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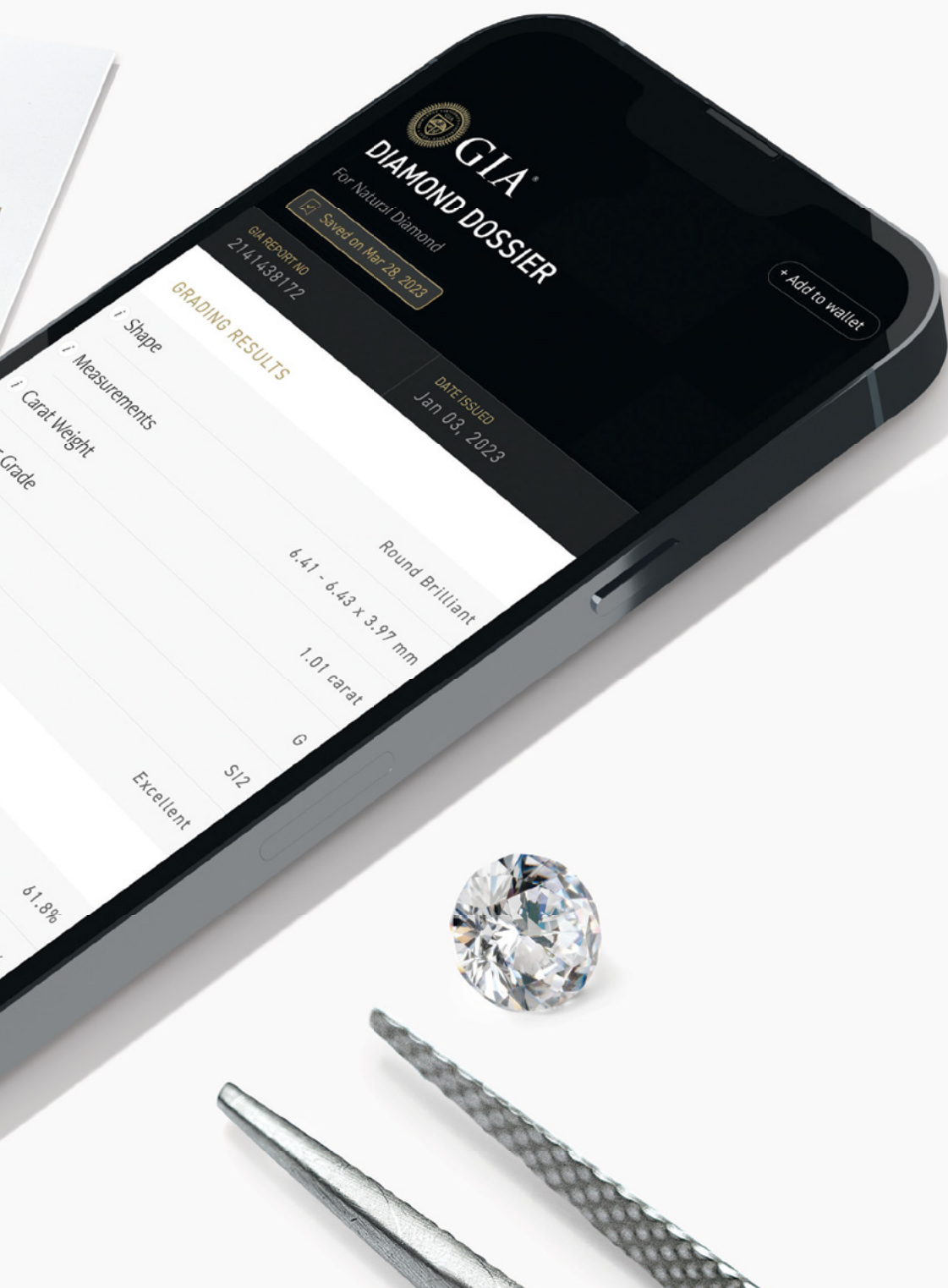
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CONTENTS

4 | What does sustainability mean to you?

Ten industry experts share their thoughts and the steps they're taking to build a better future.

8 | The diamond standard

Should lab-grown and natural stones meet the same ethical guidelines?

10 | Terms of transparency

Governments and groups are working to nail down definitions for green buzzwords and keep the jewelry trade accountable.

14 | Preaching what you practice

How retailers can get their sustainable message across to customers.

16 | Climate of innovation

A look at some of the creative ways companies are helping protect the environment.

