

Free Report

How to Tell Quality Jewelry from Cheap Imitations

What to look for when buying fine Jewelry

This short guide is intended to be a resource for you to use when looking at jewelry, whether in a bricks and mortar store, or on the internet. It will help you to quickly separate the obviously bad from the good, but may not be sufficient to allow you to separate the good from the better or the better from the great. You may need the help of a professional appraiser to make those distinctions.

As a jeweler/appraiser I am constantly asked to look at something purchased elsewhere, and often must be the bearer of bad news. This report is the result of having to tell people far too often that it will cost more to repair their poorly made jewelry than it will to build another piece correctly.

I hope that armed with this report you will be able to make better informed decisions, **before** you spend any of your hard earned money.

Weight

One of the most obvious things to look for is the heft or apparent weight of the piece. Here is a typical offering from some of the home-shopping networks and their web sites:



Poorly manufactured, lightweight rings



Rings made by Designs by Vatche

Notice in the first picture how the shanks are hollowed out and that the prongs are thin. The pieces poorly made will be light in weight. In this case, they are a complete rip off of a popular design house, Designs by Vatche. Notice how much thicker the shank of the Vatche ring is, and that it is solid with a slight comfort fit curve to the inside of the shank. Notice how much thicker the prongs are and how much better built they are. Even the cathedral portion of the shank,

rising up to meet the diamond is much heavier and better formed. The Vatche ring not only has far superior quality but will wear better, be more comfortable on the finger and will withstand any future necessary repairs much better.

Vatche rings are designed to last, versus the short term wear you'll get from light weight imitations. They will cost more, but in my opinion, if you are looking for something wearable for more than a few months, the extra durability, comfort and life expectancy is actually the greater bargain.

Finish

Finish is another of those things to look for. Here is an actual picture taken from a website of a ring offered for sale.



As you can see even in the photo, there are many defects that can be seen in the finish. As long as the web site is using real photos of their rings, you may be able to disqualify many of the rings from their photos. Many sellers mislead potential customers by using “stock photos.” These can be pictures of similar designs done by other manufacturers, or themselves but with larger stones or better craftsmanship than the piece being offered for sale. Unscrupulous vendors may also use CAD or computer generated images as stock photos. These do not show the finish or craftsmanship because they are hypothetical drawings versus actual images of the finished jewelry.

Contrast this to the high polish and quality finish on the ring below. Both the outside and inside of the shank surfaces are polished so highly that you are seeing reflections of the lights and windows of the room that the picture was taken in.

No question here which ring is better quality, but also which offers the better value for your dollar.

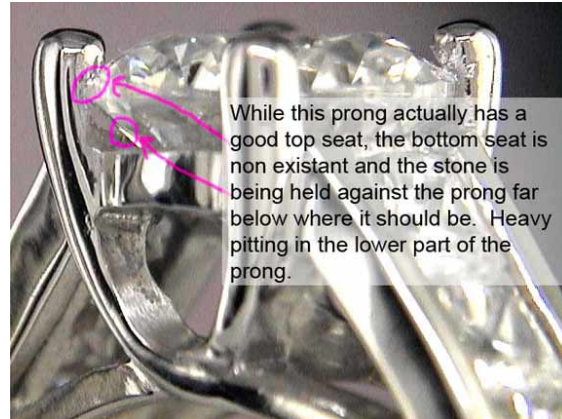
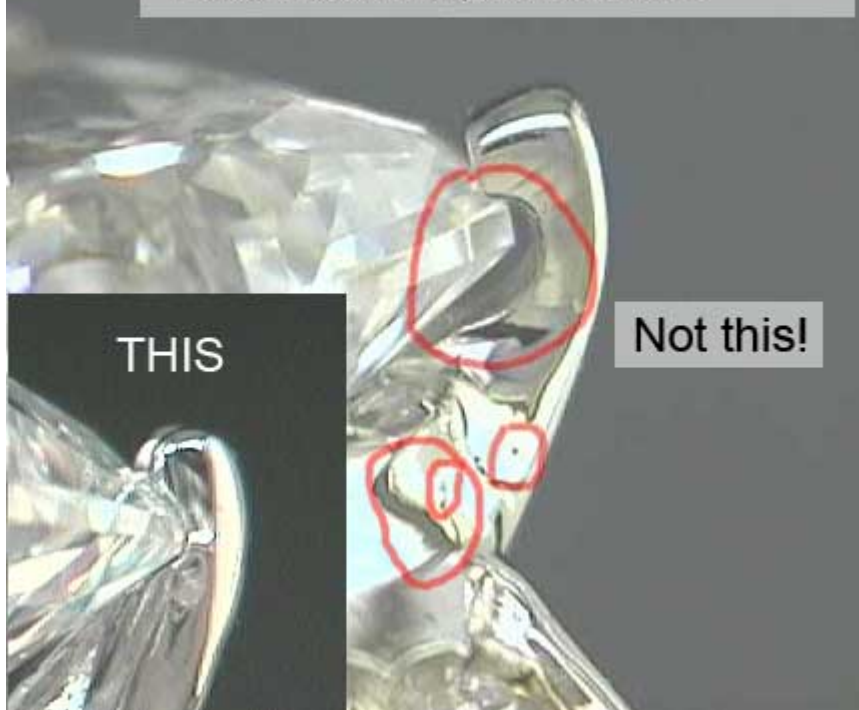


