange (GJX), Hotel Tucson City Center, Pueblo Gem & Mineral Show, Holidome, and others all felt like permanent fixtures that would always exist.

And they still do... in part.

Over the past few years, however, we have experienced rapid changes: epidemics, soaring prices, price drops, fluctuating supply chains, tense political climates, and tariffs. That doesn't even fully capture the last year.

Some shows have changed, vendors have disappeared, and new ones have emerged to replace them. Some shows no longer exist, while new ones have begun.

I realized that Tucson is a condensed reflection of our industry. Any shift in the market is deeply felt there, sometimes hidden behind polite smiles that mask harsher realities.

Canadians at the show

Over the last 10 years of writing gemmology articles, and for those who know me, I have always strived to present both the truth and the positive aspects of gem shows. I thought for hours on the direction I wanted this article to take, but I think truthfulness is more important. So, when I returned from Tucson, and curious colleagues repeatedly asked how the show was, I found myself with only one word: Weird.

I will, therefore, try to answer your unspoken questions to the best of my ability.

PHOTOS COURTESY LAURIANE LOGNAY/RIPPAVA INC



AGTA Show 2026.



Australian black opal necklace with tsavorite, demantoid garnets, and diamonds.

Like many fellow Canadians, I was apprehensive about what this year's show would be like. The reality is that relations with the United States have felt somewhat tense. Many colleagues chose not to attend this year due to uncertainty in both the market and the country itself.

Although I exhibited at AGTA during all the previous Tucson shows, for the first time in five years, I decided to attend primarily as an observer.

I approached the trip with an open mind and a hopeful but curious outlook, ready to see where it would lead.

The show effectively began even before boarding the plane. A statement from the Tucson Police Department announced that federal immigration enforcement operations were being conducted in the area. Questions quickly circulated about the presence of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and whether tourists should carry passports at all times in case of questioning. There were also rumours that border officials might request access to social media accounts or phones upon entry.

Thankfully, none of that happened in the circle of people I knew.

Still, it left an uneasy feeling at the start of a show that I usually anticipate with the excitement of Christmas morning. It painted a worrying backdrop.

The Canadians I met at the major gem shows had one thing in common for the most part: they all had offices or companies in the U.S. to make it easier on them regarding transportation, tariffs, accounts, and more. Shows like the AGTA decided for next year to only accept U.S.-based sellers, refusing Canadian-only business or any other localities. This makes it difficult to even get new dealers to enter the show.

Prices

For the most part, there were no major surprises regarding surging gold prices or the gemstone market. However, tariffs, as many had feared, created challenges for both vendors and buyers. Good deals could still

be found, but they were increasingly scarce if you didn't know where to look or lacked established relationships with the exhibitors.

It did not, however, deter everyone; serious buyers were still lined up at the doors on the opening day of the major shows. The first two days were the best, and the remaining week saw fewer buyers each day.

Some vendors were pleased, saying it meant more committed buyers, fewer hesitant browsers waiting to purchase later at the Las Vegas show, and less casual window-shopping.

At first glance, that sounds positive, even excellent. But less enthusiastic buyers offered another perspective: it may also reflect greater caution, reduced willingness to experiment with new products, and a tendency to stick with familiar purchasing habits.

Customers will not buy with confidence if jewellers show hesitation.

Whether that represents a healthy trend for the industry in the long term is open to interpretation.

Attempting to discuss these issues with American exhibitors, or even the smaller number of Canadian/U.S. exhibitors, proved delicate. Many were reluctant to speak openly, fearing conversations might become political in an already deeply divided environment. Most Americans I talked to (and most not wanting to be named) confessed to feeling divided. Most painted themselves as prisoners of their own politics. Even friends said to me, "We just want to make jewellery and geek out on gemstones," and for years, that was also my personal take, but that no longer works.

Remaining neutral may be understandable in such circumstances, but it may not be the best path forward if the goal is a stronger, more transparent industry.

People were not forthcoming with their opinions and were more inclined to say nothing had changed; everything was well. If we want an industry based on trust and transparency, it has to start at the root.



Quartz sculpture at the Pueblo show.

Some vendors from elsewhere in the world, like Madagascar, Thailand, or India, were a little more inclined to talk about the situation, but few had a positive word to say about the current climate. Perseverance was key to coming to the show this year, and hopes were high that it would be worthwhile. Missing booths were replaced by new hopeful vendors, creating a false sense that everyone was there, as if nothing was amiss. Some booths were left empty for reasons we can speculate on.

I'd love to say we, as buyers and exhibitors, make the Tucson Gem Show what it is today, but the reality is that the same system has been in place for more than 30 years at some shows, and the system makes the show work right now, but for how long?

Precious Tucson

Despite all the concerns, changes, and uneasy conversations, one truth remained impossible to ignore: the magic of Tucson is still there.

Between the rows of showcases and jewellery displays, I saw what has always defined this event: spontaneous reunions between colleagues who see each other only once a year, new friendships forming over a shared fascination with an unusual stone, and moments of genuine excitement when someone discovers something extraordinary. The laughter, the late-night discussions (and parties), the trading of knowledge, and the quiet passion for gems continue to transcend borders and circumstances.

Tucson has never truly been about buildings, venues, or even sales figures. It is about people, miners, jewellers, cutters, dealers, designers,



Giant jasper-quartz spheres displayed at the Pueblo show, with Lauriane Lognay standing next to them for scale.

gemmologists, collectors; all connected by a deep appreciation for the Earth's treasures. That shared language of beauty and curiosity is far stronger than any (hopefully) temporary tension.

If anything, this year demonstrated not weakness, but resilience. The show adapts because the industry adapts. New vendors step in where others leave; new markets emerge, and new generations arrive with fresh energy and ideas. Change, while uncomfortable, is also a sign that the industry is alive. Change is inevitable.

For Canadians and international visitors alike, Tucson still offers something irreplaceable: perspective. It reminds us that we are part of a global community that, despite differences, continues to collaborate, trade, learn, and create together.

The show did feel "weird" this year, but it also felt human and very much alive.

And as long as people continue to gather there with curiosity, passion, and a love for gemstones, Tucson will remain what it has always been: not just the largest gem show in the world, but one of the most important meeting points of our industry.

I, for one, am already wondering what colours Tucson will show us next year. 🌈



Lauriane Lognay is a fellow of the Gemmological Association of Great Britain (FGA) and has won several awards. She is a gemstone dealer who works with jewellers to help them decide on the best stones for their designs. Lognay owns Rippana, Inc., a Montréal-based company that offers coloured gemstone, lapidary, and jewellery services. She can be reached at rippanainfo@gmail.com.



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Security lessons from our southern neighbour



By Scott Hayes

At the time I am writing this article, I've just finished attending the 42nd Annual Security Seminar and Expo, put on by Jewelers' Security Alliance (JSA). They are the Jewellers Vigilance Canada (JVC) equivalent in the United States, but on a much larger scale. While this seminar is geared towards the U.S. market, the security and crime issues faced by the U.S. jewellery industry are very similar to the issues in Canada. I'm going to highlight some of my takeaways and some lessons learned as they relate to the Canadian jewellery industry.

Smash-and-grab robberies

Four or five years ago, these were practically unheard of, but they have become an all-too-common risk for jewellery retailers. In my talks, presentations, and webinars, I have been advocating to jewellers that being able to control your store entrances is critical to prevention, and this point was echoed by JSA's Scott Guginsky. I watched surveillance video of an event, and similar to Canada, the thieves gathered in stolen vehicles before entering the store and then smashed through cases and stole large amounts of jewellery. The elderly store owner suffered a stroke and a heart attack when the thieves pushed him to the ground. The store had a controlled-access door lock, and while staff saw them coming, a staff member accidentally pressed the door lock entry button in a panic. This reinforces two points: 1) Control your entry (if you can), 2) Train your staff.

Vehicles being used to ram through storefronts is just as big a problem in the U.S., and few options can stop a 4,000-lb vehicle. Traffic bollards

are the best, and possibly the only, defence against this kind of threat. If you're exploring options, there are many models available that can match the style of the area. You're not limited to yellow cemented pillars.

Perimeter protection

Every jeweller has some form of alarm system to be alerted of a potential crime; however, you have to wait until a sensor is triggered, which means an attempted entry has already occurred. Staying aware of activities outside your store can be an important step in preventing crime. Mat Smitheman from Interface demonstrated an exterior unit that only needs power to operate. This device is mounted outside the store and works with AI-equipped cameras to monitor your exterior. It can identify when people are doing more than just walking by and deliver pre-recorded messages to deter would-be thieves. If individuals continue to loiter, the AI detects this and routes the video to a live human at a monitoring centre, who can communicate with them via a two-way device built into the unit.

GPS tracking of high-value items

Dan Kopchick from Ensurity gave a presentation on GPS devices that can be embedded in jewellery pillows and show boxes, providing nearly live information (approximately every 20 seconds) on the device's location once it detects movement. The battery in these devices can be charged wirelessly and can last six months or more before needing to be recharged. When actively transmitting, the device's battery can last up to



three weeks. This is more than enough time to get an accurate location. I won't get into all the details in this article, but several methods and strategies are involved in deploying a GPS program. On this note, I want to touch on the use of Apple AirTags. While there have been some success stories with them, they are not designed to give real-time location data, and they are easily discoverable when deployed due to Apple's concerns about anti-stalking with their use.

Alarm systems, jamming, and safe attacks

On the more advanced end, organized crime groups have become highly skilled in their break-in tactics. Some are gaining entry through the roof, conducting construction work beforehand, and waiting for the store to be closed on a Sunday or long weekend. They then use jamming devices to overwhelm the wireless signals of your security system. DGA Security offers a device called Jam Guard, which can be installed with any security system; it detects jamming devices and alerts the alarm centre. These sophisticated criminals wait to see the response, and if no one shows up to check the whole perimeter, they enter and proceed to target your safe.

As I mentioned in a previous article, it's important to remember that you should have your alarm system inspected once a year, test it quarterly, and make sure your call list is updated with people who will answer the phone. A common issue in the U.S., as we have here in Canada, is that keyholders don't answer the phone, or the alarm company is calling people who are no longer employed. Remember to get all the numbers

of your alarm centre so you can program them to override any "do not disturb" blocks on your phone.