18 | Recycle or reform?

Jewelers are reusing and reinventing pre-owned goods and waste products — but it may not be enough.

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WELCOME



Susan Jacques, CEO AND PRESIDENT, GEMOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA (GIA)


One of the most important contributions GIA has made to our industry and to gem and jewelry consumers is the creation of recognized standards and a common vocabulary for evaluating and communicating the quality of diamonds. The undefined terms used before the 4Cs and the defined color and clarity scales — remember “top Wesselton, River, Cape”? — caused confusion and doubt in the trade and among consumers. Now the 4Cs are the global language of diamonds, making transactions easier and giving consumers greater confidence in their diamond purchases.

There is similar confusion today around another important term: sustainability. For some, “sustainability” means protecting the environment while responsibly sourcing materials. For others, it means ensuring that a business can survive into the future. In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In 2015, the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 sustainable development goals organized around five pillars: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. Taking these together for our industry, we can define “sustainability” as providing benefits to the people, communities and countries that produce gems and jewelry, while also protecting the environment and respecting the needs of future generations.

Our hope is that an industry-wide conversation about sustainability and what it means to the producing communities and countries, to the supply chain from mine to retail, and — so importantly — to consumers will yield a similarly beneficial result.

Embracing sustainability is imperative for luxury businesses. As an industry, we must be open to adapting to consumers’ focus on greater transparency, establishing sustainability practices, embracing responsible sourcing and traceability, and limiting our environmental impact. Consumers want this from us, and they will reward companies and brands that strive to meet their evolving demands.

At GIA, we are developing a robust environmental, social and governance (ESG) program to integrate sustainability policy and practices into our core business strategy, linked to our consumer protection mission.

We hope to contribute to a common understanding of “sustainability.” As with so many terms, a shared definition can reduce confusion and doubt, building stakeholder confidence and helping our industry move forward to a bright, prosperous and sustainable future. 

WHAT DOES SUSTAINABILITY MEAN TO YOU?

Industry leaders share the steps that they and their companies are taking to create a better future.

By Rachael Taylor



We recognize that you can't recover nature's treasures without treasuring nature. This is why we are doing everything we can for a better, more sustainable future. Our sustainability framework, Building Forever, sits at the heart of everything we do, from our diamond recovery operations in Botswana, Canada, Namibia and South Africa, through to the stores where we sell our diamond jewelry. It guides our work, our decisions and our behaviors. Three years ago, we set out 12 goals that we are determined to achieve by 2030. These goals include being carbon-neutral across our operations, providing the origin and impact of every diamond we discover and sell, and supporting 10,000 women entrepreneurs and 10,000 women and girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Our commitment means that every one of our diamonds can be worn with pride."

CÉLINE ASSIMON
CEO, DE BEERS JEWELLERS AND
DE BEERS FOREVERMARK



“Sustainability is crucial for our world’s future. At Sarine, as technologists and scientists, we play a vital role in enabling and driving sustainable practices through technology. Reliable, data-based traceability, from raw material to final product and onward in the secondary market, is a core enabler for sustainability. Our expertise in technology and data analytics delivers verifiable and dependable tracking solutions for the entire life cycle of diamond jewelry. We empower stakeholders to make informed decisions, thereby ensuring responsible practices throughout the supply chain. With a passionate belief in a sustainable future and the transformative power of data-driven traceability, we strive to enable ethical sourcing and environmental impact reduction, all in alignment with our commitment to a sustainable world.”

DAVID BLOCK, CEO, SARINE TECHNOLOGIES



“Sustainability encompasses a long-term perspective that considers the well-being of future generations and the responsibility we hold now in protecting our people and planet transparently. At Dimexon, it means building trust and confidence through responsible business practices and concrete actions that prioritize social and environmental stewardship. For decades, sustainability has been at the heart of Dimexon’s operations, and today it is fully integrated into our business strategy and communication. We believe transparency is key — in our supply chain, but also promoting open communication and accountability in decision-making processes. We strive to create a world where progress is not achieved at the expense of our planet, resources and human beings. It also involves nurturing a harmonious relationship with our ecosystems, and in this field, partnerships are instrumental.”