Prongs

Prongs are another thing to check. They may be difficult to see in photos. It is something worth looking at up close, either at the store or when you receive your ring. You may want to invest in an inexpensive loupe to look at prongs, or if at a store, use theirs. (By the way, any store that will not let you use their loupe is probably a good store to leave.)

You want to look for several things when looking at prongs. One, they should be nice and thick in proportion to the stone that they are holding. The prongs need to be properly cut to provide a good seat for the stone. That is to say, they should nestle up to the stone without large gaps. The seat must not be too big or too small, and the cut must not extend too far into the prong, or the whole tip of the prong is at risk for popping off and allowing the stone to go free. Here is a picture that depicts both proper and improper seating.

The seat for the stone is terrible, there is no support for the pavilion of the stone. This ring will be a constant pain, needing the stone retightened after every few days of wear. Pitting and other slop circled as well.

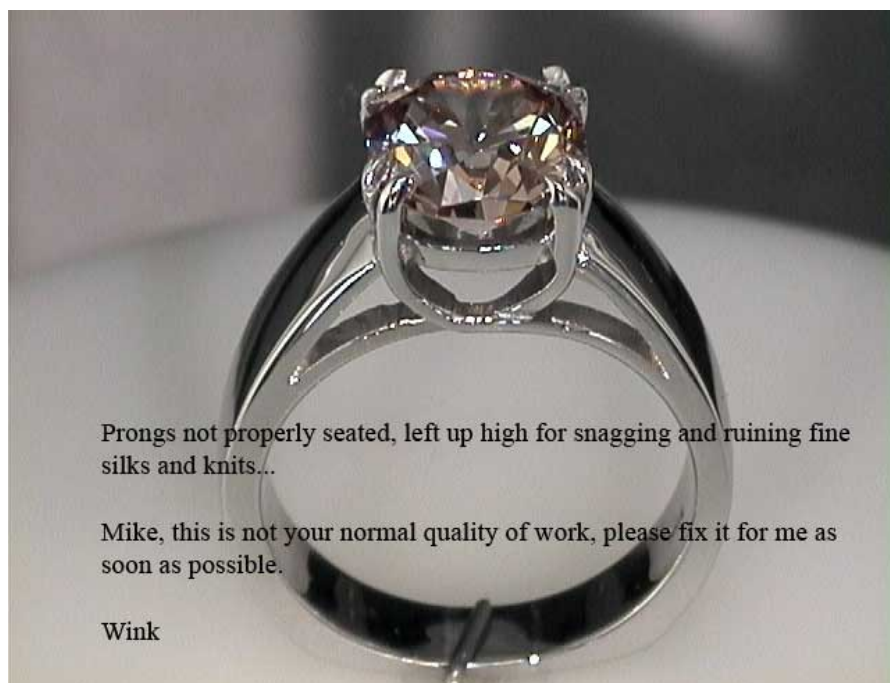


Check, too, to ascertain that the stone is actually set straight. Hold the ring perpendicular to the girdle of the stone and look to see that the stone is level with the ring from both front and side angles. While a small variance may be acceptable because stones are set by hand not a laser guided machine, a large variance is not acceptable. Look for side view photos whenever possible.