Safe attacks are less common in Canada, but this tactic can be easily communicated to those here in the North. If you don't have a seismic or vibration sensor installed on your safe, you should consider installing one and also think about a device like Jam Guard that will notify you if your system might be down due to jamming. 🌐

Jewellers Vigilance Canada (JVC) is a non-profit subsidiary of the Canadian Jewellers Association with a mandate "to advance loss prevention within the jewellery industry." JVC also works closely with law enforcement agencies in Canada through their Crime Prevention Program. For more information, visit www.jewellerycrimecanada.ca.



Scott Hayes is a security advisor and independent security consultant with Jewellers Vigilance Canada (JVC). He retired with over 28 years of experience in law enforcement, having spent the last 15 years investigating organized crime on a national and international level. He is a Certified Protection Professional (CPP) with ASIS Int'l and an Associate

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Digital readiness

and succession in the jewellery industry

A practical perspective

By Danielle Walsh

The jewellery industry is experiencing a generational shift. Across Canada, many retail jewellers, designers, wholesalers, and repair shops are long-standing family-owned businesses now preparing for leadership transitions. As owners begin planning for retirement or restructuring, succession discussions often focus on identifying new leaders, transferring ownership, and preserving customer relationships.

A factor that receives far less attention but carries equal long-term significance is the digital maturity of the business. The systems, processes, and data structures that support daily operations have a large influence on how effectively a successor can manage, grow, and modernize the organization.

The next generation will have difficulty succeeding if they inherit a business held together by memory, paper notes, and outdated systems.

Jewellery is a relationship-driven, craftsmanship-rich industry. But it is also one where knowledge is heavily concentrated in the minds of owners and senior staff. As these individuals prepare to step back, the question becomes: Is the day-to-day of the business organized well enough that someone new could step in, understand the workflows, and keep things running smoothly with the tools and routines in place today? In other words, if you were gone tomorrow, would the business still run the way it needs to?

Jewellery businesses are now operating in an increasingly complex environment:

- Customer behaviour has shifted toward online research, digital price comparisons, and hybrid purchasing paths blending online and in-store interactions.
- Inventory management has become more demanding with serialized items, consignment pieces, custom work, and broader product diversity.
- Fraud, cybercrime, and payment-security risks continue to rise across retail sectors.
- Younger owners and managers expect data availability, process visibility, and integrated systems that support informed decision-making.
- National competitors and international brands have invested heavily in digital channels, omnichannel retailing, and advanced inventory systems.



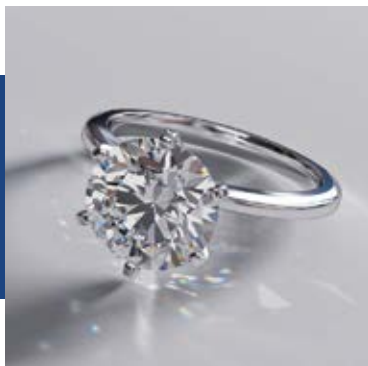
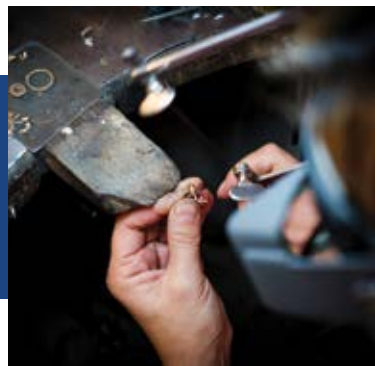
Cybersecurity is essential for modern retail operations, not just an optional add-on.

PHOTO © FANCYSTUDIO/COURTESY BIGSTOCKPHOTO.COM

In this context, a successor's ability to lead depends heavily on the digital environment they inherit. The following are some foundational elements that can play a big role in helping jewellery stores, studios, or workshops have a smooth transition.



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Succession shouldn't start from scratch; ensure the next generation inherits a strong foundation.

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1) Document what you know before it walks out the door

Many seasoned jewellers carry years of experience in their heads: they can glance at a repair envelope and recall the customer, the original sale, and the exact work completed years prior. They know every supplier, special-order nuance, and pricing detail without checking a document.

That knowledge is priceless but also incredibly fragile.

When leadership changes hands, undocumented knowledge becomes risk. Repairs may be delayed, pricing becomes inconsistent, supplier relationships weaken, and custom jobs take longer. Simply put, things begin to slip through the cracks.

Documenting the everyday realities of how your business operates: repair intake, appraisal steps, inventory processing, and custom design workflows helps ensure those practices don't disappear when key people step back. It's not about replacing craftsmanship. It's about protecting it.

2) Successors need clear, simple visibility into the business

Many jewellery stores still run on a mix of handwritten repair tickets, paper appraisals, spreadsheets, old point-of-sale (POS) systems, and shared memory. While these methods have served the business for decades, they make it difficult for a new leader to understand what's really happening.

Successors benefit from modern tools that provide real-time visibility into bestsellers, margins, inventory aging, customer history, workshop volume, and upcoming commitments. When new leaders can see the full picture without digging through binders or guessing, they can make decisions confidently and lead more effectively.

3) Manual processes become vulnerabilities during a transition

Paper repair envelopes, handwritten custom-job notes, and manual inventory counts have long been staples of the jewellery trade. These methods work until the moment a leadership transition introduces new people, new responsibilities, and unfamiliar workflows.

During a transition, manual processes can lead to misplaced jobs, inconsistent handovers, unclear status updates, training challenges, and difficulty identifying or correcting mistakes. Digitizing a few key workflows, such as repair intake or workshop tracking, helps ensure the business runs predictably regardless of who is behind the counter.

This isn't about becoming a high-tech operation; it's about making your processes stable, repeatable, and resilient.

4) The next generation expects modern tools, and so do customers

Incoming leaders often assume certain digital basics will already be in place: a modern POS tied to inventory, accurate stock visibility, digital customer records, simple reporting dashboards, and online catalogues or appointment booking.

Meanwhile, customer expectations have shifted toward hybrid online/in-store experiences. Shoppers want the ability to browse online, schedule appointments, reference past purchases, or receive timely updates on repairs and custom pieces.

Here is a simple example from my own experience that shows how important it is to record information clearly, no matter what system you use. When my husband needed to bring in my wedding ring for a repair, the store tried to look up the original purchase using their

digital records. But because the customer representative had entered his name phonetically and even recorded his phone number incorrectly, nothing came up under any of the usual search fields. The only reason we found the record at all was because my husband remembered the date he had taken a photo of the ring after buying it, and we used that to search by date instead. Once we did, the order appeared right away, just filed under the wrong spelling.

The system itself wasn't the problem. The issue was how the information had been entered. No matter what tools a business uses, the details still need to be recorded carefully and consistently so that anyone, even someone who has never used the system before, can find what they need when it matters. More often than not, digital systems tend to capture more data than necessary to find these "lost" items. Of course, we found the receipt the next day, and lo and behold, all the "misinformation" was right there on the receipt.

Modern systems help successors meet these expectations while providing the structure needed to run the business efficiently.

5) Strong technology directly protects business value

One of the least discussed aspects of jewellery succession is how significantly outdated systems can reduce business value. Whether the new leader is a family member or an outside buyer, they care deeply about how inventory is tracked, how accurate the books are, how much knowledge is undocumented, and whether customer information is secure.

A business built on organized processes and accessible data is easier to transition, easier to scale, easier to value, and easier to find "lost" items, no matter who recorded the transaction. Digital readiness is not just an operational improvement; it is a strategic investment in the long-term worth of the business.

6) Cloud tools and managed IT reduce stress during handover

When a leadership change occurs, that transition often involves updating accounts, shifting email access, replacing hardware, and adjusting digital permissions on most of the systems in the business. These are moments when information gets lost, systems break, or security is weakened. More often than not, in the form of forgotten accounts that lay dormant but still enabled with administrative privileges, you never know when the previous owners might come back! But these represent a security risk because they are not kept up to date, usually have access to all the data and permissions, and are not monitored very heavily.

Cloud tools bring stability. Automatic backups, secure access from anywhere, shared documents that don't disappear with one person, easy role changes, and simplified collaboration all help ensure continuity. Paired with basic IT support, this creates a smoother and far less stressful transition for everyone involved.

A typical process at this stage of the transition should be a review of the accounts, removing permissions if that individual is no longer in that role, and locking down access to avoid accidental operational changes, especially to financial and inventory systems.



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An organized business with accessible data simplifies transition, scaling, and valuation.

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Digitizing key workflows like repair intake and workshop tracking ensures consistent business operations, no matter who is at the counter.

PHOTO © ANDREYPOPOV/COURTESY BIGSTOCKPHOTO.COM



Jewellery is a business built on legacy. Digital readiness ensures that legacy is intact, organized, and strong enough for the next era.

7) Cybersecurity matters more now than ever

Jewelers face significant cybersecurity threats: payment fraud, phishing attempts from “suppliers,” compromised staff accounts, stolen customer information, and ransomware. These risks tend to increase during leadership transitions, when criminals assume systems and staff may be distracted. They are also facilitated when old accounts lay dormant and haven’t had their security updated, in terms of passwords, MFA settings (or lack thereof), or account privileges.

Strong passwords, staff awareness training, secure systems, and routine monitoring go a long way in protecting both outgoing and incoming owners. Cybersecurity is no longer an optional add-on; it is a necessary component of running a modern retail operation. Cybersecurity needs to be seen as an investment in the continuity and long-term viability of the business, not as a cost centre. Regardless of the industry, ransomware and cybersecurity incidents have brought businesses to their knees and have forced some to close. These risks can be minimized with the proper tools and staff training. At the end of the day, cybersecurity is a people, process, and technology problem; they all need to work together.

It all comes down to one question: What kind of business are you handing over?

Succession shouldn’t feel like starting from scratch.

The next generation should inherit:

- Systems they can trust
 - Processes they can follow
 - Data they can learn from
 - Customer records they can build on
 - Technology that supports, rather than hinders, their leadership
- Jewellery is a business built on legacy. Digital readiness ensures that legacy is intact, organized, and strong enough for the next era.

The craft doesn’t change. The relationships don’t change. The artistry doesn’t change.

