

DelaFuente

A BUYER'S GUIDE · FINE JEWELRY

The Diamond *Buying* Guide

Everything worth knowing before you spend real money on a diamond — how the four grades actually work, why lab-grown retires the old advice to compromise, and the honest parts most jewelers leave out.



Written by Danna de la Fuente

GIA GRADUATE DIAMONDS · DIAMOND SPECIALIST

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THE SHORT VERSION

- 1 **Stop compromising.** Every rule you have read about where to save on a diamond was written for mined stones, priced by rarity. In lab-grown, the top of each scale costs a fraction of that premium.
- 2 **Cut: Excellent.** Cut is not the shape — it is how well the stone was cut, and it is the single biggest driver of sparkle. It is the one grade that was never worth compromising, in either market.
- 3 **Color: D–F, colorless.** The advice to settle for a near-colorless G–H exists because a colorless mined stone is expensive. A lab-grown one is not, so DelaFuente specs colorless as standard.
- 4 **Clarity: VVS1 or VVS2.** Inclusions a skilled grader needs magnification to find. Not “eye-clean, if you look closely” — clean.
- 5 **Never buy without an independent report.** GIA or IGI, with the report number laser-inscribed on the girdle. It is proof rather than a promise.

THE ONE-LINE VERSION

The old rules — settle for G, settle for SI1, stay under a carat — were written for a market where the top of the scale was out of reach. That is not the market you are buying in.

01

THE QUESTION EVERYONE ASKS FIRST

Is a lab-grown diamond a real diamond?

Yes. A lab-grown diamond is pure crystallized carbon with the same crystal structure as a diamond formed in the earth — not glass, not an imitation. It has essentially the same physical, chemical and optical properties as a mined diamond, and it is graded on the same 4Cs scale by the same independent laboratories.

WHAT ACTUALLY CHANGES

Only the origin: weeks inside a laboratory that recreates the conditions found deep in the earth, instead of billions of years underground. Everything origin brings with it changes too — no mining, a lighter footprint, and a price that lets you choose a larger, finer stone on the same budget. You are not trading down. You are trading the mine for the lab.

DON'T CONFUSE A DIAMOND WITH A SIMULANT

This is where most people get lost, so let's be precise. **Moissanite** is silicon carbide — beautiful and durable, but it throws more rainbow fire than a diamond and reads differently to a trained eye. **Cubic zirconia** is a soft, inexpensive zirconium dioxide that scratches and clouds over time. Both only *imitate* a diamond. A lab-grown diamond *is* one — a perfect 10 on the Mohs scale of hardness, exactly like mined, which is precisely why diamond is the stone for a ring worn every day for the rest of your life.

CAN ANYONE TELL THEM APART?

Not with the naked eye, and not with a standard jeweler's loupe. Separating a lab-grown diamond from a mined one requires specialized laboratory equipment that detects microscopic traces of how the crystal grew — the kind of instrument only a grading lab has. That is also your protection: every stone comes with an independent report, and on most stones the report number is laser-inscribed on the girdle.

HOW THEY'RE GROWN

HPHT recreates the heat and crushing pressure of the earth's mantle, crystallizing carbon onto a tiny diamond seed. **CVD** places that seed in a carbon-rich gas chamber, where carbon atoms settle onto it layer by layer, like frost forming on glass. Different paths, identical result — and neither method changes the beauty of the finished stone. That comes down to the 4Cs.

02

HOW TO JUDGE A STONE

The 4Cs — what actually matters, and what doesn't

Every diamond is graded on Cut, Color, Clarity and Carat. The traditional advice is to maximize one and compromise on the rest — and that advice was written for mined stones. Lab-grown quietly retires it.

Cut STANDARD: EXCELLENT

Cut is not the shape of the diamond. It is how well the stone was cut — its proportions, symmetry and polish — and it is the single biggest driver of beauty. A well-cut diamond catches light and throws it back as *brightness* (the white light it returns), *fire* (flashes of color) and *scintillation* (the sparkle as it moves). A poorly cut stone leaks light and looks dull, even when everything else about it is excellent. GIA grades cut only on round brilliants, from Excellent to Poor. Fancy shapes carry no official cut grade — which is exactly why who cut the stone, and who selected it, matters more there.