Here is an example of a difficult setting job - three stones, each needing to be set at a different angle, by hand. While the visual look is perfect, it is possible to see a slight variance on the angle of the two outside stones. This variance was deemed acceptable to all concerned as the visual affect of the ring is stunning.



Lastly, prongs should sit flush with the top of the stone, without leaving a gap to catch hair or snag fine knits and silk items. This ring was sent back to the bench for repair. Mistakes are going to be part of the fact of every day life. Catching those mistakes and making prompt repair is an indicator of the mark of a good jeweler. We do our best to catch and fix any mistakes and take our bench to task when necessary. Jewelers who ignore or deny their mistakes or are unwilling to repair them may be someone you would be best off not using.



Prongs not properly seated, left up high for snagging and ruining fine silks and knits...

Mike, this is not your normal quality of work, please fix it for me as soon as possible.

Wink

Channels

Channels should be even, with straight lines and nice crisp corners. There should be no waviness to the line of the channel. The stones should be close to one another, but not actually touching girdle to girdle unless they are square or rectangular cut. Round diamonds that are actually touching are a recipe for chipping at the contact points. They should look to the eye as if they are very close to one another or even like they are touching, but they should not actually be in contact. A big problem when one stone is jammed slightly overlapping another is this requires tilting one or both stones and is very likely to result in chipping of one or both stones with wear.

Good channel work

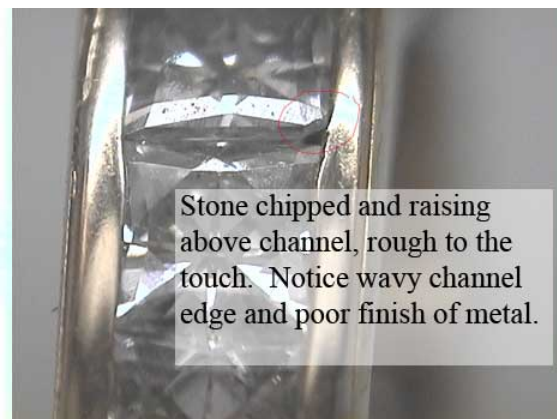
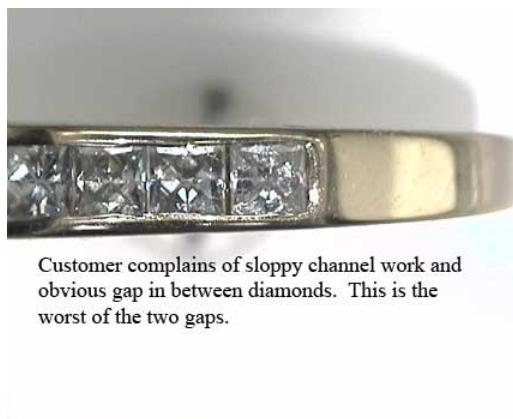
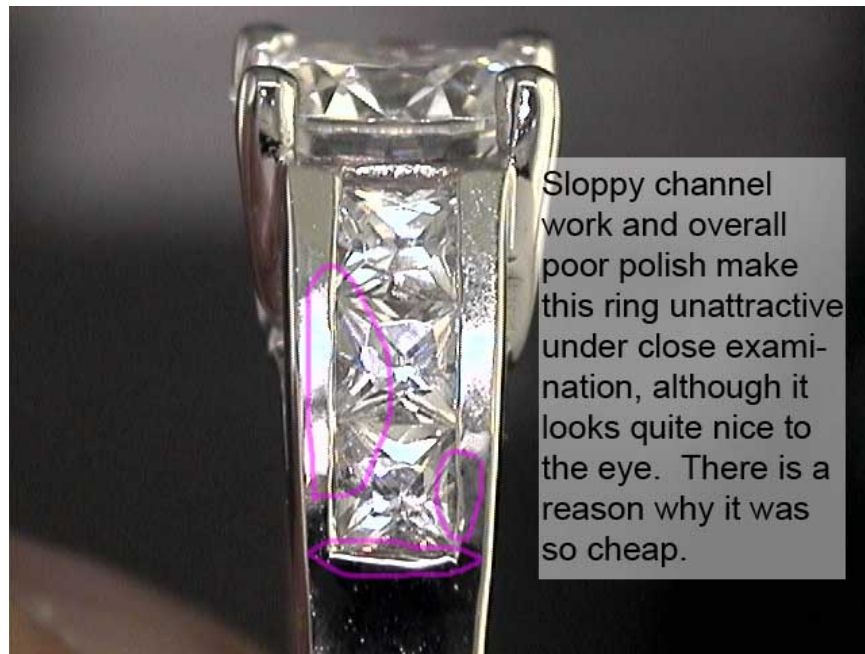


