

RECASTING THE OUTCASTS

Black, brown and grey diamonds once lay on the margins of the jewelry world, but now they're in vogue among consumers and connoisseurs alike. By **Rachael Taylor**

De Grisogono founder Fawaz Gruosi takes credit for rebranding black diamonds from dank hunks of unsellable carbon into the glamorous gemstones we see on red carpets today. Once he breached that barrier by blessing the overlooked carbonados with his favor and influence, grey and brown diamonds soon followed suit in the luxury market, and demand has surged as consumers continue waking up to their lower prices.

While it was once considered disruptive or offbeat to choose these so-called imperfect stones over clear, bright white diamonds, jewelry designer Diane Kordas believes this is softening. "I find that customers with both traditional and non-traditional personal style are now all buying black, brown and grey diamonds," she says. "Fine jewelry has really evolved in terms of design, and it has become more adventurous, making colored diamonds popular in the current market."

The price is right

These stones are also less expensive. A Diane Kordas Heartbeat ear cuff set with black diamonds is more than 25% cheaper than the same design set with white diamonds. This can be a draw for shoppers on a budget, particularly when it comes to big-ticket items like engagement rings.

Rachel Boston, who studied for a diamond grading diploma at the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) in New York, has a bridal offering dominated by grey diamonds. They come in both yellow and white gold settings, in a range of fancy cuts such as kite, shield and hexagon. Also, unusually for heavily included grey diamonds, she has treated some to sharp round, pear or cushion cuts, just as they would be if they were a more traditional choice of stone.

Again, the cost is significantly lower. An 18-karat gold Rachel Boston engagement ring set with a round brilliant, 0.50-carat, white diamond in a hexagonal halo drops by more than 47% in price when the central stone is swapped for a round, grey diamond of the same size.

Rising stars

Still, despite their relative affordability, the rise in these darker colors' popularity has bumped up their prices.

"They are considerably more expensive now than they were five years ago," says designer Alice Cicolini,

whose Indian-inspired collections often favor them over traditional diamonds. "The carat price of polki diamonds has doubled in a year, [and] champagne diamonds [have risen] by over a third."

Cicolini has no fear that this will impact the stones' appeal, as investing in them is more often a style decision than a financial one. Besides, the concept of what is precious is becoming more fluid.

"The jewelry buyer is less willing to be dictated to by a small number of people or companies that have dominated the perceptions of value in the past," she argues. "Value is much more than monetary in the world of jewelry now."

Warm tones

In Paris, Charlotte Dauphin de la Rochefoucauld — whose luxury jewelry brand, Dauphin, has been winning over the fashionable set at Barney's and Dover Street Market — is experimenting with brown diamonds for the first time.

Known for her geometric shapes and blue gold, the designer was looking for a softer approach to diamonds. She found it by combining rose gold and brown diamonds in her new collection, Fluid Captured, with soft triangular meshes of settings that swing freely from open-ended rings. "I wanted to create warmth," she says.

Whether it's the warmth of brown, the edginess of black or the quirky inclusions of grey, these unorthodox diamonds are finding a new place in the industry — one in which they are the stars, not just the alternative. ■



Rachel Boston
Grey hexagon diamond engraved wedding band.
rachelboston.co.uk

Dauphin
Ring with brown diamonds.
maisondauphin.com



Djula
Hypnotic earrings with black diamonds.
djula.fr



Diane Kordas
Heartbeat ear cuff with black diamonds.
dianekordasjewellery.com



Gilan
Cuff with black and white diamonds and a 3.01-carat ruby.
gilan.com

'A MAGICAL STORY TO TELL'

Chupi Sweetman, a former Topshop designer-turned-jeweler, has a motto when it comes to black and grey diamonds: "Magic, not money." Though the lower prices are a sweetener for fans of her brand, Chupi, she says it is by no means the main reason her clients choose them.

"They have a magical story to tell that you don't always get from a white diamond," says Sweetman, who uses the stones throughout her collections, particularly salt-and-pepper grey diamonds. "Their inclusions simply add to their beauty; that's why I fell in love with them many moons ago."

She sets these once-unloved diamonds in simple four-claw designs that could be worn as engagement rings, as well as in eternity bands, solitaire pendants, studs and dress rings. She casts the jewelry in solid 14-karat white, yellow or rose gold, using a mold she makes from Hawthorn tree twigs — an ancient Egyptian technique that gives them a rough, organic finish. The work is all done by hand in Chupi's Dublin studio before the finished pieces head to the historic Dublin Castle nearby for hallmarking.

"I think everyone is looking for something that is a little bit different these days," says Sweetman, who has retailers in New York and Florida stocking her jewelry. "They want to know they have something truly unique and special that no one else has."
chupi.com

Chupi
Solid gold grey-diamond collection.