But the tools we use to support those things must evolve, especially when it’s time to pass the baton. 🇨🇦



Danielle Walsh is founder of Walsh Family Business Advisory Services, a consulting company specializing in helping family-owned and operated businesses navigate management and ownership succession. She is a chartered professional accountant (CPA), chartered accountant (CA), and holds certificates in family business advising and family wealth advising from

the Family Firm Institute (FFI). Walsh developed her philosophy and desire to help family businesses from her father, Grant Walsh, who has worked as a family business practitioner for the last 25 years. She and her father recently published a book titled A Practical Guide to Family Business Succession Planning: The Advice You Won’t Get from Accountants and Lawyers. Walsh also currently teaches the first family business course offered at the undergraduate level at Carleton University in Ottawa. She can be reached via email at danielle@walshfbas.com.

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Love's Language

2026 brings imaginative bridal jewels



Britain's Queen Victoria's snake engagement ring depicted a popular motif of the era.

By Diana Jarrett

Engagement rings are nothing new. However, bridal jewels have experienced immense transformations over the years.

They were not worn by ordinary folks when they first appeared, though. Ancient Roman rulers and Egyptian nobility gave engagement rings, and history informs us they symbolized ownership and love. Modern society would take umbrage at the concept of ownership between spouses. So, our 21st century equivalent is best expressed as fidelity and love—a positive step in bridal jewellery's narrative.

Wearing a message

The concept of the ring speaking a love language is surprisingly not modern. Britain's Prince Albert designed Queen Victoria's engagement ring in 1839, which was rich in symbolism. A coiled snake encircling her delicate finger, glancing up at its wearer, embodied icons familiar to Victorian-era sensibilities.

In the 19th century, snakes were not perceived as slithering, sinister creatures at all. Rather, serpents signified eternal love, wisdom, and protection. Earlier, Ancient Roman traditions portrayed reptiles positively as emblems of devotion and an everlasting union.

Additionally, the emerald atop Victoria's snake's head ring was her birthstone. Celebrity jeweller Neil Lane, founder of Neil Lane Couture, puts it this way. "Snakes have never gone out of fashion. Sometimes it's more popular than ever. If you go back to the 19th century, snakes were everywhere." You're likely to see snakes adorning custom engagement rings today.

Popularity boom

By the 1930s, diamonds' availability soared when their production from South Africa peaked. Engagement rings became the norm for ordinary couples by the mid-20th century.

Although they were introduced to America in the 1840s, Canada saw their popularity surge around 1940. That's also when De Beers' brilliant marketing tag, "A diamond is forever," first enjoyed widespread reception the world over.

During their mid-20th-century swell, the modern engagement ring's message was that of financial commitment from the groom, and a pledge of faithfulness between the couple. Aspirational rings from that time boasted a one-quarter-carat diamond solitaire, eliciting sighs of admiration from family and friends.

How 2026 is different

As we move through 2026, we're seeing some exciting trends emerge within the bridal jewellery niche.

Naturally, the promise of commitment is still foundational to an engagement ring's message. But today's imaginative designers are in lockstep with the shopper's desire for personal expression with their bridal jewels. It's a moment for retailers to respond by offering a broader selection of bridal jewels for couples who crave individuality with their rings.

Expert gemstone cutter Mike Soebbing, owner of The Gemstone Man LLC, confirms the uptick in personalized engagement jewellery. Couples are conveying a love story through their engagement ring,

he's discovered. "I recently cut stones for local couples who acquired Montana sapphires to use in their custom engagement rings. They'll be designed using sapphires specifically from this area."

The natural stones provide stunning alternatives to traditional diamonds, Soebbing says. "One couple selected stones allowing them to create an original ring around their personal story." The gems he's cut for them include "combos of light green and darker blue heat-treated sapphire, plus a natural one from the El Dorado mining area."

Heavy metal vibes

Consumers have several metal options today to further personalize their bridal jewels. But savvy jewellery fans are gravitating to platinum, as a perennially luxe choice. With its heft and soft white patina from wear, a platinum ring feels lush.

Jenny Luker, president, Platinum Guild USA, sheds light on consumers' attraction to this metal. "Nothing feels like platinum. Its rarity, density, and naturally white colour deliver a level of quality and permanence that sets it apart from other white metals." Luker believes shoppers are finding platinum more attractive than ever before. "Platinum never fades, offers superior security for diamonds and gemstones, and continues to gain relevance as gold prices rise, making it a compelling, long-term choice for fine jewellery."

Who's wearing what?

A key driver affecting engagement ring trends for some includes celebrity preferences. For instance, Lady Gaga's current oval solitaire engagement ring tells fans that bigger is better.

Professionals estimate this sparkler weighs upwards of 20 carats.

An engagement ring is nothing new for this entertainer. She's been engaged at least two times before. But her choice of a colossal classic diamond solitaire ring this time represents an evolution from her earlier engagement ring choices. There was a heart-shaped diamond given to her on Valentine's Day years ago. Next, there was a pink sapphire and diamond engagement ring. This time, simplicity is the ticket, as long as it's enormous.

Oscar winner Halle Berry recently wowed fans when she flaunted her antique-inspired engagement ring. The vintage design centred on a round diamond accented with intensely saturated sapphires. Trade pundits agreed that her distinctive sparkler's vibe aligns with the sought-after engagement trends in 2026.

Berry's ring leans into the growing desire for maximalism—complex pieces that stand apart from a predictable diamond solitaire. And seminal to this trend, her design reflects a shift toward individuality. Today's couples increasingly seek rings that feel one-of-a-kind through the use of mixed gemstones, and especially unconventional layouts.

Talented music star Rita Ora opted for a personalized stone to express her love story. Choosing a substantial emerald centred around scintillating diamonds, her stone choice reflects Ora's individuality and asserts her confidence as a bride. The verdant emerald jewel is often seen as an ode to new life—and an expectancy of what's to come. That's a powerful gemstone choice that conveys her hopes for this marriage.



Platinum and diamond engagement ring.

PHOTO COURTESY PLATINUM GUILD INTERNATIONAL



Mike Soebbing examines a Montana sapphire

PHOTO COURTESY MIKE SOEBBING

Lately, Miley Cyrus has been proudly showing off a wide-band yellow gold engagement ring—a glamorous trend that younger devotees are opting for to create a bold look. The trend is taking off as more celebrities and jewellery fans adopt this chunky gold look.

Retailer's perspective

Toronto-based jeweller Susan Shaw, co-partner at ATTIC Gold, shares her insight into the current atmosphere in bridal jewellery. According to this popular retailer, today's couples are informed, requiring less tutoring to find their perfect engagement ring. "Most couples come to us having already connected with our aesthetic. They've done some browsing online and are looking for something that feels like them."

While online browsing is often seen as essential homework, nothing substitutes for an in-store experience, Shaw tells us. "Trying on pieces in



Platinum bridal ring set.

PLATINUM GUILD INTERNATIONAL



Custom polishing a Montana sapphire for an engagement ring.

PHOTO COURTESY MIKE SOEBBING



Large centre diamond rings are sought after in 2026.

PLATINUM GUILD INTERNATIONAL

person is key, because what clients think they want often shifts once they see and feel the rings.”

Shaw explains that current shoppers veer away from old traditions while starting their own new ones. “Today’s couples are less focused on tradition for tradition’s sake and more interested in self-expression, whether that’s a wider, bolder band, an unconventional diamond, or simply the setting that feels right for who they are.”

Case in point

ATTIC Gold custom-designed a “His and Hers” engagement ring set. One ring featured a dark, smoky salt-and-pepper shield portrait cut diamond. The other ring sported an emerald-cut trapiche salt-and-pepper diamond. Both were crafted in bold yellow gold settings. “The couple stopped by our 10th year celebration with their new baby, telling us how connected they remain to the rings and how many people comment on them.”

Shaw reveals she’s always drawn to stones with warmth and character. “My dream diamond would be of Canadian origin, a modern

old mine cut with a warm champagne hue.” The stones themselves can convey individuality, she says. “The chunkier facets of Antique-style cuts have so much charm and personality, a soft, slower sparkle. They just feel romantic.”

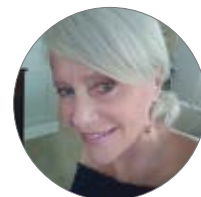
An eye on trends

In 2026, there’s no single “right” engagement ring for couples. And that’s good. Each bride can discover her personal style expressed through a ring that reflects her taste. East-west or angled centre stone orientation is a hot pick now. Setting stones creatively is the something “extra” with broad appeal. Marquises, emerald cuts, ovals, and even pears are given an unexpected orientation in their settings for a new message with the solitaire ring concept.

Shoppers are also selecting a traditional diamond look with an updated twist. The bigger the better is the rule, right now. Taking a cue from celebrities like Lady Gaga, a couple can glam it up with large-carat diamonds, which are infinitely more affordable if they choose lab-grown diamonds. Many brides do just that.

Expect to see a mix-and-match motif—a vintage diamond or gemstone shape in a modern setting. Look for coloured stone centres to star in engagement rings this year. They deliver a personal message for couples who are integrating storytelling themes into their bridal jewels.

Whether a couple selects a traditionally demure wedding ring style or a bold main event ring, jewellers are creating inspired designs to help them tell their unique love story. 🌟



Diana Jarrett, GG RMV Member AIJV, is an award-winning trade journalist and graduate gemmologist (GG). A registered master valuer, Jarrett is a popular conference and trade show lecturer. She is also the co-author of Cameos Old & New (4th Edition) and the co-creator of JewelryWebsiteDesigners.com. Jarrett can be reached at diana@dianajarrett.com or via

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Bridal pearls

Pearl choker necklace featuring small freshwater pearls and baroque pearl earrings.

A timeless elegance of love and tradition

By Olga Shevchenko

Years ago, I came across a phrase: “Pearls and brides are synonyms.” And it is true, as these two are connected by culture and symbolism.

The pearl is an organic gemstone with a recorded history that predates most other gems. Formed within a living mollusk, a pearl may be seen as a metaphor for life, love, and marriage.

Indeed, a pearl can symbolize love and marriage—it takes time to form; during its growth, it encounters various challenges before becoming beautiful, valuable, and rare. The same is true for love and family life. Therefore, pearls serve as a metaphor for love that deepens over time, overcoming difficulties and obstacles to become precious and unique.