Color STANDARD: D-F

Diamond color runs from **D** (completely colorless) down to **Z** (light yellow or brown). Counterintuitively, less color is rarer and more prized. **D-F are colorless**; G-J are near-colorless and face up white to the eye once set. Nearly every guide will tell you to settle for a G or an H, and in the mined market that is sound advice — a colorless mined stone carries a steep rarity premium. In lab-grown it does not, so DelaFuente specs D-F as standard — and within that band, D, E and F are indistinguishable face-up.

Clarity STANDARD: VVS

Clarity describes a diamond's tiny internal characteristics (inclusions) and surface marks (blemishes) — think of them as birthmarks formed as the stone grew. The scale runs FL/IF (flawless), VVS1-VVS2, VS1-VS2, SI1-SI2, then I1-I3. The old advice was to buy “eye-clean” — a VS2 or SI1 with nothing visible to the naked eye — because anything higher was unaffordable. That is no longer the constraint. DelaFuente specs **VVS1-VVS2**: inclusions a skilled grader needs magnification to hunt for, not ones you are hoping sit behind a prong.

WHY THE OLD ADVICE EXISTS

Almost every diamond guide still tells you to save on color and clarity. For mined stones that is correct: they are priced by rarity, so a colorless, near-flawless crystal costs multiples of a G VS2 that looks identical on the hand. Lab-grown breaks that link — growing a cleaner, whiter crystal costs far less than finding one. The compromise did not get smarter. It became unnecessary.

Carat, and the DelaFuente standard.

Carat **WEIGHT, NOT SIZE**

Carat is a measure of weight — one carat equals 0.2 grams — not of size. Two diamonds of identical carat weight can look like different sizes, because cut and shape decide how much of that weight sits on top, visible from above, versus hidden in depth. In the mined market, price steps up sharply at “magic” weights like 1.00 ct and 2.00 ct, which is why buyers get coached to sit at 0.90 ct. In lab-grown that step is much softer. If you want the round number, take the round number.

WHAT CHANGED, IN ONE TABLE

THE C	THE OLD ADVICE, FOR MINED	THE DELAFUENTE STANDARD
Cut	Never compromise — the one grade to protect.	Unchanged: Excellent. Cut is what makes a diamond look alive.
Color	Settle for a near-colorless G–H; it faces up white.	D–F. Colorless, with no premium worth avoiding.
Clarity	Settle for an eye-clean VS2 or SI1.	VVS1–VVS2. Clean under magnification, not just to the eye.
Carat	Sit just under 1.00 ct or 2.00 ct.	The size you actually want.

THE ONE PLACE STILL NOT WORTH PAYING FOR

Flawless and Internally Flawless. At VVS the inclusions already take magnification and a trained eye to find, so the grade above it buys you a word on a report and nothing your eye will ever register. Every guide should have one line telling you where to stop. That is mine.

03

TASTE, NOT QUALITY

Which diamond shape should you choose?

Shape is the outline of the stone, and it is purely a matter of taste — no shape is higher quality than another. Start with the one they already wear.



Round brilliant

The most brilliant and timeless. Maximum sparkle.



Oval

Elongated and elegant. Looks larger per carat.



Emerald

A step cut with long, clean lines and a quiet “hall of mirrors” flash.



Pear

A teardrop. Slimming on the finger.



Marquise

Long and pointed. Dramatic, and maximizes apparent size.



Cushion

A rounded square with vintage romance.



Radiant

Brilliant sparkle in a soft rectangle.



Princess

A sharp, modern square.



Asscher

A stepped, geometric square with Art Deco character.