MORGANE WINTERHOLER, GENERAL MANAGER OF STRATEGIC BRANDS AND SUSTAINABILITY, DIMEXON



“As the leading trade association in the US, Jewelers of America’s mission is to improve consumer confidence in fine jewelry and watches. All of Jewelers of America’s members must commit annually to our Code of Professional Practices, and many aspects of the code relate to sustainability. Additionally, we provide guidance on the most important issues jewelers face. That guidance has a direct impact on the sustainability of jewelers’ commercial business. Examples of guidance and best practices include responsible sourcing of diamonds, gemstones, gold and other precious metals, as well as in-depth business guidance. Jewelers of America is a valuable resource to help insure jewelers’ long-term sustainability.”

DAVID BONAPARTE, PRESIDENT AND CEO, JEWELERS OF AMERICA





“Even [when I was] growing up as a boy, we were always aware of consumption and respect for the planet. When I fell in love with diamonds, I wanted to find ways to embed that philosophy into the business, using a combination of innovation, technology and disclosure to my customers. As a certified member of the Responsible Jewellery Council, and Cartier and Kering’s Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030, we at Andre Messika Diamonds have intensified our commitment to recognized sustainability-focused frameworks and our priorities include ethical sourcing and accurate traceability, in addition to decarbonizing operations, such as our Namibian cutting factory. Needless to say, the social aspect is key, and our disabled and hard-of-hearing workforce in Namibia clearly demonstrates our commitment to society.”

**ANDRE MESSIKA, FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN,
ANDRE MESSIKA DIAMONDS**

“As a leader in the gem and jewelry industry, GIA upholds the highest standards of integrity, academics and science in everything we do, including sustainability. Our sustainability initiatives strive to build an inclusive and resilient future for people and the planet through social inclusion, environmental protection and economic growth. GIA’s first environmental, social and governance (ESG) report is now available and we will share yearly updates. Other recent initiatives include GIA’s participation in Tracr, which provides GIA grading reports with information about the diamond’s origin, allowing full transparency on the diamond journey to the consumer. By working together as an industry to champion transparency and traceability and build trust, we will spark real, sector-wide sustainable change.”

**JOHANNA LEVY, VICE PRESIDENT OF
ESG PROGRAMS, GIA**



“As today’s consumer seeks sustainability in every aspect of their lives, we have developed a program at CD Peacock to reduce the industry’s environmental impact by elevating the traditional estate-sale model, which has always been a means to recycle jewelry. By retooling our jewelry repair centers into jewelry workshops, we not only repair jewelry as a service to our clients, but have developed a creative space for bench jewelers and jewelry designers to reimagine vintage jewelry acquired throughout the year. During CD Peacock’s biannual estate sales, clients find not only pre-owned jewelry refurbished to perfection, but unique pieces with modern appeal created by our in-house artisans from vintage parts.”

**STEVEN HOLTZMAN, VICE CHAIRMAN,
CD PEACOCK**

“ At Kering, we are very ambitious when it comes to sustainability, and we set the framework for our houses, including our jewelry houses. This includes our Kering Standards, which act as a guide for best practices across raw materials — including diamonds — and manufacturing. We have also committed to a series of targets. As an example, our target to reduce 40% of the group’s absolute emissions across scopes 1, 2 and 3 by 2035 is driving our houses forward. For jewelry, this means sustainable sourcing for diamonds and precious stones, recycled and ethical precious metals, and innovative design combined with cutting-edge technologies. Collaboration is also key, which is why Kering established the Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030 with Cartier to bring together the sector for collective action.”

MARIE-CLAIRE DAVEU, CHIEF SUSTAINABILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS OFFICER, KERING

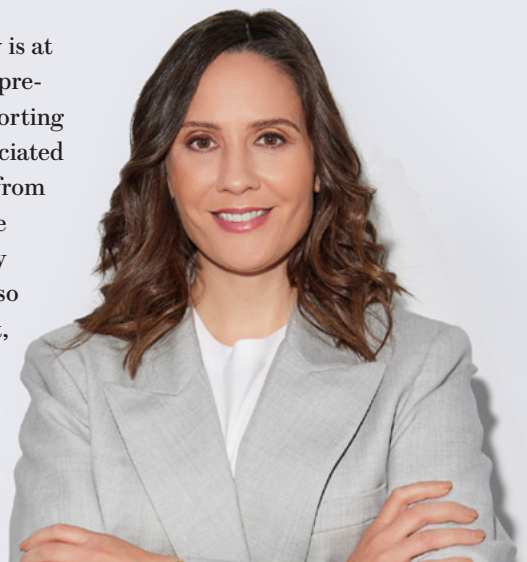


“ Sustainability for us is connected to both the environmental and human impacts within our supply chain, and is a goal that we are striving toward with our diamond- and sapphire-sourcing practices. It is also a term that we do not use lightly. Both industries have much work to do before the words ‘ethical’ and ‘sustainable’ can be used, and our mindfulness regarding the use of those terms is because we believe that while progress has been made in our sourcing channels and within our industry, it does not serve us, our clients or the cause to greenwash the supply chain with rosy terms for marketing purposes.”