About pearlcore weddings

Pinterest identified the term “pearlcore” as a rising trend in its 2022 report, a movement that has gained popularity. It describes a bridal aesthetic, making pearls the central visual theme at the wedding ceremony. Pearls are

incorporated during all stages of the celebration: adorning the bridal gown, veil, and shoes; worn as jewellery; and even integrated into the decor.

This is a bold manifestation of the renaissance of pearl jewellery that started years ago. A pearlcore wedding combines the exquisite, timeless elegance of pearls with contemporary trends and designs.

It is no coincidence that the tradition of wearing pearls at a wedding is growing in popularity. Fashion is cyclical—pearls were very trendy in the 20th century, considered a classic; then, in 1980-1990, they temporarily fell out of favour (think of “grandma’s pearls”) only to come back stronger and more reimagined.

Pearls and weddings in history

In ancient India, pearls were associated with longevity, prosperity, and life preservation.

One of the earliest connections between pearls and marriage is found in Hindu tradition. Legend says the deity Krishna gave his daughter a precious gift on her wedding day—a beautiful pearl.

PHOTOS COURTESY OLGA SHEVCHENKO

And India preserves this tradition—many brides wear pearls on their wedding day.

Ancient Greeks considered pearls the wedding gem.

During the Middle Ages and the Crusades, knights gave pearls to their brides. Over time, pearls became a symbol of love.

Thus, pearl jewellery is a traditional bridal adornment. There is also a longstanding custom of giving pearls as wedding gifts to brides, bridesmaids, and the mothers of the newlyweds.

Today, we observe a continuation of an ancient tradition of giving pearl jewellery to the bride on the wedding day, by the father or by the groom.

Sustainability of pearl jewellery

Another significant factor driving the increasing popularity of pearls is their sustainability. The link between pearls and sustainability was first discussed in 2010, and today, it is more important than ever as many consumers, especially the younger generation, are concerned about environmental issues and responsible sourcing.

Pearls are naturally sustainable because they only grow in clean, unpolluted water. As a result, pearl farming can have positive environmental effects, such as improving water quality, protecting coral reefs, safeguarding waterways and marine life, and providing shelter for small fish.

Nowadays, pearl-producing countries worldwide, including China, pursue various initiatives to make pearl farming more responsible and environmentally beneficial.

This fact should be specifically highlighted by retailers selling pearl jewellery, as it adds significant value.

Which pearl jewellery are modern brides looking for?

Modern brides look for pearl jewellery that complements their wedding gown and enhances their overall style without overwhelming it. Pearls are well suited to bridal wear because of their refined, understated elegance, and their wide variety of sizes, shapes, and colours makes it easy to match any bridal look.

Classic pieces such as white pearl earrings, necklaces, and bracelets made with Akoya, South Sea, or freshwater pearls remain popular, though many brides choose updated versions featuring unique clasps or distinctive pendants.

Fashion-forward brides often select statement designs, including asymmetrical earrings or pieces that pair pearls with coloured gemstones or diamonds for added contrast and freshness. Even traditional strands can be reimagined as modern chokers with bold clasps. Baroque and Keshi pearls appeal to brides seeking individuality, offering organic shapes and strong lustre that make each piece one-of-a-kind.

Minimalist brides may opt for simple studs, a delicate bracelet, or geometric designs that offer a clean, contemporary look. With the diversity of cultured freshwater pearls, there is pearl jewellery suited to every style, preference, and personality.

Colourful pearls for a wedding

Colour has long been prominent in fashion, and brides seeking a modern, distinctive look often turn to coloured pearls instead of traditional white accessories.



Statement custom pearl jewellery—classic with a modern twist. Necklace featuring freshwater peach-coloured pearls. Matching earrings featuring peach-coloured Chinese Kasumi pearls paired with Ethiopian opal.

Cultured freshwater pearls come in natural pastel shades such as pink, apricot, lavender, and champagne, offering a subtle glow that aligns with the quiet luxury trend.

These hues add elegance and individuality, helping a bride stand out while still appearing refined and feminine.

Coloured pearl jewellery can elevate a bridal look and may even complement her skin tone. A white gown paired with pastel pearls creates a sophisticated, memorable effect that remains stylish long after the wedding day. With pearls now worn casually as well as formally, her wedding jewellery becomes a versatile, lasting part of her wardrobe.

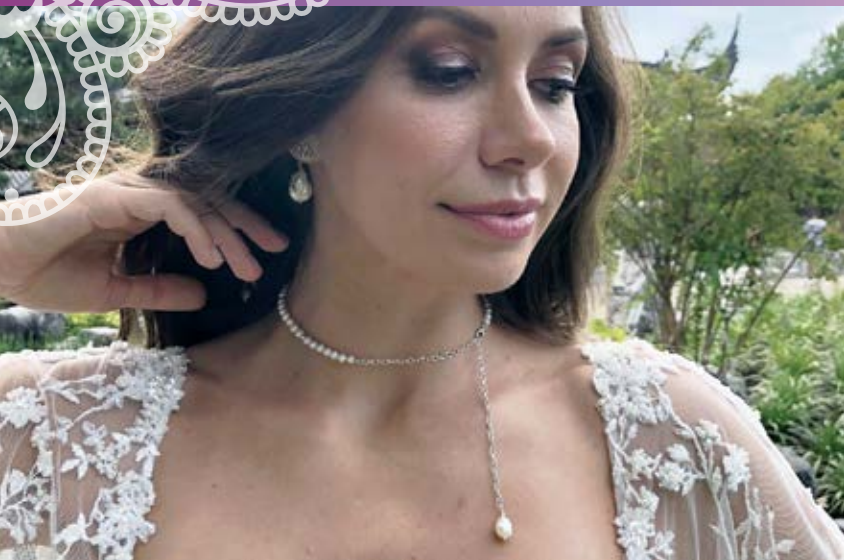
Budget considerations

Pearl jewellery is available at a wide range of price points, which makes it accessible to many buyers.

Cultured pearls come in both freshwater and saltwater varieties, and freshwater pearls typically cost far less due to differences in how they are grown, while still offering comparable qualities such as lustre, colour, size, and shape.

Simple freshwater pieces, like stud earrings or a delicate bracelet, can start around \$100 to \$150, while elaborate freshwater necklaces may reach several thousand dollars.

Saltwater pearls, including Akoya and South Sea, are priced higher. With options ranging from mass-produced designs to unique, high-quality pieces, retailers can appeal to budget-conscious shoppers and luxury buyers through tiered pricing.



A versatile pearl necklace and baroque pearl earrings.



A station necklace featuring large baroque pearls and statement pearl earrings.

Mass-produced versus designer pearl jewellery

Of course, there is a big difference between mass-produced pearl jewellery, which is often lacking in uniqueness and worn by many others, and one-of-a-kind or custom-made pieces.

Unfortunately, most jewellery stores sell mass-produced pearl pieces with few options. While designer or custom-made pearl jewellery often comes in limited editions or as unique pieces, it emphasizes quality, details, balance, and proportions. It tells a story.

Since a wedding is one of the most significant events in life, a bride wants to look beautiful and memorable on this special day. Instead of a traditional pearl necklace or bracelet, she often opts for stylish contemporary pearl jewellery as an accessory.

Therefore, it might be worthwhile for a jewellery store, alongside traditional pearl jewellery, to feature a section showcasing fresh, unconventional creations by independent designers. In today's world, where people seek uniqueness and personal expression, wearing a one-of-a-kind pearl piece is an excellent choice, especially for a wedding. Every bride wants to stand out and be memorable. She will likely enjoy wearing a unique pearl jewellery piece made for her and with her involvement, as she can share this emotional story on many occasions. This special piece then becomes a family heirloom, and the story continues.

Jewellery stores' greatest advantage

Despite strong online competition, jewellery stores hold a key advantage: customers buying important pieces, especially wedding jewellery, often want to see, touch, and try on items in person, and may even customize them.

This gives retailers valuable opportunities to build personal connections, understand customer needs, and turn first-time visitors into loyal clients.

Knowledgeable staff are essential; they should be able to explain the differences between freshwater and saltwater pearls, emerging varieties, and current jewellery trends.

When shoppers receive clear, expert information, trust develops, increasing the likelihood of a sale and repeat business. Retailers can also capture additional purchases for bridesmaids or family members.

Carrying both contemporary, design-forward pieces and mass-produced items ensures broad appeal, and unique pearl jewellery often offers stronger margins.

To rent or to buy?

Given budget considerations, the question arises whether Canadian companies rent real pearl jewellery for weddings. Research suggests very few, if any, offer this service, likely because renting presents several challenges.

Some brides may want the look of luxury without the cost, especially if they do not expect to wear the piece again. However, many brides value sentiment and heirloom-quality items, making rental jewellery feel less meaningful for a wedding day.

There are also practical concerns. Real pearls are delicate and easily damaged by cosmetics, perfume, hairspray, and even minor mishandling. Because wear and tear may not appear immediately, rental pieces could deteriorate quickly, creating risk for jewellers.



Classic with a modern twist—white pearl necklace with a contemporary clasp and highly lustrous custom baroque pearl earrings featuring a new generation of pearls, freshwater Chinese Kasumi pearls.

Questions also remain about whether renters would follow proper care instructions for a one-day use. For these reasons, many retailers may hesitate to offer rentals. A possible compromise could be a purchase-credit program if the bride later chooses to buy the piece.

Conclusion

Throughout history, pearls have been traditionally worn at weddings and given as wedding gifts. Today, they remain one of the staples of wedding jewellery. With their subtle, refined beauty, pearls can easily and successfully be incorporated into contemporary bridal designs.

Bearing all the above in mind, including the history and traditions of pearls as well as the recurring popularity of pearl jewellery, retailers should view it as a profitable addition.

To succeed, a modern jewellery retailer should offer pearl jewellery for various customer segments. Additionally, the retail staff must be well educated about pearls and proactive—salespeople should attend workshops and exhibitions to expand their knowledge of new trends.

