

simchahs

Finger Friend

Diamonds are just an appetizer on the wedding ring menu.

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Special to the Jewish Times

Lo sported a pink diamond. Tony Parker and Eva Longoria inscribed French inside their rings. Sandra Bullock wears a “toi et moi” ring with octagonal diamonds in an Edwardian platinum setting. Prince Rainier gave Grace Kelly a 12-karat emerald-cut diamond engagement ring, flanked by two baguettes.

Everyone knows what celebrity-types are choosing when it comes to engagement rings and wedding bands, but what are the rest of us buying?

For some people, celebrities do drive trends. “The minute you see it in Hollywood, it’s transferred to the rest of America,” says Joshua Kaufman, designer and CEO at Martin Flyer Inc. (martinflyer.com), whose bridal jewelry collection is sold locally at Timonium-based Albert S. Smyth Co. (albertsmyth.com).

“But not too many people are interested in the ‘pink’ look or in buying million-dollar diamonds,” he says. For those with a more conservative bent and a smaller budget, but for whom a “hint” of celebrity still appeals,

Mr. Kaufman offers this trendy tidbit: “Over the past three years in Hollywood you see more cushion cuts and Asscher cuts.” Those styles echo throughout the general public now.

When it comes to bridal jewelry, trends find their way to fourth fingers everywhere. Vintage-inspired looks prove all the rage. Marquise and pear-shaped diamonds may be passé, but oval, round and square-cuts remain in vogue. White gold and platinum trumps yellow gold on the bridal market.

Some trends spring from an inner aesthetic. Others sweep the market from outside forces. The latter proves true for all things earth-friendly. With a focus on the environment, many couples opt not only for a “green wedding,” but eco-friendly rings, too.

“Eco-friendly is a huge ring trend that continues to grow,” says Heather Levine, fashion and beauty editor for theknot.com. Bridal jewelry features recycled gold and conflict-free diamonds. At the Web site NoDirtyGold.org, retailers who espouse responsible gold mining get the nod. Yet despite the best fair-trade practices, some couples desire man-made diamond chips (moissanite.com). Still others opt for wood rings (simplywoodrings.com).

But most bridal rings still hail from mines rather than trees. Toward that end, one new trend pushes through: raw diamonds. Ms. Levine calls herself a “huge fan. The exterior is uncut and rougher... with interesting shapes like octahedrons.” Designer Todd Reed (toddreed.com) leads the way with raw diamond trends, according to Ms. Levine.

Online at theknot.com, brides and grooms study up on all things nuptial. Its section on rings offers up the latest crazes. Trend 1: pave diamonds. Trend 2: the vintage look. Trend 3: colored stones. Trend 4: stacked rings.

But for some people the very concept of wedding ring trends presents somewhat of a conundrum.

Michael Gedraitis of Radcliffe Jewelers shows off some wedding band styles to a customer.



A selection of wedding rings at Radcliffe Jewelers. The ring on the grey stand is a Memoir Eternity Band.

“Bridal jewelry doesn’t seem to move in fast trends,” says Michael Gedraitis of Radcliffe Jewelers (radcliffejewelers.com). “It has to endure a lifetime of wear.”

Others in the field agree. “An engagement ring is more than just trendy. It’s got to last,” says Marley Simon, designer and owner of Pikesville-based Marley’s Fine Jewelry (marleyfinejewelry.com). “It’s more than a seasonal piece... It has to outdo time.”

Despite so-called trends, conservative styles remain strong. Still, couples desire to set themselves apart from their friends. “My customers want to do something with their rings that nobody else has done. They’ll come in to Marley’s because they know I can put a little bit of a twist on a conservative style,” says Mr. Simon. He uses words like “very contemporary, modern and hard-edge simplicity” to describe his signature style.

Mr. Simon sees one strong trend. “Customers are on the Internet. They’ve done a lot of upfront work before they even set foot in a store. Women look up the styles. Men look at price. They are seeing all that’s available... out on the Internet. They’ll take that information and bring it in. They’re much more knowledgeable. But they don’t buy stones or mountings online. It’s still just a source of information.”

While surfing the Web, one hot trend catches the eye: colored stones. But not necessarily colored diamonds. “Diamonds can be really expensive

— and yellow diamonds are so rare to find that people use a large citrine stone or yellow sapphire for a bridal ring,” says Ms. Levine. Blue and pink sapphires appeal, too.