ASHKAN ASGARI, FOUNDER AND CEO, MISFIT DIAMONDS

“ As a business that specializes in pre-loved luxury items, sustainability is at the heart of what we do. Our company slogan is, in fact, ‘Proud to be pre-loved.’ By focusing on pre-owned jewelry, we’re actively promoting and supporting the circular economy, which drives down all the environmental impacts associated with processing new fine jewelry. I’m also actively looking to source jewelry from wholesalers who use recycled gold or repurposed gemstones. I wish this were more commonplace in the supply chain, but I feel we are getting closer every month. I would actually love to see a hallmark specifically for recycled gold so that retailers of secondhand pieces could continue to promote that highlight, which final end-users are seeing more and more as an asset to their jewelry.”

SARAH DUNCAN, HEAD OF FINE JEWELRY, LUXURY PROMISE



THE DIAMOND STANDARD

Setting green guidelines that cover both mined and lab-grown stones is no simple matter, but government and trade bodies are working to do just that.

By Rachael Taylor



Sustainability is a major bone of contention in the ongoing battle between mining companies and synthetic-diamond producers. The latter have generally pitched their product as a greener alternative to natural diamonds, while the former contend that these claims are exaggerated or even false. Not all man-made stones have the same carbon footprint, miners argue, adding that

descriptions of lab-grown as “mining-free” are untrue, since elements of the creation process — such as the reactor — rely on mined materials.

“It is also not possible to make a simplistic general comparison between natural diamonds and laboratory-grown diamonds,” states the recent Diamond Facts report from the Natural Diamond Council (NDC). “Each category has a range of production processes, geographical locations, power sources, productivity capabilities, and sustainability practices.”

Even the carbon footprint of a given lab-grown diamond can vary wildly, according to environmental, social and governance (ESG) consultancy Sphera. If the producer uses renewable energy, a chemical vapor deposition (CVD) stone can generate as little as 17 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂eq) per polished carat, whereas one from a non-carbon-neutral facility in India — where the electric grid is heavily dependent on coal — can yield 260 kilograms per carat.

Nor are all mining companies decarbonizing at the same rate. While De Beers aims to be carbon-neutral by 2030, Rio Tinto is aiming for 2050.

In short, diamond sustainability credentials are a complicated business, and there is growing concern about how to give consumers clarity on the subject.

GROUP EFFORTS

The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is currently revising its *Green Guides* for marketing sustainable goods, and this will likely have an impact on how lab-grown and natural diamond producers present their products.

Several industry groups have answered the FTC's call for feedback on the guides, including the Jewelers Vigilance Committee (JVC) and the American Gem Trade Association (AGTA). Among other things, they've asked the commission to clamp down on jewelers' greenwashing claims and lay out solid definitions for phrases like "sustainable," "carbon-neutral" and "mining-free."

As for how to substantiate claims about natural and lab-grown diamonds, AGTA recommends carrying out "an academically rigorous comparative environmental and social life cycle assessment (LCA)," which would analyze the data from the full production process, says Jenna White of the trade body's Industry Terms Committee. "[AGTA] members should only make claims if a rigorous independent LCA has been conducted."

The Gemological Institute of America (GIA), meanwhile, plans to continue releasing research on the topic to help businesses make decisions.

"GIA is committed to providing comprehensive laboratory services that are backed by our decades of gemological research, including laboratory-grown diamonds," says Richard Pesqueira, its vice president of business development for North America. "It is important for individuals interested in claims of sustainability to make informed decisions based on research and understanding of exactly what is meant when a person or organization uses [the term]."

The Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC) is also diverting resources to this issue: It plans to launch a set of standards specifically for lab-created diamonds in mid-2024. "We want to be sure there is clarity for our members, and especially consumers, so they can be confident in exactly what they are buying," says executive director Melanie Grant. "We believe that consumers should fully understand the source behind both — whether that is mined from the earth for natural diamonds, or manufactured in a factory for laboratory-grown diamonds."