The salespeople should be able to confidently discuss pearls professionally: understanding their history and origin, various types, new varieties, and features, as well as pearls' symbolism and reasons for their reinvention. Current fashion trends should also be mentioned. Clearly, this will appeal to customers seeking meaningful purchases and help build trust that can lead to increased sales. 🌟



Olga Shevchenko is a fellow of the Gemmological Association of Great Britain (FGA). She is a jewellery designer creating contemporary, unique pearl jewellery (www.pearljewelleryexpert.com). She is a founder of Jewelry Olga, based in Montreal (since 2009). She can be reached at info@pearljewelleryexpert.com or (514) 884-4980.

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How bridal jewellery is evolving with AI

By Megan Crabtree

Bridal jewellery has always been the cornerstone of fine jewellery retail. It represents emotion, commitment, and a once-in-a-lifetime moment. For jewellers, success in bridal means getting countless details right: inventory, pricing, presentation, timing, and trust.

Today's bridal customer, however, is very different from those of past generations. They are digitally fluent, highly informed, and expect clarity and consistency across every touchpoint. In this environment, traditional processes alone are no longer enough. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming a practical, everyday tool that helps jewellers work smarter, not harder.

This isn't about replacing expertise or intuition. It's about removing friction, surfacing insights faster, and helping jewellers make sound decisions with the data they already have.

The state of the bridal market

The bridal category continues to perform strongly, even when other areas of retail soften. But competition is intense. Customers research extensively before visiting a store. They know the four Cs, recognize popular settings, compare prices online, and often arrive with screenshots and inspiration boards in hand.

That means jewellers need instant access to accurate information: what's in stock, where it's located, how it's performing, and how it compares to the rest of the market.

AI as a practical retail assistant

AI works best when it's treated like a highly organized assistant. One you can talk to plainly and ask very specific questions. Think of it as explaining things to a two-year-old: spelling out every detail that raw data alone doesn't show.

1) Inventory analysis and POS data export

AI works with your point-of-sale (POS) system, not instead of it. Reports still need to be run from the POS, including:

- On-hand inventory
- Sold history
- Days to sell
- Average ticket values

Once these reports are exported and shared, AI helps interpret the data in plain language.

Most POS systems do offer basic replenishment and days-to-sell reporting, but AI can analyze that data more deeply. By reviewing how often items are ordered, how quickly they sell, and how long they sit between replenishments, AI can help identify whether products are being reordered too late, too frequently, or not often enough.

AI can also add critical context when comparing vendors, but only when that information is clearly provided. Details such as whether the merchandise is on memo or owned inventory need to be explained so the analysis reflects reality. With that context, AI can help highlight differences in average ticket, cash flow impact, and inventory risk, supporting more informed and confident buying decisions.

2) Faster inter-store transfers

For retailers with multiple locations, inventory visibility can be a constant challenge. Manually checking which store has stock, where an item was sold from, and where it should be transferred can take far too long.

AI simplifies this by answering questions like:

- Which location currently has the size or style that's selling fastest?
- Where did this ring sell from most often?
- Which store should this piece live in to maximize sell-through?

This allows teams to move inventory quickly and confidently, reducing missed sales and unnecessary reorders.

3) Consistent jewellery descriptions, everywhere

Product descriptions are a hidden pain point for many jewellers. Inconsistent naming conventions can cause confusion and result in lost sales or unnecessary reordering.

AI can help build standardized formulas for jewellery descriptions by category. For example:

- Start with metal
- Follow with total carat weight
- Then the centre stone size and shape
- Finish with mounting or design details

A consistent description might read:

14k WG .32 ctw with 1.02 ct round centre semi-mount

Once these formulas are established, AI can quickly revise all product descriptions using the exported data, allowing your team to import consistent, standardized descriptions across the entire inventory.

Content creation that improves over time

AI is also a powerful tool for content creation. Think social posts, email drafts, product highlights, and educational bridal content. The key is interaction. When you take time to go back and forth, give feedback, and refine outputs, AI adapts. It remembers preferences, tone, and structure, making future content faster and more aligned with your brand voice.

For retailers managing their own social media, this means AI can help maintain a consistent posting schedule, test captions, and suggest hashtags or imagery ideas based on engagement trends. You can quickly generate multiple variations of a post, experiment with phrasing, and see which resonates most with your

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Each year, the **Canadian Jewellery Group (CJG)** honours outstanding creativity and craftsmanship with its National Designer of the Year Award.

AI analyzes order frequency, sell rates, and replenishment times to identify if products are being reordered too late, too often, or not enough.

PHOTO COURTESY GEMINI RENDERING



audience, all without sacrificing authenticity. Over time, AI becomes a creative collaborator, freeing you to focus on storytelling and connecting with followers, rather than spending hours drafting and editing content.

Shopping the market with AI

Understanding your competitive landscape has always required time and legwork. AI accelerates this process.

Retailers can use AI to:

- Ask who appears when you search your local market and identify which competitors are showing up most often
- Review pricing on core basics such as studs, tennis bracelets, and solitaire rings, based on what competitors are charging
- Compare how similar products are positioned locally and online to better understand your place in the market

This insight helps validate pricing strategies, identify gaps, and ensure your offerings are competitive without racing to the bottom.

Better decisions, not just more data

At its best, AI doesn't just present numbers; it provides context. When you clearly explain what matters (memo versus owned, asset cost, sell-through speed, average ticket), AI helps connect the dots.

That leads to better decisions:

- Smarter buying
- More efficient inventory movement
- Clearer product presentation
- Stronger content and marketing

Training associates to work with AI

The most effective training approach is to position AI as a support tool, not a replacement for experience or judgment. Associates should understand that AI exists to handle data-heavy tasks so they can focus on clients, storytelling, and service.

Begin by teaching associates how to ask clear, specific questions. AI works best when given context, so training should emphasize explaining details the

data doesn't show, such as whether inventory is on memo or owned, which styles sell best at a particular location, or why a client is price-sensitive. The clearer the input, the more useful the output.

Next, integrate AI into familiar workflows. Use it to help draft product descriptions, summarize POS reports, or prepare client follow-ups. Starting with everyday tasks reduces hesitation and builds confidence quickly.

Encourage a feedback loop. Associates should review AI-generated content, suggest edits, and refine responses. This reinforces brand standards while helping the tool adapt over time.

The human element still matters

AI doesn't replace the human touch, a sales associate's intuition, or the emotional weight of a bridal purchase. Choosing an engagement ring is deeply personal, often tied to family history, cultural tradition, and once-in-a-lifetime milestones. No algorithm can replicate the trust built through a thoughtful conversation or the confidence a client feels when they know they're being truly heard.

What AI does exceptionally well is remove administrative noise and data overload. It handles the time-consuming tasks of sorting inventory data, analyzing sales patterns, drafting descriptions, and surfacing insights, so associates can stay present with clients instead of being distracted by screens or paperwork.

This shift has a direct impact on customer experience.

When retailers begin using intelligent tools to create space for meaningful client interactions, technology stops feeling disruptive. It becomes a trusted business partner. One that supports consistency behind the scenes while allowing the human moments at the counter to remain precisely that: human. 🌟



Megan Crabtree is the founder & CEO of Crabtree Consulting, a boutique consulting firm with a proven track record of successfully growing jewellery retailers and manufacturers for more than two decades. Known for their unique data-driven approach, they identify barriers and create tailored growth opportunities, fuelling success and helping clients reach their goals in the industry.



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Summer is here!

The season ahead is filled with moments to look forward to. From an exceptional two-day workshop with one of the world's leading gemmological experts, to the launch of JETS—our newly reimagined course experience—and the return of Expo Prestige in Montréal, Que., there is a renewed sense of energy across the industry.

On May 1 and 2, 2026, the CJA is proud to host four workshops at George Brown College's Casa Loma Campus in Toronto, led by Branko Deljanin—an internationally respected educator whose work has shaped gemmological knowledge across continents. With decades of experience, published research, and a reputation that reaches from Antwerp to Tokyo, Deljanin brings both remarkable expertise and a rare gift for teaching.

Over two immersive days, participants will explore diamonds, beryls, and jade using advanced gemmological tools in a hands-on setting designed for both newcomers and seasoned professionals.

And with Mother's Day just around the corner, this is a gift unlike any other—unexpected, meaningful, and lasting. Whether offered to someone special or to yourself, it is an opportunity to step into a world of knowledge, curiosity, and craftsmanship. Spaces are limited, and Deljanin's sessions are always in high demand—this is a moment worth seizing.

We are also delighted to introduce JETS, our newly redesigned jewellery education course. What was once a series of PDF materials has been fully reimagined into a dynamic learning experience that you can take anywhere. Accessible from your laptop, tablet, or phone, JETS allows you to learn at your own pace, in your own time—whether at home, at the workshop, or on the go.

This transformation goes far beyond format. The content itself has been carefully rehabilitated, reviewed, refined, and thoughtfully updated to reflect today's industry realities. Every lesson has been reworked to feel clearer, more engaging, and more relevant, creating a learning experience that feels intuitive and genuinely enjoyable. Looking ahead, this is just the beginning, with

new courses already on the horizon to continue supporting and inspiring our community.

Expo Prestige, Canada's longest-running jewellery buyers' show, returns for its second consecutive year under the CJA's production at the Grand Quay in Old Montréal on August 23 and 24, 2026. Last year's edition revealed just how special this gathering can be—a thoughtfully curated event bringing together designers, suppliers, manufacturers, and retailers from across the country.

There is also something uniquely magical about Old Montréal in August. The warmth of the season, the liveliness of the streets, and the beauty of the Old Port come together to create an atmosphere that feels both vibrant and timeless. Whether you are there to discover new collections, showcase your work, or simply reconnect with the industry, Expo Prestige offers a space where meaningful connections unfold naturally.

Before the season begins, there is one essential piece to have in place: a strong Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing (AML/ATF) compliance program. Far from being a formality, it is a vital step in protecting the business you have built. CJA members have exclusive access to Outlier's compliance solutions, designed to simplify requirements and provide clarity and confidence as the busiest months approach.

If you are not yet part of the CJA, this May feels like a natural moment to join. The association exists to support, protect, and uplift every professional in the industry—through education, advocacy, shared knowledge, and a sense of community that continues to grow.

As the months unfold, we look forward to learning together, gathering together, and continuing to shape the future of our industry—one conversation, one course, and one connection at a time. ☺

Until next time,

Sara Belyazid

Communication Co-ordinator
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Designed with clean geometric lines, these ear hoops bring ease to dressing—equally at home in daily routines and evening occasions.

