

RING CARE

Preserve the sparkle for years to come

By Chandra Orr
Creators News Service

Cut, color, clarity and carat weight -- every bride knows the four Cs, but what about care, cleaning and coverage?

You spend a great deal of time picking the perfect ring, and you drop a small fortune when you find the right one.

Like a house or an automobile, your wedding and engagement rings are an investment -- and like any asset, they require a little TLC to keep them in tiptop shape.

"Although diamonds are forever, their mountings are not. Cleaning and caring for your wedding rings is necessary for them to live happily ever after," said jeweler Susan Eisen, author of "Crazy About Jewelry: The Expert Guide to Buying, Selling and Caring for Your Jewelry" (\$17, Full Circle International Publishing) and owner of Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry and Watches in El Paso, Texas.

Regular cleaning, proper upkeep and the right insurance coverage will guarantee that those treasured rings will last a lifetime.

CLEANING

Most people never remove their wedding rings. That means everything you touch -- cosmetics, lotions, food, cooking oils and everyday dirt, grit and grime -- also affects your rings.

Over time, tiny particles get lodged in the setting and a thin layer of grime settles onto the stone and band.

To keep that wedding day luster, Eisen suggests a quick touchup. Combine a capful of dishwashing soap -- not detergent -- with 1 cup of water. Let the rings soak overnight in the mixture. In the morning, use a soft toothbrush to gently loosen dirt and grime, then rinse with cool water.

For deeper cleanings, try using an electric toothbrush -- just be gentle and take special care with loose settings.

Whatever you do, skip the home ultrasonic cleaning machines, Eisen said. They can damage fine jewelry if used improperly.

"Cleaning your jewelry is best saved for the right jeweler who has the proper equipment," Eisen said.

Check with the jewelry store that sold you the rings -- they will often clean and service wedding bands for little or no cost.

CARE

"To properly care for your wedding rings, you should have the stones tightened, the prongs checked for strength and the overall mounting checked for damage and wear," Eisen said.

"Often this preventive medicine will save you the heartbreak of losing a diamond."

Have a jeweler check your rings annually -- and while you're there, ask to have your rings polished.

"Polishing is different from cleaning," Eisen explained. "Polishing is more extensive and takes longer, but it is well worth the cost."

Polishing is a two-step process. Jewelers use a special abrasive compound to buff the surface and remove minuscule scratches, then finish with a polishing compound to restore surface luster.