TWO THINGS TO CHECK ON ANY ELONGATED SHAPE

The **length-to-width ratio** defines the silhouette — a longer, narrower oval versus a rounder one. It is personal taste, but choose it deliberately; a favorite oval ratio sits around 1.35–1.50. Then look for the **bowtie**: a dark, bowtie-shaped shadow across the center, caused by light passing through the stone instead of reflecting back. A faint bowtie is normal and present in almost every elongated stone. A heavy, dark one is a cutting flaw worth walking away from.

IF YOU WANT A RING THAT READS INTENTIONAL

An **East-West setting** turns an elongated stone on its side, so the diamond lies horizontally across the hand rather than running up the finger. It is unexpected, modern and quietly editorial — and it is especially striking with ovals, emeralds, marquises and pears, where the horizontal line elongates the hand.

04

STRAIGHT TALK

How much should you spend?

There is no correct number. The “three months’ salary” rule was a 1930s marketing slogan, not financial advice. Spend what feels right for your life and your relationship — no more.

What actually stretches a budget

Notice that none of these levers ask you to accept a lower grade. That was the old trade, and lab-grown already made it for you.

- 1 Choose lab-grown.** This is the whole game. Not simply a bigger stone for the money — the entire top of the quality scale comes within reach, with essentially the same physical, chemical and optical properties as mined.
- 2 Take the bottom of each top band.** An F rather than a D, a VVS2 rather than a VVS1. Both colorless, both clean, indistinguishable on a hand — but the price difference is real.
- 3 Pick a shape that looks large for its weight.** Oval and marquise carry their weight across the finger rather than down into the stone.
- 4 Let the setting do some of the work.** A slim solitaire puts the whole budget into the stone. Pavé, hidden halos and heavy galleries are beautiful, and they are also where a budget quietly disappears.

Set the number before you start looking

Decide your budget before you see a single stone, and say it out loud to whoever is helping you. Shopping without a number is how people end up well over it — every stone looks like it is only a little more than the last one, and that ladder has no top. A jeweler worth working with will do more with a stated budget than with a vague one, because knowing the ceiling lets them go find your stone instead of showing you whatever is already in the case.

WORTH SAYING PLAINLY

Give me a number — any number — and I will tell you exactly what it buys, including the times when the right answer is to wait a few months and get the stone you actually wanted.

05

PROOF, NOT A PROMISE

Why the certificate is non-negotiable

A grading report is an independent laboratory's unbiased assessment of a stone's 4Cs. It is the difference between a jeweler's word and a third party's verdict — and it is the single document that makes an online purchase verifiable.

THE LAB	WHAT IT IS	BEST KNOWN FOR
GIA	Gemological Institute of America. The long-standing benchmark, and the body that created the 4Cs scale.	Mined diamonds
IGI	International Gemological Institute. Highly consistent, and the dominant lab for grading lab-grown stones.	Lab-grown diamonds

Both are respected, independent, and non-negotiable. One caution: confirm the report comes from GIA or IGI specifically, not an in-house “certificate” written by the seller.

WHAT TO ACTUALLY READ ON THE REPORT

Measurements and shape — should match the stone you were shown, to the millimeter.

Cut, polish and symmetry — cut is graded only on round brilliants; polish and symmetry are graded on every shape.

Fluorescence — most stones are None or Faint. Strong blue can look slightly hazy in sunlight, and is priced lower.

The plotted diagram — where the inclusions actually sit. One under a prong is invisible; the same grade dead center is not.

The inscription number — it must match the report in front of you.

A GRADING REPORT IS NOT AN APPRAISAL

The report states what the stone *is*. An appraisal states what it would cost to *replace* — which is the document your insurer will ask for. You want both, and they are not interchangeable.

06

THE PART MOST JEWELERS SKIP

The honest part nobody tells you

Two things are true that a sales page will not say out loud: a diamond is not an investment, and lab-grown is a lighter footprint rather than a zero one. Neither should stop you buying. Both should shape how you buy.