Notably, the RJC's lab-grown standards will be separate from its existing guidelines for natural diamonds — a stance that differs from most groups' models. In a previous 2018 ruling, the FTC declared both natural and lab-grown specimens to be diamonds, and standards-development body SCS says assessments of the two sectors' sustainability credentials should use the same markers.

ROCK-SOLID FOUNDATIONS

SCS is one of the few bodies offering a sustainability certification for diamonds: the SCS-007 Jewelry Sustainability Standard, which came out in 2021. It evaluates diamond companies based on five key pillars, which are the same for natural and synthetic stones, says SCS executive vice president Stanley Mathuram: origin traceability, ethical stewardship, climate neutrality, sustainable production practices, and sustainability investments.

In other words, both types of diamond producers must be able to track their stones to the source; show that every business in their supply chain has strong ESG credentials; offset their entire climate footprint within a set time frame, including greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants; achieve net-zero

environmental and human-health impacts in all areas of production within a given period; and invest in supporting vulnerable communities and other causes that contribute to a safer world.

"A diamond is a diamond regardless of whether it is mined or grown in a laboratory," states Mathuram. "The [SCS-007] standard also accounts for the entire chain of custody, establishing unprecedented benchmarks of performance and transparency. [This results] in the highest level of assurance for jewelry manufacturers, retailers and customers." 

Below: Platinum and diamond earrings by Ondyn. Opposite: Rings featuring lab-grown diamonds from Diamond Foundry.



TERMS OF TRANSPARENCY

Labels like ‘sustainable’ and ‘recycled’ have become common in the jewelry industry, but they don’t always reflect reality. What can the trade do to combat misleading claims?

By Jennifer Heebner

A portrait of Iris Van der Veken, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a light blue blouse and a dark belt. She is smiling and looking towards the camera.

Iris Van
der Veken.

Stomping out unfounded claims and misused terms is a monumental task when it comes to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the jewelry world, but it’s an important one. Leaving it undone can mislead consumers and prompt purchases of misrepresented products.

The seriousness of the issue comes through in research from the European Commission, which found in 2020 that 53% of green claims gave vague, misleading or unfounded information, 40% of claims had no supporting evidence, and half of all green labels offered weak or nonexistent verification. In addition, the trade body reported, the European Union is home to 230 sustainability labels and 100 green energy labels, all with vastly different levels of transparency.

“Consumers today are looking for purpose and are particularly concerned with the social and environmental impact of their purchases,” says Iris Van der Veken, executive director of the Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030 (WJI 2030), which formed in spring 2022. “It is key when claims are made that they are reliable, and that requires more than ever a strong collaboration across the value chain.”

LANGUAGE MATTERS

To combat these problems, governmental and jewelry trade groups in the US and Europe are attempting to standardize some definitions and strengthen their guidelines.

For starters, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) encouraged industries late last year to offer edits to its *Green Guides*, which aim to help marketers — in the jewelry sector and elsewhere — avoid making misleading environmental claims. This past March, the European Commission proposed criteria for proving the claims that companies make — including having an accredited verifier check them — and “new rules on governance of environmental labeling schemes to ensure they are solid, transparent and reliable,” according to Van der Veken.

The Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC) is also making efforts to create supply-chain standards that will build trust, while the WJI 2030 is focusing on climate resilience, preserving resources and fostering inclusiveness.

On the language front, the *Green Guides* feedback included a request from the American Gem Trade Association (AGTA) to ban use of the term “recycling” when referring to repurposed diamonds, gemstones and precious metals, and to prohibit phrases such as “never mined” or “mining-free” in relation to such materials. Both AGTA and the Cultured Pearl Association of America (CPAA) asked the FTC to define “sustainability” — a previously undefined term — as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” per the 1987 UN Brundtland Commission on sustainable development. The CPAA also asked that the definition include the “three pillars” from the Brundtland report — economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity.

LAYING DOWN THE LAW

Of course, big changes can be slow to implement, but not doing so could lead to legal action.

“The FTC could sue a business for failing to comply with the standards for advertising outlined in the FTC Act [that gave the body its mandate],” says Sara Yood, deputy general counsel for the Jewelers Vigilance Committee (JVC). “The National Advertising Division of the Better Business Bureau also evaluates advertising claims and issues enforcement recommendations in a self-regulation process.”

