

to select separate bands, each reflecting the personal tastes of the wearer, but still symbolizing your togetherness.

Silver and platinum have both made significant inroads into the wedding ring market in recent years (and are encouraged as a personal - if somewhat "bold" - choice), but gold is still far and away the norm as the precious metal of choice for wedding bands. But there are a couple of other trends which have gained much ground recently. One is colored gold such as "white" and "pink" gold (gold which has trace amounts of other minerals which tint or even "dye" the basic gold color without affecting its luster or other "gold" characteristics. (It is interesting to note that colored gold - particularly pink gold - was extremely popular at the last turn of the century and into the early 20th century!) The other is the two-tone ring (intertwined gold of different colors or even two different colored metals). By far the most popular combination is the platinum/gold ring. The platinum is favored for its strength and class, while the gold is desired for its beauty and tradition. And finally, "gem-intensive" wedding bands are beginning to come into favor. With more relaxed attitudes toward such considerations as mixing stones (say, an emerald engagement ring and a diamond encrusted wedding band), men wearing jewels, the possibility of non-matching bands (jewels for the bride, metal only for the groom, or - dare we say it, vice-versal!), and the possibility of skipping the purchase of an engagement ring (for financial or other considerations) makes sav-

ing your gem purchase (or purchases) for an extra-special wedding ring (or rings) a very real option today.

When shopping for your rings, you will be considering a different type of "Carrot" - KARAT, with a "K". Karat refers to the percentage of precious metal contained in an alloyed or combined metal. But, this certainly does not mean that the less gold or silver contained in your rings is reflection of their quality or value. On the contrary! Precious metals, particularly gold, are very soft and could wear out and/or break almost immediately. The addition of other metals into your ring will ensure that the band will retain its shape and will be easy to re-size or repair, and will shine on forever!

A good medium - price wise and for durability - is fourteen karat gold (14K). This is a ring for a lifetime; one you can wear for fifty years or more. Why do you think they call it a "Golden Anniversary"?

PRICES FOR PRECIOUS METALS AND GEMSTONES

Although the gold market (and other precious metal figures) varies widely, a good, solid set of wedding rings can always be found in the 14K range at a reasonable price. A little shopping,

some careful planning and, perhaps, a financing plan from your bank or the jewelry outlet itself will guarantee you an easy way to own the rings you really want.

For diamonds, the rule of thumb is approximately (according to recent Diamond Information Center figures) two month's salary as a good amount when considering just how much you should spend on your engagement ring. For example, if you're making \$60,000 per year, or \$5000 per month, a \$10,000 engagement ring would be in order. In this price range, a really nice 1 Carat or larger diamond should be obtainable.

STYLES

Many new styles have come on the market in the last few years. One of the most popular is the antique-styled rings we've been seeing. Heirloom, estate and antique jewelry have always been popular as wedding bands and engagement rings. If you desire this look, but it is not available to you because nothing's been passed down in your family or because the runaway market in antiques has made it unattainable, simply shop around. You're going to see many older and antique styles popping up in the stores. Of course, your own flair and look will determine what you'll want to be wearing all the time. ♥