In the above pictures notice the straight sharp edges of the channel, the slight gap between the round cut diamonds and the absence of a gap between the princess cut diamonds.

If you look closely you can also see the sharp square corners at the bottom of the channel in the ring with the princess cut diamonds.

In the pictures on the next page you will see some rings that were NOT as nicely done.

Poor Channel Work:



And the UGLY!

The following ring was incredibly poorly done. This ring ended up being completely remade by a different craftsman. This ring is a perfect example of all the “little” things that can go wrong with a good design. It is important to ask a jeweler about their system of quality control. This ring was actually delivered to a customer. It came from a source indifferent about quality control both from the bench that made it and the jeweler who sold it to the client who brought it in to us for appraisal.



1. Sloppy channels, not straight.
2. Sloppy bottoms of channels, not aligned with one another.
3. Stones not set level, some tilt up, some tilt down. Totally not acceptable, normally your channels are straight like arrows and no waviness at all. Please go "kiss" your setter for me.

Wink

Next is one of the worst rings I have ever seen. We had a bench that wanted to do some work for us, so they sent us this piece. Needless to say, they never did any work for us.

It does not pertain to channel setting, but it is a “Perfect Storm” of monumental screw-ups that are worthy of being seen just for the “knowledge” that this “stuff” is out there.



Just to aid your recognition. The problems of this ring start with the entire shank being wavy and not straight; the bead set diamonds are not set evenly; the center stone is set crookedly from the top and at a tilt from the side; they used a round head for the square stone, letting the head be visible from the top; and it has the ever present porosity and poor finish that is often seen on lower quality rings.

Milgrain

Milgrain should be straight and even, not wavy and uneven. Here is a picture of what it should look like.



Bezels

Bezels are generally pretty easy to judge. They should be smooth and not wavy. They are sometimes hard to photograph well due to the reflections and the way that the light plays over them. What looks like a small burble at 2 o'clock is actually where the reflection of the ceiling light stops



Conclusion

We have looked at many quality issues in this report, how to judge the weight and heft of a ring, the finish, the prongs and their many issues, what makes a quality channel set, bezels and milgrain.

Obviously there is more. It is important to the longterm satisfaction of a piece that you take the time to inspect your purchase and ask questions. Oftentimes jewelry is purchased with a first impression, heart reaction. To enjoy your jewelry for years to come and see it as a treasure for a lifetime, take the time to carefully inspect it prior to purchase with these things in mind. You will be far ahead of the average shopper in determining if the jewelry you are looking at is of high or low quality. If you find problems, give the jeweler or manufacturer the opportunity to make it right. Remember, mistakes do happen, and many can be repaired easily if being done by someone used to dealing in quality. However, a poorly made piece is something no quality bench or reputable jeweler wants to revisit. Be an alert, discriminating shopper.

Enjoy your shopping.

Wink Jones