

How to tell the Carat of your Gold

Gold is the most popular choice for men and women's wedding and engagement rings. Gold is also very popular in dress rings, earrings, pendants, necklaces and bracelets.

You've probably heard the term "carat gold." - Pure gold is 24 carat is 100% gold. The ultimate in richness, with a unique supple quality that lets it be shaped and moulded into spectacular jewellery with a glow that transcends all others.

Much of today's gold is mixed with a percentage of alloys--metals that make it harder, stronger. The carat mark tells you the percentage of pure gold to alloy. The higher the carat, the purer the gold. For example, 18 carat gold is 75% pure gold and 25% alloyed metals.

Gold Content

- 999 is 24 carat gold
- 750 is 18 carat gold - 18ct gold contains 75% pure gold (750 parts per thousand parts).
- 585 is 14 carat gold - 14ct gold contains 58.5% pure gold (585 parts per thousand parts).
- 375 is 9 carat gold - 9ct gold contains 37.5% pure gold (375 parts per thousand parts).

Other gold carats are used in different parts of the world including 10ct, 22ct and 24ct. It is generally considered that 22ct and 24ct gold are too soft to be used to make men's wedding rings. 10ct gold (417 parts pure gold per thousand parts) is very similar to 9ct gold and the reason why some countries use 9ct and other countries use 10ct is due to historical reasons, rather than one being superior to the other.

There are two things to consider when looking at gold;

- what gold carat to choose: and
- the gold colour or the combination of gold colours available.

Gold carat

There are several carats available for gold.

The carat is the gold content of the metal. The carat measures the proportion of pure gold mixed with other metal alloy to make up the final metal.

The carat of gold is represented in many countries by the abbreviation ct. Carat can also be called Karat, represented by kt or K.

You may notice that carat or ct is also used to measure the weight of diamonds and gemstones. Although the same name is used, the two measurements are measuring different characteristics of jewellery.

The higher the proportion of gold used in the final metal, the more valuable and expensive the metal will be. So all other things being the same, an 18ct ring will be more expensive than a 14ct ring and a 14ct ring will be more expensive than a 9ct ring.

Markings

Jewellery is normally stamped with a marking to show the type of gold.

- For 9ct gold the stamp will normally be either the number 375, or 9ct, 9kt or 9K.
- For 14ct gold, the stamp will normally be the number 417, or 14ct, 14kt or 14K.
- For 18ct gold, the stamp will normally be the number 750, or 18ct, 18kt or 18K.

The stamps only indicate the carat of metal. They do not indicate the colour of the metal. So for example, an 18ct yellow gold ring would have a stamp of 750 as would an 18ct white gold ring. 9ct, 14ct and 18ct gold are each relatively hard and durable metals and are suitable for use in all types of fine jewellery. Gold is also suitable to be used in jewellery that is worn on an every day basis.

There are also other marks with other meanings on fine gold jewellery. They include: The Manufacturer's Trademark. The country of origin may also appear on a piece of gold jewellery.

Considerations

When choosing jewellery, particularly rings, many people consider the hardness and durability of gold to be used in their ring. Metal hardness is measured by what is called the Vickers scale where harder metals receive a higher Vickers score than less hard metals.

9ct has a Vickers hardness of 120 and 18ct has a Vickers hardness of 125. This shows 18ct as harder, but the difference is so slight that in practical terms 9ct and 18ct are much the same in terms of hardness.

One other difference that should be considered when comparing 9ct and 18ct. 9ct is more difficult to bend and is a little springier and therefore a fine 9ct ring may be less likely to bend out of shape than a fine 18ct ring. However, if the ring is of a good sturdy construction neither metal will be likely to bend out of shape.