For that reason and others, having standardized language and rules — and adhering to them — is in all businesses’ best interests. 🌱

WORD FOR WORD

There may not be uniform definitions for a lot of green terms in jewelry, but the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) has its own interpretations of select words and phrases. Johanna Levy, its vice president of environmental, social and governance (ESG) programs, shares some of them here.

SUSTAINABILITY: The practice of conducting business in a way that meets the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This follows the UN’s 1987 definition of “sustainability.”

ETHICAL (ETHICALLY-SOURCED): Ethical sourcing focuses on promoting transparency, fair wages and safe working conditions in a way that aligns with local and international regulations and recommendations and shows respect for local communities.

RECYCLED: Operating in a circular way in which materials are reused or repurposed, such as when GIA experts verify jewelry items that are up for resale on eBay.

RESPONSIBLE: Conducting business operations in an accountable and ethical manner.

CONFLICT-FREE: Ensuring that clear internal practices are in place so the gems GIA encounters comply with applicable laws, regulations and industry protocols, and for diamonds, the Kimberley Process.

CARBON-NEUTRAL: Achieving a net-zero carbon footprint by balancing the amount of carbon emissions released against an equivalent amount of carbon removal. At GIA, we explore projects that use automation to reduce our global footprint, and have set climate targets aligned with the Paris Climate Agreement.

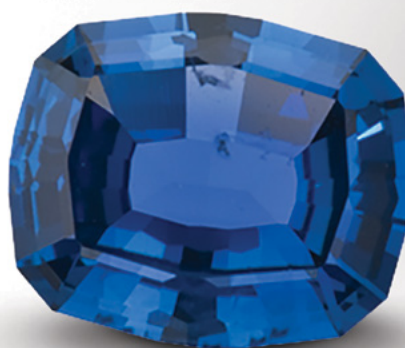


Johanna Levy.

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PREACHING WHAT YOU PRACTICE

Today's clients will enter your store with fresh ideas about how their luxury purchases should fit into the social and environmental landscape — which means engaging in some potentially tough conversations.

By Jennifer Heebner

When Bob Goodman walks the aisles of certain trade shows, he's troubled by what he perceives as some less-than-truthful proclamations. "I see the word 'sustainable' everywhere, but when I ask the vendor what's sustainable about their product, I realize that most of the claims are greenwashing," says the co-owner of Robert Goodman Jewelers in Zionsville, Indiana.

Many next-generation clients seek out his store because of his devotion to stocking jewelry from designers that share their values; his website has a "Sustainable Jewelers" section that lists makers like Fana and Karin Jacobson Design. Other shoppers are drawn to his personal views: Signage online reveals his store to be a gun-free space that supports Black Lives Matter, the LGBTQ community, and various local causes. For Goodman, all of these elements are part of the "human model" that he and his wife Rose Marie baked into the business at its inception in 2000.

"We've decided to occupy a space of transparency, traceability and ethics, which

all fall under social justice," he says. "For the client who doesn't care, we'll just talk about the designs. We create benefit no matter what."

THE VALUE OF RIGOR

The transparency angle is an important one for jewelers to take. Store owners must be willing to talk about tough topics like the exact makeup and origins of recycled metals, the sources of the gemstones they use, and what they're doing to get accurate information from suppliers.

The experts' advice? Don't just use the trendy terms to make a sale; do your due diligence and be prepared to walk away from vendors who can't provide a paper trail. Don't apply a term to a product if you don't know the exact composition. And if a product is only partially sustainable, make sure to qualify any responsible-sourcing claims you make about it.

"If a jeweler stated that they were using 'recycled' gold, but it only accounted for 10% of the gold they used, that claim could be deceptive to a consumer without identifying the percentage," explains Sara Yood, deputy general counsel of the Jewelers Vigilance Committee

(JVC), which provides legal guidance to the jewelry industry.

Goodman investigates every claim and sometimes has to admit to clients that he only knows what he's been told. His honesty has earned him praise from customers, he confesses.

One useful tactic is to show sustainable jewelry lines and use that to start a conversation on the subject. "This is a way to walk the talk without interfering with sales," says Susan Wheeler, founder of Susan Wheeler Design and the Chicago Responsible Jewelry Conference.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Simply pointing to cases of recycled gold and conflict-free gems, however, is not enough.

"The knowledge that retailers need to have ready is not just the marketing that we receive from mining companies," Wheeler says; to give real answers, store owners need to be aware of "the problems that we create in our supply chain."

Consultant Christina Miller of the eponymous firm agrees. "Telling someone, 'This is Fairmined gold,' and not following up about why that matters is a missed opportunity to tell customers that their choices can have an impact," she says.