On resale value

Lab-grown diamonds resell for less than mined ones, and diamonds in general are not a financial asset. Retail carries a margin that resale does not return, for mined stones too. Buy the ring for what it means and for how it looks on the hand — not as something you expect to sell. Through that lens the math is simple: lab-grown gives you the most beautiful stone for the money, full stop.

On sustainability

Lab-grown avoids the land disruption and human-rights concerns tied to some mining, and skips the dug-out earth entirely. It does use energy to grow, increasingly from cleaner sources — so it is a meaningfully lighter footprint, not a zero one. Anyone telling you a diamond is carbon-neutral is selling, not informing. Pairing a lab-grown stone with recycled gold is genuinely one of the most responsible ways to buy fine jewelry today, and you sacrifice nothing in beauty to do it.

On “certified” as a word

Certification only means something when you name the lab. A stone described as “certified” with no lab named, or graded by a house you have never heard of, is often two or three grades softer than an equivalent GIA or IGI stone. That gap is where most people quietly overpay.

THE TEST WORTH APPLYING

Ask any jeweler what the weakest part of the stone they are showing you is. Everyone selling you a diamond knows the answer. The ones worth buying from will tell you.

07

VERIFY, DON'T TRUST

Buying online with confidence

Buying a diamond online should feel safer than a display case, not scarier — because online you can verify things a counter never lets you check.

☐ An independent certificate for your exact stone

GIA or IGI, with the report number laser-inscribed on the girdle. Not a generic grade for “stones like this one.”

☐ A 360° video of the actual diamond

You see the real stone — including its inclusions and any bowtie — before it ships. No display case offers that.

☐ A clear returns and resize policy, in writing

Ask specifically what is final sale. Custom and made-to-order pieces usually are, which is normal — but you should know before, not after.

☐ Fully insured, signature-required shipping

In discreet, unmarked packaging, with tracking.

☐ A real person guiding you

Someone who answers “what is wrong with this stone?” directly, rather than an algorithm that only ever shows you more options.

THE REFRAME

You are not gambling. With a report, an inscription and a video of the actual stone, you are seeing and verifying more than you ever could leaning over a counter under flattering light.

08

TAKE THIS WITH YOU

Your buying checklist

- ☐ **It is a real diamond — mined or lab-grown, never a simulant**
Moissanite and cubic zirconia imitate a diamond. They are not one.
 - ☐ **Cut: Excellent**
On round brilliants, that is the top grade. Fancy shapes carry no official cut grade — ask for Excellent polish and symmetry, and judge the stone on video.
 - ☐ **Color: D–F, colorless**
Not near-colorless. In lab-grown there is no reason to stop at G.
 - ☐ **Clarity: VVS1 or VVS2**
Clean under magnification, not merely clean to the naked eye.
 - ☐ **Carat: the size you actually want**
The rule about sitting under 1.00 ct is a mined-market habit. It barely applies here.
 - ☐ **Certificate: GIA or IGI, number laser-inscribed**
Named lab or no deal. Keep the report — your insurer will want it.
 - ☐ **A 360° video of the exact stone you are buying**
Check elongated shapes for a heavy bowtie before you commit.
 - ☐ **A budget you set yourself — not one a slogan set for you**
Three months' salary was advertising. It was never advice.
-

ONE LAST THING

If a seller cannot answer any single line on this list in writing, that is your answer. Every item here is something a serious jeweler can confirm in a message, in a minute, without hesitating.

WHEN YOU'RE READY

Tell me your budget and
your priority — *bigger,
whiter, or brighter* — and
I'll build the stone
around it.

Almost every DelaFuentes piece is made to order: cast, set and finished individually rather than pulled off a shelf. That means the stone is chosen for you, and it means I can tell you plainly when a different grade, a different shape, or waiting another few months would serve you better than what is in front of you today.

EMAIL

dannadelaf@gmail.com

ONLINE

delafuentes.jewelry

INSTAGRAM

@delafuentes.jewelry

Danna de la Fuente

GIA GRADUATE DIAMONDS · DIAMOND SPECIALIST

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