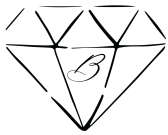

Lab Grown Diamonds & Diamond Grading

Lab Grown Diamonds 101

Lab-grown diamonds have become a hot topic for many prospective engagement ring buyers because they're much more affordable than natural diamonds.

Here are the most important points to know.

- Lab-grown diamonds are chemically the same as natural diamonds.
- Lab-grown diamonds are different from diamond substitutes like Cubic Zirconium or Moissanite, which have different chemical compositions than diamonds do.
- Lab-growns are graded on the same scales for color and clarity as natural diamonds, so there are varying levels of quality.
- Pros: You'll get a bigger, higher-quality diamond for the same budget. Some consider lab-grown to be more ethical.
- Cons: The resale value is much more uncertain, and the price of lab-grown diamonds has steadily decreased over the last few years. Perception matters and some people have a bias that natural is better.

The GIA Grading System

The Gemological Institute of America (GIA) established the **4C grading system**, which is the gold standard across the world.

Jeweler's Tip: *Any natural diamond you buy for an engagement ring should be GIA certified. If you fall in love with a stone that isn't certified, and the jeweler is hesitant to have it certified for you, take that as a red flag!*

Color: Diamonds are graded for color on a scale ranging from D to Z. D is colorless / bright white, Z is quite yellow. The lower a diamond is on the color scale (the closer to D color), the more expensive and desirable it is considered.

Jeweler's Tip: *It typically requires a variance of at least 2 color grades to tell the difference between two stones. For example, when comparing a G and H color diamond, you probably won't be able to see a difference, but if you compare a G and I color diamond, you can probably slightly tell the G is whiter.*

Clarity: Clarity refers to the number or severity of inclusions or imperfections in the stone and is graded on a scale of Flawless (no imperfections) to Included. When targeting a clarity grade, consider the shape of the diamond. Emerald and Asscher cuts show their inclusions more, so they require a better clarity grade.

Jeweler's Tip: *Diamonds are graded for clarity at a 10x magnification, so as long as there are no visible inclusions to the naked eye, you're good! This is called "eye-clean," and finding an eye-clean stone is a great way to maximize your budget. Don't pay for something you can't see!*

Cut: Cut refers to the quality of the shape, proportions, and faceting. How well the diamond is cut can determine how much it sparkles and even how large it appears. Round diamonds are given a formal cut grade ranging from Excellent to Poor, while all other shapes receive a polish and symmetry grade.

Jeweler's Tip: *This is low-key the most important of the Cs. You can have a flawless D color diamond, but if it's cut poorly it's not going to be beautiful!*

Carat Weight: Carat weight refers to the actual weight of the diamond. When considering how large the diamond will appear, carat weight is of course important, but it's not the full picture of what you'll see in real life. You must also consider how well the diamond is cut and its dimensions. You can have two diamonds that have the same carat weight, but they appear much different in size due to the dimensions of the stones.

Fluorescence: In addition to the 4Cs, you'll see a fluorescence grade ranging from "none" to "very strong" on every GIA certificate. This refers to how intensely a diamond emits a soft color glow when exposed to ultraviolet (UV) light. Most of the time fluorescence isn't a big deal, but it can impact the resale value of your stone.

In summary, of course you should factor the 4Cs into your decision, but don't let only what's on paper distract you from what you see in person. A diamond's beauty is subjective, and the best deals are on diamonds that appear more beautiful than what their formal grade suggests!