Color now gravitates away from only large stones. “A new trend involves using color in little melee diamonds. Pink and yellow is the trend. Many rings use pink as accent,” says Mr. Kaufman, who reports that Martin Flyer was one of the first designers to “get into pink and yellow diamonds in bridal jewelry.”

He admits that colored stones are “exciting, fun, fashionable and different — but you can get sick of wearing it. Most people who want to wear their ring every single day for the rest of your life go back to white.”

At Radcliffe, that very sentiment rings true. Mr. Gedraitis reports that colored stones are not a common request. “Center diamonds and colorless goods remain the most popular choice.”



^ Martin Flyer-designed ring set Engagement ring of half-moon, diamond, semi-mount with channel, princess-cuts and beaded, round diamonds (\$13,985) paired with channel-set, princess-cut wedding band with beaded sides (\$6,395) Total cost: \$20,380

< Men’s wedding band from Martin Flyer 14K yellow gold for him: half round rope edge wedding band with satin finish center and high polish edges (\$1265)



<Vintage engagement ring of brilliant trapezoid semi-mount with halo center and beaded shank, scrolls, and bezeled diamonds (\$8,095) paired with platinum vintage hand-engraved, beaded diamond wedding band (\$4040)

He identifies another front-and-center trend: micro-pave settings. “Pave, literally, means paved with diamonds. Micro-pave is a much finer execution of that. It allows the center diamond to stand out more,” says Mr. Gedraitis.

Mr. Kaufman counters that with so much micro-pave and vintage-inspired looks, some couples are turning away from this trend. “One in three brides wants a vintage feel, but it’s almost oversaturated. Ring buyers today are looking how to separate themselves.” He points to one trend to fill that need with “the dressed-up” solitaire.

“The solitaire will never go out of style,” agrees Ms. Levine.

Yet it’s not for everyone. Three-stone rings continue in a strong trend. This setup symbolizes “past, present and future.” Today, the trend is “not just one big center stone, but three stones the same size across,” says Ms. Levine. Three-stone styles emerge in both women’s and men’s bridal rings.

That’s right. Let’s not forget about the men. While women’s rings long have focused on style, today “men are more fashion forward,” says Ms. Levine. “Wedding bands for men are getting more involved with some diamonds. They’ll choose square baguettes to be a little more macho.”

Metal trends move beyond the gold band. “Some men choose titanium because it’s light and very comfortable to wear,” says Ms. Levine. Another option: tungsten carbide. “It’s a steel wedding band. It’s more contemporary... a rugged ring. Men like it because it’s budget-friendly and a durable ring, too,” says Mr. Gedraitis.

When it comes to men’s rings, the operative word remains simple — literally. “Guys are very simple. I know from myself,” says Mr. Kaufman. “Men want simple looks — nothing over the top. They prefer not so splashy. They want a comfortable, wider ring — typically 7 millimeters wide. They might choose a matte finish or a rope edge or millgrain

edge. But for the most part, men don’t care. Most guys make their band decisions in five minutes.”

Not so when it comes to picking out the ring on her finger. But Mr. Kaufman offers some insight to make the task less daunting. “I know what women want in bridal jewelry. I researched it,” he says. “Comfort, that’s it. Low to the finger works well with their everyday lifestyle. Rings are like shoes. They fit right — or not. When you put it on, you know,” says Mr. Kaufman, whose trademark FlyerFit engagement/wedding ring sets fit flawlessly together. The company touts a unique technology that eliminates the dreaded “gap” that exists between engagement ring and wedding band.

But all this talk of trends in rings begs a central question. Exactly who picks out bridal jewelry? The bride? The groom? Or both together?

No clear trend emerges in this matter. “Today, it’s about doing your own personal thing,” says Ms. Levine. “Some women are romantic so they want to be surprised. Other women give their tips. Decision-making falls across the board.”

Mr. Gedraitis observes a modern mix of it all. “Typically couples shop for the ring together to get ideas. Then, the gentleman comes back to buy the style she prefers to surprise her.”

Mr. Kaufman offers yet other reality. “For the most part in the U.S.A., everyone is focused around the center diamond. The man picks it out. She gets the ring. Sometimes she doesn’t like it. In that case, some women trade it in. Some upgrade later in marriage. Some keep it for the rest of their lives.”

But in the end, Ms. Levine reminds that, “Shopping for a ring is like shopping for a house. You need to know what’s out there so you don’t get sticker shock.” □

Elizabeth Levy Malis is a local free-lance writer.

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