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The return of statement *minimalism*

Finding the middle ground between boldness and everyday wearability

By Jinagna Shah

In a time shaped by both economic caution and a renewed interest in personal style, jewellers and watchmakers are moving toward a new design approach: statement minimalism. This style blends clean, bold shapes with the quiet, refined look many consumers now prefer. The result is jewellery and watches that stand out visually but are still easy and comfortable to wear every day.

At the same time, the industry is observing a familiar pattern: when gold and silver prices rise, average product weights tend to decline. During the current period of historically high bullion pricing, this trend is driving some of the most significant shifts in design and manufacturing practices

in recent years. One notable response has been the growing use of mixed metals, a strategy that allows makers to maintain design impact while managing material costs. This approach also aligns with the preferences of millennial and Gen Z consumers, who increasingly value versatility, contemporary styling, and accessible price points.

While large-scale global showcases like Vicenzaoro continue to spotlight significant innovation, and industry reports from platforms such as JCK emphasize commercial momentum, consumer preferences in markets like Canada reveal a nuanced shift. Buyers are increasingly seeking jewellery that makes an impression without appearing too

extravagant—a response shaped by both practical lifestyles and changing cultural attitudes toward adornment.

What's driving the trend?

Quiet luxury's influence

The quiet luxury movement, marked by subtle details, clean lines, and an emphasis on material quality, has reshaped how boldness is expressed in jewellery and watch design. With gold prices remaining a key obstacle in bringing heavier pieces to market, designers are increasingly required to balance creative intent with material costs. As a result, consumers are shifting away from oversized or highly ornate pieces and toward styles that show confidence through thoughtful shape, balanced proportions, and skilled craftsmanship. This reality has encouraged designers to rethink the “statement piece” not as something loud or maximalist, but as something sculptural, refined, and quietly impactful.

Economic realities and practical wearability

In the Canadian market, ongoing economic uncertainty is encouraging shoppers to choose jewellery with lasting value. Pieces that can move easily from work to weekend, or from everyday use to special occasions, are becoming more appealing than short-lived trends.

Designers are responding with collections that focus on:

- Versatile, multi-wear designs
- Simple, timeless shapes



Single-line chain diamonds—light on gold, rich in style. Manufactured by Charu Jewels.

- Lighter, durable materials that help manage costs without sacrificing quality
- This creates a clear middle ground in the market: consumers want to invest in meaningful pieces, but they also want those pieces to be practical, flexible, and worth the spend.

The rise of geometric precision

At global design fairs, bold geometry has emerged as a defining aesthetic direction. Instead of the floral, ornate, or whimsical motifs of past seasons, artisans are playing with architectural contours, sharp edges, rounded domes, and modular forms. Also, designers are able to create pieces with certain logical filigree styles and cutouts to maintain the gold weight.

When executed with restraint, these shapes bring a modern edge without overpowering the wearer. Think:

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Designed with intention, this unisex birthstone bracelet reimagines wearability, shifting beautifully into a brooch or pendant when the moment calls for it.



A lightweight double-line chain bracelet accented with lab-grown fancy-cut diamonds—designed for style-forward elegance without excess gold. Manufactured by Charu Jewels.



A modern mixed-metal design featuring lab-grown diamonds and tourmaline created for flexible, multi-occasion wear.

- Domed gold rings with clean profiles.
- Cuff bracelets with tapered architectural cuts.
- Watches featuring minimalist dials offset by sculptural bezels; convertible bracelets to watch dials.
- Convertible necklaces to bracelets.
- Convertible rings to brooches to pendants.
- More versatile pieces to suit all occasions and events.

These pieces convey strength while remaining wearable and affordable for millennials, which is increasingly the sweet spot for consumers. Social media plays a significant role in promoting these styles.

The lightweight materials problem: A loop worth talking about

One of the industry's most notable loops, or recurring issues, is the rush toward ultra-lightweight designs. Driven by cost concerns and everyday comfort, brands often default to minimal metal weight or hollow construction, which are made from vermeil metal or mixed metals.

However, this can inadvertently discourage designers from producing vibrant, substantial pieces that still maintain wearability. The middle space, light enough for comfort but solid enough for visual impact, is where statement minimalism shines.

Innovations that help bridge this gap include advanced metal alloy engineering, which combines metals such as silver and gold, titanium, and even tungsten to achieve strength and durability without excessive weight. Additionally, 3D-printed structural supports provide accurate weight estimates, allowing consumers to make quick, informed decisions.

Hollow-form techniques are also employed to maintain volume without adding heaviness, especially in designs like Cuban, curb, and rope chains, which are popular in hip-hop collections. Finally, textural finishes add depth and visual interest without adding extra bulk, ensuring both style and comfort. These allow for sculptural designs while keeping both budget and ergonomics in check.



Diamond loose chain bracelet—easy elegance for every day.

Colour, texture, and the subtle return of personality

The rise of statement minimalism reflects a wider shift in the market: Canadian consumers want jewellery that feels special without being extravagant, and versatile without feeling ordinary. They're looking for individuality, but not excess. They want pieces they can wear often and confidently, items that fit into their lifestyle rather than staying stored away.

For designers and retailers, the opportunity sits squarely in this middle ground. Thoughtful shapes, smart material choices, and careful craftsmanship can come together to create pieces that are both meaningful and commercially realistic.

As economic pressures and consumer expectations continue to evolve, statement minimalism is well-positioned to remain a steady design direction. It is more than a stylistic trend—it's a practical response to how people are choosing jewellery today, balancing beauty, value, comfort, and personal expression.

Why statement minimalism works, especially now

It aligns with the values shaping today's market: quiet confidence, long-term wearability, and everyday ease.

It reflects global design momentum: geometric minimalism continues to appear across major European showcases and in international luxury segments.

It acknowledges economic realities: consumers feel more comfortable investing in pieces that fit naturally into their daily routines.

It leaves space for creative exploration: designers can experiment with shape, volume, and new materials without losing the practicality buyers expect.

For Canadian retailers and designers in particular, this trend presents a strategic opportunity, offering collections that feel modern yet sensible, expressive yet enduring.

The future: A balance that is here to stay

As consumer tastes continue to shift, the industry's challenge—and opportunity—will be to maintain this careful balance. The expectations are clear: jewellery and watches must be both functional and artistic, bold enough to stand out yet subtle enough for everyday wear.

Statement minimalism doesn't replace maximalism or traditional quiet luxury. Instead, it connects the two, capturing the modern desire for pieces that are beautiful, expressive, and effortless to live with. ☺



Jinagna Shah is a founder and director at Jina's Jewels Inc. She is a G.G-GIA, PJA-CJA jewellery artist, designer, and historian. She is also an accredited jewellery appraiser based in Markham, Ont. with 21 years of experience in the jewellery industry. Shah has been running her own jewellery designing and manufacturing company since 2019. She has completed numerous B2B design & manufacturing & valuation projects, as well as product development projects in manufacturing. To know more about her, visit jinajewels.com.

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14K white gold, set with 2.00 carats lab diamond centre, made using certified Canadian gold from the Royal Canadian Mint, from Beverly Hills Jewellers. **Price upon request.**



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Ocean wave statement solitaire and matching wedding band from Broken Group by Pure Carbon Diamonds; handcrafted in Vancouver from 14K yellow gold with a 3.41 carat lab-grown round brilliant diamond.

MSRP \$5,999



18K white gold heart-shaped pendant, set with 295 natural blue sapphires, 3.25 carats, 795 natural round brilliant-cut diamonds in FG colour, VS clarity with very good cut, 0.53 carat, 7.3 grams of gold from Aarkish Diamonds.

MSRP \$15,500



Four-ring stack in 18K eternity rings, square/round shape ring in rose gold and yellow gold ring, set with 40 natural round brilliant diamonds in E colour, VS clarity, and very good cut, 1.26 carats, pavé yellow and white gold ring, set with 78 natural round brilliant diamonds in E colour, VS clarity, and very good cut, 0.93 carat, 3.8 grams of gold from Aarkish Diamonds.

MSRP \$3,540

15.26-carat radiant brilliance, 1.71 carats of baguette perfection, platinum craftsmanship. Pure statement beauty from Uneek Jewelry.

MSRP \$1.8 million



Inspired by vintage elegance, this platinum and 18K yellow gold engagement ring features a 0.25 carat square mixed-cut pink sapphire in a rich bezel setting. The centre stone is framed by 62 round brilliant diamonds pavé set in a rounded square face, totalling 0.46 carats (F-G colour, VS1-VS2 clarity), from Made You Look Jewellery.

MSRP \$8,810



Ethos eclipse genuine black sapphire eternity band ring in sterling silver with 14K gold and gun colour plating, sizes 11 to 13, by PAJ.

MSRP \$510

Handcrafted earrings feature a raw, sparkling geode at the centre, encircled by colour-shifting alexandrites. A vivid pink sapphire anchors the design, giving it a soft pink blush: 14K gold, 7.67 grams,

Geode, 1.76 carats natural alexandrites, 0.30 carat heated pink sapphire by Anita Agrawal, Jewels 4 Ever.

MSRP \$11,000



10K white gold, set with 1.00 carat lab diamond centre, made using certified Canadian gold from the Royal Canadian Mint, from Beverly Hills Jewellers.

Price upon request.



11.6 mm round diamond South Sea pearl, double-hinged bracelet in 18K white gold, 2.15 carats total weight from Mastoloni.

