

JEWELRY

Do lab-grown diamonds have a place in fine jewelry?

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Lab-grown diamond earrings from Loyale Paris. Image courtesy of MVEye

By NORA HOWE

Social and environmental responsibility has recently infiltrated industrial discourse and, in the world of fine jewelry, may permanently alter how people create, buy and sell diamonds.

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Through their versatility and conscious nature, lab-grown diamonds present an innovative opportunity for the luxury industry. While some legacy jewelers remain steadfast in sourcing natural diamonds, the rise of lab-grown diamond awareness marks a notable shift in how affluents may soon view these precious gems.

"Consumers are embracing sustainability in all products and brands, and diamond jewelry is no exception," said Marty Hurwitz, CEO of **The MVEye**, Austin. "They are questioning diamond sourcing and the labor practices of the diamond industry, and are consistently embracing lab-grown diamonds as an alternative to mined diamonds."

Lab-grown versus natural: the great debate

According to a 2015 report by the Diamond Council of America (DCA), at least 1,200 pounds of rock and ore must be excavated to produce a single carat.

Lab-grown diamonds share the chemical, physical and optical elements of naturally-mined diamonds but are produced in factories where high-pressure high-temperature (HPHT) and chemical vapor deposition (CVD) methods are used to artificially replicate natural conditions in which these structures form.

"The technology has improved, but not as much as it should," said Diana Verde Nieto, cofounder and CEO of **Positive Luxury**, London. "The biggest change in the industry is simply the number of producers."

"Courbet, a Butterfly Mark certified by Positive Luxury, is a popular [brand selling stones purchased from and grown by diamond manufacturers] in Paris that has recently been producing lab-grown diamonds up to 9-carats," she said. "Now, they are working on a 15-carat diamond."

While there is still some skepticism regarding a lack of traceability in the lab-grown sector as well as its contribution to carbon emissions, consumers seem to be adopting these diamonds as alternatives to mining in the name of conservation and sustainability.



Set of lab-grown diamond rings from Loyale Paris. Image courtesy of MVEye

"Given the choice of a lab-grown diamond versus a mined diamond, our research shows that 70 percent of consumers are gravitating to the larger lab-grown diamond of similar quality," Mr. Hurwitz said.

"In particular, affluent consumers shopping for a larger diamond are finding much more availability in quality lab-grown diamonds as opposed to mined diamonds."

Despite a spike in awareness, however, many consumers still see lab-grown diamonds as their own category, separate from their natural counterparts.

In its "Diamond Insight Flash Report," British diamond group De Beers found that consumers view the category as fun and fashionable, yet associate mined diamonds with characteristics of authenticity and romance.

This goes beyond consumer sentiments, too.

In France, for example, lab-grown diamonds must be labeled as synthetic and classified separately from natural diamonds.

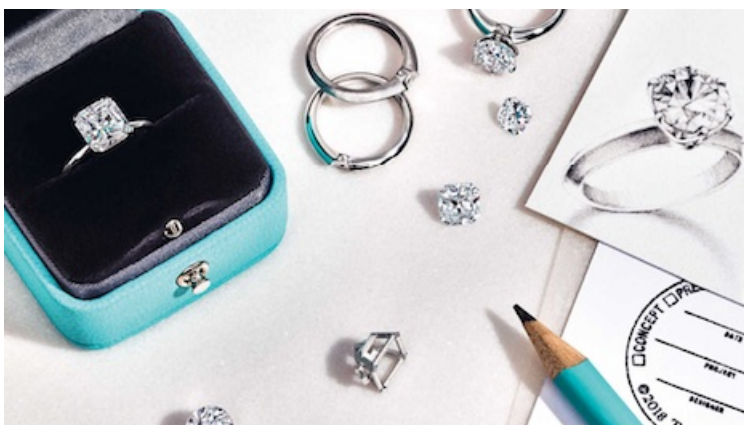
"Many brands are currently lobbying the French government to change this law," Ms. Verde Nieto said. "Lab-grown diamonds are chemically the same as mined diamonds, and one of the only ways to tell the difference is for a gemologist to look under a microscope for a laser inscription on the girdle of the diamond and determine its origin.

"Just like with vegan leather or oat milk, people, especially Gen Z and Millennials, are looking for alternatives to natural diamonds, ones that are kinder to the planet, and I hope that regulation will accompany this soon."

Where luxury stands

Some luxury brands, such as Balmain, have started dipping their toes in the lab-grown swimming pool, while others turn towards making natural mining more sustainable perhaps a tactic to avoid the manufactured alternative.

LVMH's Tiffany & Co. became the first in its industry to disclose where each of its diamonds is crafted and set ([see story](#)). The New York-based jeweler shares the full craftsmanship journey and provenance of its newly sourced, individually registered diamonds that are 0.18 carats or larger.



*Tiffany has been committed to conducting business responsibly, sustaining the natural environment and positively impacting communities.
Image credit: Tiffany & Co.*

Further, the little blue box brand received a "strong" ranking from Human Rights Watch's [report](#) on responsible sourcing in the jewelry industry, while fellow luxury jewelers Bulgari and Cartier were scored as "moderate."

"I applaud brands' achievements in strengthening their transparency and sustainability efforts in mined diamonds," MVEye's Mr. Horwitz said. "However, much of the mined diamond industry continues to struggle with the chain of custody transparency, sustainability standards, labor conditions and environmental challenges."

While Tiffany, Bulgari, Cartier and others are currently saying no to lab-grown alternatives, experts believe they will soon join brands like Balmain, which collaborated with a lab-grown diamond maker for its spring/summer 2019 show.

There is another major, albeit recent, factor in how brands may approach the lab-grown sector: Russia, one of the world's leading producers of diamonds.

Last week, French luxury conglomerates Kering and Richemont announced they would be leaving the Responsible Jewellery Council in protest of the organization's decision to remain connected with Russia, stating they do not intend to be a part of an organization that financially endorses war ([see story](#)).

As of March 21, Tiffany ceased the sourcing of all rough diamonds mined in Russia and serialized diamonds of Russian origin until further notice ([see story](#)).

As the geopolitical climate stands, lab-grown diamonds could soon get their big break.

"You will see more luxury brands testing lab-grown diamonds as an alternative for their diamond jewelry collections in coming months, and I am certain their consumers will embrace the new product."

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