

Ethical and Sustainable Jewellery Guide

The long read

Jewellery is a beautiful, luxury purchase, it's sparkly, glamorous, a symbol of status and often of love and a reminder of special people and occasions.

The mining and extraction of metal and gems, (and the ethical and environmental implications) are the side of the industry that jewellery lovers (and many jewellers until recently) knew little about.

Over the last 15 or so years there have been calls for the jewellery supply chain to clean up its act and become more transparent. It has taken some time, but things are changing and as jewellers we now have access to more ethical materials.

It's not perfect but things are improving and it's important to me that I'm doing the best I can. I work hard to keep up to date with responsible sourcing and if at any point I become aware of something I'm not happy with, I'll stop using it.



Metal

Your choice of metal is relatively straight forward – Fairmined or Fair Trade are both good – mining still goes on, but it supports communities that rely on it to make a living, whilst putting in place processes to support people and minimise environmental damage. Often the local population are pushed out by large mining companies (whether mining metal or gems).

It's worth considering that humans are very highly unlikely to stop mining precious metals and if mining is going to continue, Fairmined does at least offer the opportunity to support local artisanal miners.

You could also look at recycled metal, this is gold, silver or platinum, that has been used before (in industry or jewellery etc), then refined ready for use again. 100% recycled metal means that no new mining will have taken place in order to make that piece of jewellery. It is the most sustainable option, but there's no way of knowing where it originally came from.



Diamonds

The sourcing of diamonds is trickier, they are often labelled “ethical” as they meet the standards of the Kimberly process. Have you watched the film Blood Diamond? The Kimberly process was developed to make sure the production and sale proceeds from diamonds did not support civil wars in Africa and it would be unusual to find a jeweller these days who didn’t tell you their diamonds were conflict free.

However, many within the industry are saying that the Kimberley Process does not go far enough and that blood diamonds still manage to enter the market. Even if a diamond is conflict free, it doesn’t mean that those diamonds haven’t been cut and polished in a sweat shop of a factory, using child labour or that there haven’t been human rights violations or exploitation.



Some sellers can guarantee conditions in the factories, but they still can’t tell you where the diamonds came from or conditions in the specific mine and without that information, how can you know that there aren’t human rights violations, that miners are being properly paid, that children aren’t working in the mines or that the gems aren’t funding violence?

In my opinion, there are currently no natural diamonds that are environmentally friendly. There are no traceable, small scale and artisanally mined sources of diamonds available either, which are usually less environmentally damaging.

So, I give my customers the following options:

Diamonds sourced from the Canadian mines



Ekati diamond mine, Canada.

The diamonds are guaranteed natural and untreated and can be traced.

You can find out more about the mines here:

<https://www.ddmines.com/ekati-diamond-mine-operations/>

<https://www.riotinto.com/en/operations/canada/diavik>

Each Canadian Diamond larger than 0.3cts is laser inscribed with a unique serial number and can be tracked back to its mine of origin. The Canadian environmental protection laws require that a thorough environmental assessment be carried out before a diamond mine can be approved, that effective systems are in place to protect local wildlife, and that the land be restored once mining has ceased.

It's worth bearing in mind though that many of these mines are huge holes in the ground and that even with the best environmental protection laws, mining still has a huge impact on the environment. On the plus side, Canadian miners are protected by strict health and safety regulations, and Canadian employment laws preclude child labour and any form of sweatshop labour.

Unless you know where a diamond came from, you cannot know for certain that it was ethically produced. Canada is the only country in the world to operate a system to monitor and track diamonds from the mine.

Laboratory grown diamonds

These are grown in large factories, they are exactly the same composition as natural diamonds. We don't have much in the way of reliable information as to whether they are more or less environmentally friendly than natural diamonds, however, it is unlikely that they cause as much environmental damage as the huge diamond mines or the mining ships that dredge the sea bed of the coast of Namibia.

The factories that manufacture them, will use large amounts of energy in the process. Many in the jewellery mining sector would like to undermine sales and devalue lab grown diamonds.



Recycled diamonds

These are diamonds recovered from old antique jewellery, unsold diamond jewellery and industry. Any recycled diamonds I supply will have been recut and polished or will be old mine cuts.

These could be the most ethical and eco friendly option, however, as with recycled metals, there is no way to trace where they originally came from.

Have a look at my [blog.post](#) for more on this subject



Coloured gemstones

When it comes to coloured gemstones, I work with a small number of suppliers who are ethical. They pay fair wages, treat their staff properly, do not use child labour and operate in a safe and environmentally friendly way. The way they operate meets the principles of fair trade and/or they know the mine from which the stones came. These suppliers can guarantee traceability, that gems did not fund wars or political unrest, that there is no child labour or human rights violations.



One of these suppliers has mines in Sri Lanka, the others are in Tanzania (including the Moyo Gemstones Project), Kenya, Malawi, Australia and the US. 25% of the profits from the sales of the Sri Lankan gemstones goes to local charities.

Sometimes the following classifications are used, and where this is the case, I will only purchase gemstones that meet level one or two:

Level 1 Complete Fair Trade.

We can trace the gemstones back to the mine where we have significant impact on the mining itself.

Level 2 Protocols to the Producer.

We can trace these gems back to the rough broker, who has an agreement with us that he can guarantee the material in question comes from the same locations. He understands and supports our Fair Trade principles and will communicate those principles to the mine operations.

Level 3 Country/Export Onward.

Known traceable country of origin, legally exported knowing they are not financing any civil wars, and cut only in gemstone workshops that meet our employment and health standards.

***Level 3 is the same as the Kimberly Process except we also know and track country of origin and who cut them.*

Level 4 Factory Forward.

These gemstones meet our employment and health standards regarding cutting, and we know country of origin, but not the details of how they were exported.

Level 5 Cannot be Considered Fair Trade.

We do not cut these gems, therefore, we cannot follow their journey from mine to market in a significant manner to ensure that they fall into the Fair Trade categories.

Jewellery remodelling and redesign



Remodelling your jewellery is essentially recycling and is the most sustainable option. It also means your sentimental/family treasures can be made into something you'll wear for years to come.

Vegan and Vegetarian

Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.



My jewellery is vegan and vegetarian friendly – I aim to do no harm to anyone (animal, human or the planet) in the making of my ethical fine jewellery. I don't use any animal products in my workshop (tools or polishes) or any organic gemstones (pearls, coral etc).

My packaging also does not contain any animal glues (most jewellery packaging is made in China and contains animal glue).

Packaging

My cardboard jewellery packaging has been chosen following extensive research. As far as I am aware, it is the only 100% recycled, 100% recyclable jewellery packaging currently available that does not contain animal glues. It is made in the UK.

Traditional jewellery packaging contains many different layers of boards, papers, glue, wood, metal, foam and fabrics. The fabrics and foams are often from petrochemical sources, the many different layers, lamination and printing make them impossible to recycle.

I have partnered with Daniel Lacey Furniture Design to produce a premium packaging range for engagement rings and purchases over £1500.

These boxes are made from recycled offcuts of wood from Daniels workshop and are fully recyclable and compostable.



If you would like to commission your own piece of ethical and sustainable jewellery, please get in touch.

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