



Photo by Brad Stamen/Daily Nebraskan

With this ring, I thee wed

By Paul Morin
Staff Reporter

In 1477, Duke Maximilian of Austria presented a diamond ring to Mary of Burgundy to seal their engagement to marriage. Since then, the diamond engagement ring has come to be a traditional sign of a couple's betrothal and a symbol of the love behind the marriage union.

Today, the element of surprise in buying a diamond ring has faded out of popularity. Bob Fixter, advertising manager of Sartor Hamann jewelry, said it is rare these days for the man to go out and buy an engagement ring without any input from the woman. The two often shop together first, and then come back individually to take a closer look at the choices.

Fred Wilson, owner and manager of Fred Wilson Jewelry, said many women will come in by themselves or with a friend to "pre-shop" for a ring before shopping with their fiancée. Loretta Thomas, manager of A. T. Thomas Jewelry in the Atrium, said she agrees with Wilson and Fixter. "Women want to feel like they made the choice, too," she said.

Because the engagement ring is considered by most to be a big investment, it is risky business to make a purchase without consultation.

Fixter said college students play a big role in the diamond-buying business. He estimated that about 50 percent of Sartor Hamann's customers shopping for engagement rings are college students. Thomas said 60 percent of the A. T. Thomas customers are college students, the rest being mostly young professionals.

The most popular shaped diamond, according to all three managers, is the round cut. Round diamonds allow maximum brilliancy without sacrificing light dispersion. This shape is followed in popularity by the marquise, pear and emerald shapes.

A. T. Thomas has approximately 600 styles of diamond engagement rings, half of them mounted and half of them loose diamonds. Loose diamonds are more popular, according to Thomas, because of a recent striving for individuality in engagement ring styles.

Sartor Hamann keeps about 125 loose diamonds in stock and offers about 200 different styles of mounting. Fixter said the plain band still is the

most popular style, but a carved band or a band with a twist in the gold also is popular.

Thomas said bridal sets seem to be more popular than the plain band style. A bridal set includes the engagement ring with the main diamond and a few smaller diamonds on the band, along with the wedding ring.

There also are trio sets, which include the engagement ring and the set of wedding rings. Trio sets usually have a series of small diamonds on the man's band, as well as the woman's.

How much does all this cost?

Fixter said a diamond weighing one-fifth of a carat can run anywhere from \$265 to \$985, depending mostly upon the cut of the diamond. The most popular weight of diamond is between one-fourth and one-half carat.

Of the four C's in diamond grading (cutting, color, clarity and carat weight), cutting is the largest factor in price because of the strong influence it has on the interaction of light with the diamond.

The price of gold on the stock market also is a factor, Wilson said. If the ring is bought on a day when the price of gold is down, the price of the ring will be cut accordingly. But the converse of this also holds true.

Wilson hinted that it would be smart shopping if the couple kept an eye on rising and falling gold prices, and bought when gold was at its cheapest. This would be especially advantageous when buying wedding bands. For engagement rings, this method might take from \$10 to \$20 off the price of a ring.

Thomas said an average amount spent on an engagement rings is \$600 to \$800.

Paying for all this is easier than it might sound. Sartor Hamann offers three payment plans: 90 days same-as-cash, six-month payment with one-third down and interest, and a layaway plan.

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