It's also important to be crystal-clear with language. Terms like "sustainability" can have an environmental meaning to some, but you can offer a more comprehensive view "by highlighting the economic and cultural sustainability impacts of jewelry materials as well," Miller points out. "When it comes to social or human-rights issues, most consumers continue to be concerned with 'blood diamonds' but don't yet have awareness that other jewelry materials — gold especially — are fueling issues just as grievous."

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

Explaining your goals and the actions your store is taking to combat negative effects can go a long way, says Andrew Cooper of Andrew Cooper Consulting, who recommends using layman's terms to do so.

"Transparency about progress, even if goals are not fully achieved yet, builds trust," he elaborates. A retailer's toolbox could include a sustainability section online, a policy on responsible business practices, and an annual sustainability report that customers can read.

"Be prepared to share detailed information about how you substantiate claims," he adds.

And if you don't have an answer, just say so. It's okay to admit that you're working toward a better jewelry industry. Most customers just want assurance that their purchases are not harming others or the environment.

"Each person has their own balance of values," says Wheeler. "The truth will always be appreciated." ❧

Earrings by Karin Jacobson in Fairmined 18-karat gold with post-consumer recycled diamonds from Hoover and Strong, and Montana agate and Brazilian citrine from Columbia Gem House.



“Telling someone, ‘This is Fairmined gold,’ and not following up about why that matters is a missed opportunity”

CLIMATE OF INNOVATION

Miners, manufacturers and jewelry brands are taking creative steps to help save the planet.

By Kate Matthams



At the recent State of the Art Jewelry Summit, climate change emerged as the biggest issue facing jewelry companies today. The industry can and should act now, said Melanie Grant, executive director of the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC), which cohosted the event at Harvard University along with the Gemological Institute of America (GIA).

But while plenty of companies are talking the talk, consumers often need to cut through greenwashing to find ones that walk the walk as well. Fortunately, a number of companies are finding innovative ways to make their businesses eco-friendly and ethical, whether in the mining phase, further down the supply chain, or via the materials themselves.

GROUNDBREAKING IDEAS

Mining companies are becoming more mindful of their impact, looking to offset their carbon footprint and give back to local communities. In July, De Beers reached a new deal with the Botswana government on their joint mining venture, Debswana, to channel more diamond wealth back into the country. It included a 10-year sales agreement and a 25-year extension to Debswana mining licenses.

Meanwhile, Fuli Gemstones intends to make its peridot mine near the Changbai Mountains in China the first zero-waste,

zero-carbon facility of its kind, breaking new ground in by-product reuse.

“We believe in natural innovation combined with positive change,” says Fuli chief marketing officer Pia Tonna. “Our target is to aim for zero waste, utilizing the industrial-grade olivine and volcanic basalt which will be removed during the peridot mining process. While mineral-rich basalt has many uses in farming, industry and construction — and will be incorporated into our mine buildings — we’re particularly excited about olivine, which can absorb its own mass of carbon dioxide when crushed and distributed, as it reacts with CO₂ to form carbonate minerals. The potential applications to counter climate change through carbon sequestration are thrilling and set Fuli on the right path for net zero.”

CARBON TRAIL

Technology has a vital role to play in climate compliance. Diamond-equipment manufacturer Sarine Technologies has developed CarbonVERO, a system that records the energy consumption and carbon footprint of individual diamonds. A collaborative effort with diamond supplier Andre Messika and climate consultancies, CarbonVERO gathers raw data from mining companies and other third parties in the diamond pipeline. Since it’s integrated into Sarine’s Diamond Journey traceability program, the data can then become part of an accurate and comprehensive report tracking the stone from the mine through manufacturing.

“By leveraging our involvement in the planning and manufacturing of over 100 million diamonds annually, we possess the unique capability to track diamonds across their entire life cycle,” says Tzafrir Engelhard, Sarine’s vice president of business development. “We believe that our solution will not only provide valuable insights into the environmental impact of diamond production, but also empower the diamond jewelry market to make informed decisions and implement sustainable practices within our industry.”

THE RIGHT MATERIALS

While many companies claim to use recycled gold — not an innovation per se, as jewelers have always reused precious metals — British brand Lylie is taking it a step further. Lylie is the only jewelry company in the UK to work exclusively with urban-mined metals, including e-waste, dental waste and medical X-rays. Meanwhile, in Paris, Boucheron’s

latest high-jewelry collection has received rave reviews for its uplifting aesthetic and innovative materials. One notable example is its Tie the Knot hair adornment.