MSRP \$21,500



Custom-made 14K yellow gold wedding band with bezel set 0.35 carat natural green princess-cut sapphire with a hand-filed exterior and high polish interior from Alastair Crombie.
MSRP \$2,950



Anne Sportun coin pearl necklace features 10 to 11 mm freshwater pearls and a 14 to 16 in. adjustable length.
MSRP \$915

Anne Sportun hammered gold band: 18K gold, 6 mm, comfort-fit band finished with a signature hammered surface.
MSRP \$5,430



Women's domed ring by Xander Jane, 18K yellow gold and black ceramic with 0.07 carat diamonds, 5 mm wide, sizes 47 to 67. Also available in white, pink, and violet ceramic, as well as 18K white and rose gold.
MSRP US\$3,700



Italgem Steel: 6-mm stainless steel curb-link bracelet, engravable.
MSRP \$99

Hand-assembled sterling silver infinity loop cufflinks made using the "Mitsuro Hikime" technique from Alastair Crombie.
MSRP \$400



Inspired by Buenos Aires, 'Recoleta' by TORI+XO showcases elegant silver silhouettes reminiscent of ornate iron railings, adding romance and mystery to any outfit. 18K yellow gold, 1 carat diamond.
MSRP \$2,990



Sterling silver meditation ring with yellow gold edges and a large CZ spinning band from MeditationRings.
MSRP \$549



The platinum sapphire and diamond trio ring features a GRS-certified sapphire oval accented by half-moon diamonds by Paragon Fine Jewellery.
MSRP \$46,000

13.3 to 13.8 mm round diamond South Sea pearl drop earring, 18K white gold, 2.13 carats total weight from Mastoloni.
MSRP \$18,000



Ethos black ice genuine black sapphire signet ring, sizes 9 to 11 in sterling silver with 14K gold and gun colour plating by PAJ.
MSRP \$390

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514-819-9891



The Tesora necklace is set with a single, bright Akoya pearl in 18K white gold and delicate diamond accents from Claire Adler.
MSRP \$1,790



The blue-green sapphire and diamond ring with diamond band by Paragon Fine Jewellery is a modern asymmetrical ring that showcases a blue-green sapphire, set in 14K white gold, accented with brilliant diamonds and paired with a complementary diamond band.

MSRP \$3,800

Matching diamond band.

MSRP \$3,315



Veloria gold-IP stainless steel oval AAA-grade cubic zirconia tennis bracelet from Italgem Steel.

MSRP \$150

Kraken: men's 8 mm 18K gold IP titanium inlay with black sapphire. Black IP titanium Leviathan-band comfort ring from INOX Jewelry. Size range: 9 to 12.

MSRP \$409



Agate stainless steel and brass ring: This mixed-metal ring features a striking agate stone set in a stainless-steel band with brass bezel. The contrast of cool steel, warm brass, and the stone's natural texture creates a bold, earthy statement piece with modern edge. Perfect for those who love organic materials paired with contemporary design, from Made You Look Jewellery.

MSRP \$1,255



The men's Seamaster Aqua Terra is a 38 mm homage to Omega's maritime legacy, with a polished stainless-steel case, sandstone dial, date window, powered by Co-Axial Master Chronometer calibre 8800, certified by METAS.

MSRP \$9,500



Inspired by the delicate petals of peonies and handcrafted in sterling silver with our signature French lace texture, the tier of three dew drops makes an elegant statement earring, 52mm x 20mm, by TORI•XO.

MSRP \$220

Men's lapis lazuli and meteorite inlay steel ring. Size range: 10 to 12. Genuinely crafted and certified with Muonionalusta iron meteorite. The high-polished comfort-fit inner band is made of stainless steel from INOX Jewelry.

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PHOTO COURTESY SHUTTERSTOCK VIA KAREN HOWARD

Appraising pearls in today's market

By Karen Howard

For centuries, pearls have occupied a unique place in the jewellery world. Revered for their organic beauty, subtle lustre, and symbolic associations with elegance and tradition, pearls are often perceived as timeless and uncomplicated. Yet for today's jewellery appraiser, pearls are anything but simple. In the modern market, appraising pearls presents a convergence of challenges: changing consumer demand, evolving cultivation methods, inconsistent disclosure, legacy valuations that no longer reflect reality, and growing confusion over nomenclature. Add to this the emotional significance pearls frequently hold, and you have a category that requires not only technical expertise, but clear communication, market awareness, and professional restraint.

This article explores the key issues facing appraisers when valuing pearls today—and why pearls, more than many gem materials, demand an appraisal approach that is informed, conservative, and defensible.

The pearl market has changed, but expectations haven't

One of the most persistent problems in pearl appraisal stems from outdated assumptions. Many clients arrive believing pearls are universally rare, inherently valuable, and steadily appreciating. This perception is often reinforced by family lore, older appraisal documents, or the prominence pearls once held in fine jewellery retail.

The pearl market has undergone profound structural change over the past several decades. The widespread availability of cultured pearls—particularly

freshwater varieties—has transformed pearls from a luxury commodity into a broadly accessible product. While high-quality pearls remain valuable, most pearls in the marketplace today fall into commercial or mid-market categories, with pricing that reflects supply abundance rather than scarcity.

For appraisers, this gap between perceived value and current market value is often the first and most difficult conversation.

Natural vs. cultured: A disclosure minefield

Perhaps the most critical issue in pearl appraisal is the distinction between natural and cultured pearls—and the misunderstandings that surround it.

Natural pearls are genuinely rare and command extraordinary prices when properly documented. Cultured pearls, however, are produced with human assistance, whether through bead nucleation or tissue implantation. Today, nearly all pearls encountered in the market are cultured.

The challenge is that many clients—and unfortunately, some sellers—still use the term “natural pearl” incorrectly, believing it refers simply to a pearl formed in an oyster or mussel, rather than one formed without human intervention.

For the appraiser, this necessitates precision in terminology and caution in conclusions. Definitively identifying a natural pearl often requires advanced testing, including X-radiography, and sometimes laboratory confirmation. In many cases, such testing is neither requested nor economically justified.

A responsible appraisal must clearly state what has and has not been determined and avoid language that could imply rarity or origin without substantiation.

Saltwater vs. freshwater: Still relevant, but not absolute

Historically, saltwater pearls (Akoya, South Sea, Tahitian) were positioned as superior to freshwater pearls. While this distinction still holds at the top end of the market, advances in freshwater pearl cultivation have narrowed the gap considerably.

High-quality freshwater pearls now exhibit excellent lustre, pleasing shape, and durable nacre—sometimes rivalling commercial saltwater pearls in appearance, while remaining significantly lower in price. This evolution complicates appraisal comparisons, particularly when clients reference high retail prices from luxury branding rather than open market realities. It also reinforces the need for appraisers to evaluate pearls on measurable quality factors, not origin alone.

Quality factors: Where subjectivity creeps in

Pearls are evaluated using a combination of factors: size, shape, colour, lustre, surface condition, nacre quality, and matching. Unlike faceted gemstones, pearls lack rigid grading scales, and assessments can vary between professionals.

Lustre is highly subjective and heavily weighted in value. Two appraisers may agree on measurements and pearl type yet differ meaningfully in value conclusions due to differing interpretations of lustre quality.

This subjectivity makes pearls especially vulnerable to inconsistent appraisals—and makes defensible documentation essential. Clear descriptions, balanced language, and an avoidance of superlatives help mitigate this risk.

Treatments and enhancements

Most pearls on the market have undergone some form of treatment. Bleaching, dyeing, polishing, and coating are common and, in many cases, accepted industry practices. However, treatments significantly affect value and long-term durability. Black pearls, for example, are frequently assumed to be naturally dark, when many are treated freshwater pearls. Similarly, uniform white strands may owe their appearance to bleaching and optical brighteners.

The challenge lies in disclosure: treatments are not always detectable without advanced testing, and sellers often do not provide full information. Appraisal language must therefore be carefully framed, acknowledging probable treatments without asserting certainty where none exists.

Matching and strand value: The hidden variable

When appraising pearl necklaces, matching is often the single most misunderstood value factor. Clients frequently focus on pearl size or length of strand, unaware that achieving uniformity in colour, shape, and lustre significantly increases production cost.

A well-matched strand of modest-sized pearls may be far more valuable than a poorly matched strand of larger pearls. Yet older appraisals often fail to document matching quality, making comparison difficult and leading to confusion when updated values differ. This underscores the importance of descriptive detail over reliance on generic labels such as “fine pearls” or “excellent quality.”

Sentimental value vs. market reality

Pearls are deeply emotional objects. They are often gifted for weddings, anniversaries, graduations, and other life milestones. As a result, clients may equate emotional significance with monetary value.

One of the most delicate challenges an appraiser faces is explaining that sentimental value, while real and valid, is not a component of market value. This conversation requires empathy, clarity, and professionalism. Transparent

communication about valuation purpose (insurance, estate, resale) helps frame this discussion and avoid misunderstanding.

Insurance replacement vs. resale: A dangerous confusion

Pearls are particularly susceptible to valuation errors when insurance replacement values are confused with resale expectations.

Retail replacement values may include branding, presentation, and full retail margins, while resale markets for pearls are often limited, with prices reflecting wholesale or secondary demand.

Clients who later attempt to sell pearls based on insurance appraisals are often shocked by the disparity. For this reason, appraisers should clearly state the valuation context and caution against using appraisal figures for unintended purposes.

Durability, wear, and condition issues

Unlike many gemstones, pearls are soft, porous, and vulnerable to wear. Over time, pearls can lose lustre, develop surface erosion, or exhibit thinning nacre—all of which affect value. Older pearl jewellery frequently presents condition issues that were not documented in original appraisals. Re-stringing, wear near drill holes, and uneven degradation are common and must be carefully assessed.

Failure to account for condition can result in inflated values that are neither accurate nor defensible.

Documentation, disclaimers, and professional boundaries

Because pearl valuation involves subjectivity, market fluctuation, and disclosure limitations, thorough documentation is critical. Appraisals should clearly state:

- Whether pearls are assumed to be cultured
- Whether treatments are known, suspected, or undetermined
- The limitations of testing performed
- The market context of the valuation

This protects both the appraiser and the client and reinforces the role of the appraisal as an expert opinion based on available information—not a guarantee.

Conclusion: Why pearls demand appraisal discipline

Pearls may appear simple, but appraising them well requires experience, restraint, and ongoing market awareness. In today's environment of mass production, evolving treatments, and shifting consumer perceptions, pearls challenge appraisers to balance tradition with reality.

For professionals willing to approach pearls with clarity, conservative judgment, and transparent communication, pearl appraisals can become an opportunity—not a risk—to demonstrate expertise and build trust.

