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CELEBRATE! RINGS



TRUE TO THE BLUE

Francesca Fearon sees sapphires outshine the diamond solitaire

WE MAY think diamonds are forever, thanks to that famous Bond movie and also to one of the best advertising slogans of the 20th-century from De Beers – but actually until the 1990s coloured gems were a popular choice for engagement rings.

Now, as one of the leading auction houses, Bonhams informs us, coloured gems are making a major comeback – just look at the beautiful cluster sapphire and diamond engagement ring worn by the Duchess of Cambridge.

It has sparked an upsurge in interest in sapphire cluster rings for engagements, according to Garrard, which made the ring, originally for Princess Diana, in the early 1980s. "Sapphires make a great alternative to more 'traditional' rings," says a spokesman for the Mayfair jeweller.

The sapphire is named after the Greek word for "blue stone". Since the Middle Ages, the heavenly-blue gem has been a symbol of truth, sincerity and faithfulness. The sapphire's regal colour and the belief that it represents divine favour has also made it the choice of kings. Many royal jewellery collections, including the Crown Jewels, are awash with sapphires.

With such positive connotations, the sapphire makes a perfect choice for an engagement ring – even before you even consider its entrancing hue, sparkle and its durability.

"Sapphires are very popular for engagement rings as they have the necessary durability – but that hardness gives it amazing sparkle as well," says Zoe Benyon, one of the co-founders of Robinson Pelham.

She is delighted that trends are moving away from a single brilliant-cut diamond – a shift, she says, that has been happening for the past 10 years.

A pop of colour certainly offers jewellery designers the chance to be more creative.

Now, at the height of the engagement season, there are many sapphire rings to consider, such as the elegant Art Deco style of Boodles' emerald-cut sapphire ring, edged in diamonds and baguette-cut sapphires, which is modern but won't date.

Perhaps the most delicate is the romantic pear-shaped Ceylon sapphire ring, with whimsical diamond filigree

curling around the finger, from Nourbel & Le Cavellier in Burlington Arcade.

There are dainty floral clusters of diamonds encircling a sapphire centre-stone in Garrard's Marguerite collection. The designs, with their scalloped borders, are inspired by the Duchess of Cambridge's engagement ring.

There is also a pretty Marguerite design with a smaller centre stone that can be worn either as an engagement or a dress ring.

Of course choosing an engagement ring is all about falling in love with the design and the stone. True blue is a magnetic colour that reflects light like no other and there is a real intensity in the hue of Cartier's alluring sapphire rings.

Equally tempting is Chaumet's Joséphine collection, inspired by Napoleon's love for Joséphine and featuring a ring with a sapphire and diamonds set like a tiara on platinum.

Mayfair-based David Marshall has noticed an increasing appreciation of coloured gems and has created a beautiful one-of-a-kind cushion-cut Ceylon sapphire ring, surrounded by Asscher-cut diamonds.

The sapphire has a spectacular royal blue hue, characteristic of Ceylon (Sri Lankan) sapphires.

Sapphires are mined in many locations across the globe, including India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and parts of Africa.

Unheated sapphires from Burma, Kashmir and Ceylon are especially valuable.

The heat treatment enhances the blue but natural colour is ultimately more valuable.

"We always suggest an open mind, as some budgets aren't made for a show-stopping diamond but can accommodate a big and beautiful sapphire," says Zoe Benyon at Robinson Pelham.

"Some couples want originality and some want investment; for the latter we recommend an unheated ruby or sapphire, as they will continue to become ever more rare as the treatment of sapphires becomes more acceptable."

Of course many might still argue that diamonds are forever. However, all these sapphire engagement rings are set with diamonds. And what better combination can there be than the truth, sincerity and faithfulness of sapphires, together with the message of eternity in the diamonds? A perfect foundation for a marriage.



Floral shapes are inspired by the Duchess of Cambridge's ring

1. Sapphire and diamond ring, Boodles, £45,000
2. Sapphire and diamond ring, Robinson Pelham, POA
3. Sapphire and diamond Shiva ring, Cartier, POA
4. Marguerite cluster, Garrard, POA
5. One-of-a-kind Ceylon sapphire and diamond ring, Nourbel & Le Cavellier, POA
6. Natural blue sapphire and diamond ring, Robinson Pelham, £14,500
7. Éclat Floral Joséphine ring, Ceylon sapphire and diamonds, Chaumet, POA
8. Ceylon sapphire and diamond ring, David Marshall, £23,990

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