



crazy for cushions

With their graceful lines and elegant presence, cushion-cut engagement rings are shaping up to be the next big thing. BY TANYA DUKES PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN DOBEN >>

up-and-coming cushions

There are rumblings of a quiet upheaval in the world of engagement rings. Although round diamonds remain the most frequently chosen center stone, the race for first place among fancy diamond shapes—anything that isn't a round, brilliant cut—is a whole other story. Recently, cushion-cut engagement rings have seen a breakout surge in popularity, and they're challenging former front-runner, the glitzy, square princess-cut, for the lead. According to designer Scott Kay, founder of the jewelry company that bears his name, requests for engagement rings with cushion-cut center stones were a rarity two years ago. Today, they account for 20 percent of the rings he sells. And the trend shows no signs of disappearing anytime soon. Just take one look at the latest tabloids and you'll find paparazzi shots of newly engaged and newlywed celebrities, like Gabrielle Union, Kaley Cuoco and Kelly Rowland, all flaunting engagement rings with cushion-cut diamonds. Neil Lane, the Beverly Hills jeweler whose name is eponymous with A-list nuptials, confirms that stars show a distinct preference lately for these stones with their style that "transcends time."

what's your size?

It's important to get your ring finger sized before you start shopping. While it isn't impossible to expand or shrink the band, too much resizing can damage or change your ring. Ask your local jeweler to help you determine the right size ring for your finger.



a cut above the rest

Like their name implies, each cushion-cut stone resembles, well, a cushion or pillow in shape. Larry S. Larson, a trend expert and instructor at the Gemological Institute of America, says the clearest indication of a cushion-cut gem is the combination of "softly rounded corners and elegantly arched sides." He attributes this rising popularity of cushion-cut stones to their "brilliance and substantial look that feels romantic, but also has a modern sensibility." While Russell Zelenetz, co-owner of Stephen Russell, which offers a significant collection of cushion-cut rings, sees their one-of-a-kind charm as a big draw: "Each stone, especially those of the antique variety, is unique and feels like a special find because every diamond cutter had his own technique." Zelenetz helps put the current trend into perspective by explaining that every era tends to have a distinctive engagement ring style. "In the '20s, asscher cuts were incredibly popular, and the next wave was emerald-cut stones. If you see a marquise, you think '80s. Now it looks like the cushion cut is becoming the coveted style." >>

shape shifters

Study up on this guide to fancy diamond cuts.

cushion



emerald



pear



asscher



oval



radiant



marquise



princess





something old, something new

Cushion-cut engagement rings may have just been discovered by a new generation, but this shape has been a part of jewelry design history for centuries. In fact, some of the most prized diamonds ever discovered were cut into cushions, including the Cullinan II—a 317.4-carat stone that sits on the Imperial State Crown worn by Queen Elizabeth once a year to open Parliament. And then there's the Hope Diamond: The fabled, steely blue gem achieved its current antique cushion shape after being cut from a larger stone first unearthed in 17th-century India.

consider it in color

Jessica Simpson's deep red ruby engagement ring—from fiancé Eric Johnson—blends together two beautiful trends: colored and cushion-cut gems. The pillow-shaped stone at its center features her birthstone. Rings with precious colored stones were often exchanged by royals as symbols of commitment as far back as the 14th-century, and the tradition has been rekindled today. Jewelers across the country have seen an uptick in requests for colored engagement rings. And thanks to the versatility and design options that cushion-cut stones allow, they make an ideal choice if you're thinking of experimenting with color.

focus on cut and clarity

You've probably heard the phrase the 4C's—cut, clarity, carat and color—for determining why some diamonds are more valuable (read: expensive) than others. Well, it's extra-important to pay attention to the first two in the case of cushion-cut stones, according to Forevermark Diamond expert Adelaide Polk-Bauman. "There's a sizable range of cuts within the cushion category. Some are closer to round brilliant stones, and others are closer to princess cuts," she says. "Also, because a cushion has larger facets, you must be mindful of the clarity of your diamond." And don't rush your decision. There can be big differences among fancy-cut stones, even when they're the same carat weight, explains Jonathan Mervis of Mervis Diamond Importers. So he suggests you compare several variations of the same shape side by side to get an accurate sense of which one you really want.

get set

It's crucial that a ring's setting complements its center stone. A mounting frames the gemstone and sets the tone for an engagement ring's look and feel. Conveniently, there aren't any limits when it comes to choosing a ring to suit a cushion-cut gem. According to Kay, "any ring will flatter a cushion cut, just as it does a round." That means you can let personal preference and lifestyle be your guide. Here are a few popular choices:

PRONG The perennial favorite, this setting features three or more metal prongs, which support the stone and help to hold it in place.

HALO A ring of small pavé-set diamonds surrounds the center stone, making it appear larger and giving a hint of extra sparkle.

BEZEL A contemporary style usually with minimal embellishment, it consists of a metal band that encircles all or part of a stone's outer edge.

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ring insurance

It may not be romantic, but the peace of mind is pretty sweet.

what it is

Ring insurance can be bought as an extension to your renter or homeowner policy. Or for more coverage (replacing the actual lost or stolen ring rather than paying a set amount of cash, for example), consider a company that specializes in jewelry insurance.

why you need it

"Couples underestimate the importance of insurance until they need it," says Joel Matthies, senior vice president at Jewelers Mutual Insurance Company. "Insurance gives you the confidence of knowing if something unforeseen happens, you're covered."

how it works

You'll need to provide your bill of sale or appraisal and a detailed description of the item you're insuring, explains Matthies. FYI: If you move, make sure your "ring rider" follows you and get your ring reappraised every few years to reassess its value.

average cost

Insurance rates vary by state and by the value of the ring, but on average, a \$1,000 ring can be insured for about \$30 annually. Couples wanting to bring costs down further should look into a plan with a deductible, which can lower your premium payments.