Because in the end, pearls are not only evaluated by size or shine, but by the integrity of the professional assessing them. 🌟



Karen Howard, FCGMA, RMV, IMJVA, is a veteran gemmologist and former appraisal business owner with over 30 years in the jewellery trade. Through her platform, Jewellery Appraisers Coach, she now coaches new appraisers to overcome the challenges of their first year in business—covering everything from client communication to ethical practices. Her work has been featured by more than 20 media outlets, including Yahoo Finance, Fox4, NBC, and WGN Chicago, highlighting her contributions to professional standards and training in the appraisal industry.

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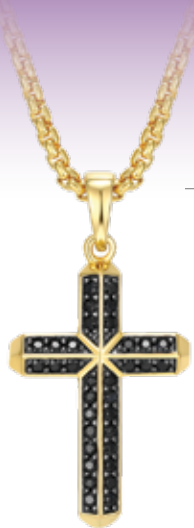
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~Compiled by Ties Morgan

Coloured gemstones

in engagement rings and wedding bands



PHOTO COURTESY MDL DIAMONDS



Gold ring with kite-shaped “salt n pepper” diamond. Leaf-and-vine motif with accent diamonds.

PHOTO COURTESY SONJA SANDERS

By Sonja Sanders

When couples decide on coloured gemstones as a main feature in engagement and wedding rings, it is not a new trend. Personal preferences, sentimentality, and colour appeal have influenced these decisions. Economics, fashion trends, and environmental concerns also come into play.

The late Georgian period into the romantic Victorian era popularized sentimental rings, which held romantic symbolism and were given as tokens of love and engagement rings. One such ring featured seven gemstones, with the first letter of each spelling out DEAREST: diamond, emerald, amethyst, ruby, emerald, sapphire, and tourmaline or topaz. The “REGARD” rings also gained popularity in the 19th century, with the gemstones being ruby, emerald, garnet, amethyst, and diamond.

Jewellers today have decades of experience designing and offering wedding jewellery in colour. We have to be open to welcoming couples’ ideas for their jewellery designs and gemstone choices. Even though we offer gemmological expertise to advise clients on gemstones with higher hardness on the Mohs scale or more durable for everyday wear, potential clients have their own reasons for the gemstone choices they make. As a whole, we are more open to selling both natural gems and lab-grown/synthetic stones as couples’ preferred choices.

Through the years, different shapes have seen various levels of popularity. At the moment, almost any shape goes as well as a mixture of shapes for the principal stones. One bride-to-be may choose to have her future husband’s birthstone alongside a diamond for her engagement ring choice, or, in a creative way, a couple may desire to have their birthstones incorporated somewhere in the design of their wedding bands. In recent years, we have seen engagement rings with two different feature stones; for example, a pear-shaped sapphire next to a diamond of another shape.

Gold ring with oval emerald centre and two diamonds as shoulder accents.



Gold ring with blue sapphire and diamond.

Strength beneath the sparkle

The three strong colour favourites for engagement rings have historically been sapphire, ruby, and emerald; the popular trinity for colour. Sapphires offer a variety of colours and, like their corundum sibling, ruby, have a wonderful hardness of 9, contributing to high durability for everyday wear. Popular sapphire colours for wedding jewellery include teal green, blue, pink, padparadscha (pinkish-orange), and yellow. Emerald is a type of beryl with a hardness of 7.5 to 8, and although it is not a tough stone, one should avoid hard wear, scratches, and harsh detergents. Emeralds with a strong green colour and impressive hue are still a popular choice for colour. Future brides can easily browse the internet for ring designs and fall in love with how this popular ‘trinity’ (rubies, sapphires, and diamonds) has such an amazing look with the complement of diamonds.

Aquamarine is another variety of beryl with a pale blue colour. This colour can be beautifully enhanced with heat treatment, which draws more attention. This has good toughness and historically has been the feature gem in engagement rings.

Years ago, another beryl, morganite (pink to violet in colour), became popular as a feature gemstone. Although responsible jewellers disclosed their susceptibility to chipping and an eventual “cloudy” appearance, brides still loved the colour and use of rose gold in the ring



Yellow and white gold ring bezel set with one round diamond and one round ruby.



White gold ring with oval amethyst and diamonds to accent shoulders.

designs. After years of wear, many women realized the difference in the appearance of the morganite and exchanged them for the harder, more durable sapphires with similar peach and pink/violet colours.

Another example is the appeal of amethyst. The beautiful, medium-to-strong purple shades are very attractive. Even though this member of the quartz family has a hardness of 7, it is a good, tough stone. However, it is susceptible to scratching and can easily get an abraded look with long-term wear. People find this a sentimental gemstone, and its strong symbolism of spiritual protection and strength against negativity adds to its appeal. Jewellers can suggest the more durable purple sapphire, spinel, or synthetic purple diamond.

Tanzanite (a variety of zoisite) is a strong blue-violet choice with a beautiful lustre. It is great for everyday jewellery, especially pendants and earrings. The intensity of its colour is achieved through heat treatment, which reduces its toughness. Precautions must be taken when being worn in a ring, as it is prone to chipping and breakage.

Alexandrite is from the chrysoberyl family with a colour change phenomenon. In daylight, they show their green colour and change to a reddish-purple or a raspberry colour in artificial light. They have

a hardness of 8.5, making them durable for everyday wear. Natural alexandrite is very appealing, but the premium price tag for good quality with strong colour change is high. This is one of our rare gemstones. The lab-grown/synthetic counterparts (corundum) are an affordable alternative but do not exhibit the same colours. They commonly display a deep purplish red and bluish-green with other tones.

Tourmaline comes in a variety of colours, and they can be quite vibrant. Jewellers are surprised that this is not more popular. With a hardness of 7 to 7.5, it is durable; however, for a ring, it is best bezel-set or low-set, often surrounded by diamonds to avoid chipping the edges.

Garnets do not only come in shades of red. The green tsavorite variety is quite desirable, even though it is susceptible to early wear. The different varieties of garnet vary in hardness from 6.5 to 7.5.

Topaz is popular in the blue and imperial golden brown to sherry tones. The golden colour is often confused with citrine quartz, which has a stronger shade. The blue topazes are irradiated, and depending on the place of this treatment, many countries have controlled distribution to ensure they are safe for wear. Pinking is the heat treatment that produces pink topaz. This has good wearability with a hardness of 8.

Men have such varied tastes, from the plain traditional rings to more intricate designs, even complex in their creation. Many of them enjoy having their rings match or complement their partner's. We see couples with alternating rows of coloured gems and colourless diamonds in their wedding bands. If a bride has a coloured stone featured in her wedding set, some grooms choose to include it in their ring as well. One recent technique involves embedding crushed coloured gemstones in wedding rings, secured with resins and specialized adhesives. This method is used not only in gold rings but also with alternative metals like tungsten and titanium. Customers should be cautious with this inlay, avoiding acetone on the area and exposure to harsh chemicals and abrasives.

Iconic engagement rings

Royalty around the world can be credited with their appreciation of fine, coloured gems as well as large ones. The former King Edward VIII gave Wallis Simpson a large emerald in her engagement ring. Catherine, Princess of Wales, wears the late Princess Diana's famous cluster ring with the large oval blue sapphire. Sarah Ferguson's ring had a large,



Yellow and white gold ring set with one oval purple amethyst surrounded by diamonds and accented with diamonds on the shoulders.

stunning ruby centre, and Princess Eugenie of York has a padparadscha sapphire as her feature centre gemstone.

The ring Marie (originally from France) received from Prince Joachim of Denmark was set with a ruby, diamond, and blue sapphire, representing the three colours of the French flag.

The movie stars of today are influencers and champions of beautiful gems, as seen with Halle Berry, who has a 4-carat emerald in her engagement ring.

Most jewellers who have grown up in the trade have inherited a deep appreciation for natural gemstones. In our modern world, the jewellery market is filled with synthetic manufactured gems of every colour. Couples are influenced by social media, the preferences of popular designers, and financial considerations. We have to be open to all possibilities when selling the appropriate product to excited couples. One has to understand that lab-grown/synthetic producers are marketing their goods, stating that their production involves less pollution and is environmentally friendlier than earth-mining, which causes habitat destruction. With all the sophisticated and sometimes misleading advertising, we have to be well educated as a trade. Keep in mind when consulting with your clients that many countries insist on environmental protection policies for earth-mining, so be prepared to reassure those who are deciding between natural and synthetic stones.

Couples are looking at social media and websites of popular brands and designers. Most of them are approaching jewellers with screenshots from their searches. They are asking for similar designs or tweaking what appeals to them. These are opportunities to showcase CAD-CAM for the ability to impress clients with a life-like indication of what their rings will look like with the amazing gemstones they have chosen.

Do not leave the diamond out of colour consideration. For couples who can afford natural colour diamonds, it is always a bonus. The availability of synthetics offers a more affordable selection if coloured lab-grown diamonds appeal to those who still want the brilliance and



White gold ring with oval blue sapphire and accent diamonds.

durability of a diamond but without the higher price tag. “Salt and pepper” diamonds and “desert” colours offer unique and modern alternatives, often with different cuts such as kite shapes that satisfy those with a “dare-to-be-different” style.

Retailers have been selling colour throughout their careers. Always have interesting engagement and wedding ring stock. Be prepared with up-to-date information on gems that can guide your clients to the right choice.

The comparison chart lists popular gemstone choices and their hardness and toughness.

Hardness: The Mohs scale is a standard for determining hardness in substances. Harder items are more resistant to scratching, and this helps determine how durable a gemstone is for everyday wear and tear.

Toughness: Not all hard stones are tough. Toughness determines a gem’s resistance to breakage. A stone that is not very tough is more prone to chipping and fracturing. This often has to do with internal structure and treatments. 🌐



Sonja Sanders grew up in a jewellery industry family and learned goldsmithing and gem appreciation as a teenager. She now operates her family’s jewellery business with her husband, Joe, and two of their children—the store’s third generation. She is a master goldsmith, Graduate Gemmologist with the Gemological Institute of America (GIA), and teaches appraisal courses across Canada. She is the author of the Professional Jewellery Appraiser course. Sanders enjoyed her work for almost a decade with the Canadian Jewellers Association, where she was involved with the Accredited Appraiser Program, education, and served on the board. She is a lover of antiques and estate jewellery and can be reached via email at shopwithsonja@bellnet.ca or pjaconnect@gmail.com.

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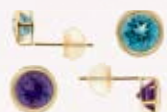
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