“Besides creative director Claire Choisne’s ambition to get an ultra-light effect for the Tie the Knot hair jewel — [which we did by] using magnesium, a first in high jewelry — she also wanted a bold and vibrant red,” says Boucheron CEO Hélène Poulit-Duquesne. To achieve that hue, “we used bio-acetate made from wood paste and cotton fibers.”

‘A CLEAR STRATEGY’

The growing concern about the jewelry industry’s environmental and social impact — along with the new generation of responsible consumers — has made sustainability more of a priority than ever. To that end, GIA has been joining forces with other groups to boost environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices in the jewelry world. Besides its role in the State of the Art Jewelry Summit, it has collaborated on climate education with Axa Climate School, partnered with eBay to advance the circular economy, and helped empower mining communities through PACT, Mercury Free Mining, and Diamonds Do Good. It is also a member of the Watch and Jewelry Initiative 2030, which is working to make the industry as a whole more sustainable.

“We’re particularly excited about olivine, which can absorb its own mass of carbon dioxide when crushed and distributed”

In June, the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) issued a set of voluntary disclosure guidelines to help hold companies accountable. Since these standards set the stage for potential legislation in countries around the world, now is the time for jewelers to prepare.

“Having a clear sustainability strategy is a must for any business,” says Pritesh Patel, senior vice president and chief operations officer at GIA. “As an industry, we must collectively change our mind-set, taking into account the impact of everything we do and working to reduce those impacts on the environment and society.”

The Tie the Knot
hair jewel from
Boucheron’s
More Is More
collection.

RECYCLE OR REFORM?

Reusing old materials is increasingly popular in jewelry, but some critics say efforts should concentrate on improving mining operations and traceability first.

By Milena Lazazzera

With sustainability rapidly becoming a top factor in people's buying choices — McKinsey & Company predicts it will influence 20% to 30% of jewelry purchases by 2025 — both heritage brands and new companies are adopting more environmentally friendly practices and looking to minimize their impact on the planet.

Online vintage-jewelry platforms such as 58 Facettes and Castafiore have mushroomed in the last five years, and trade fairs that feature estate pieces have multiplied. GemGenève has begun holding two shows a year to coincide with the most prominent auction sales in May and November, while the Lapada antique fair is returning to London in September after closing during the pandemic. These ventures cater to buyers young and old who consider pre-owned goods a more responsible choice.

The number of such buyers is growing. The vintage luxury goods market was worth €43 billion in 2022, twice as much as in 2017, according to a Bain & Company study.

"Buying new is not cool anymore," said Fabienne Lupo, founder of the vintage-focused



ReLuxury show, at the event's inaugural edition in Geneva last year.

CIRCULAR REASONING

As for brands, Chopard has led the way in responsibly sourced gold, and at the Watches & Wonders show last spring, it unveiled a new proprietary alloy it will be using in its timepieces: Lucent Steel, which consists of up to 80% recycled material. Meanwhile, a new cohort of businesses has made sustainability a founding principle. Denmark-based Kinraden uses only recycled gold and repurposes Mpingo blackwood as an alternative to diamonds, recovering the dense African wood from musical instruments and cutting it like gemstones. London-based jeweler Oushaba creates opulent designs out of electronic waste such as mobile phone circuits and charging cables.

One jewelry venture that employs exclusively recycled materials is Rouvenat, a brand originally founded in the early 19th century. CEO Marie Berthelon Gaviard revived the maison last year in cooperation with LuxImpact, a group that relaunches historical French jewelry houses. Rouvenat's entire business model is circular; it buys "diamonds

and gemstones from the safes around the world and [invites] clients to bring their stones," explains Berthelon Gaviard. The brand designs its rings from the start with a gap where the center stone would be, ready to accommodate any pre-owned gems that come

Ascent necklace from the Connection Salvaged collection by Oushaba. Below: ReLuxury founder Fabienne Lupo. Opposite: Voyage necklace and Digital Odyssey earrings by Oushaba.



IMAGES: OUSHABA; FABIENNE LUPO

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in. For its packaging, it recycles boxes from other jewelers, dressing them up in a branded graffiti-style cover. Even the furniture in the Rouvenat boutique is recycled.

QUESTIONABLE BENEFITS

Using recycled resources takes pressure off the environment, since extracting metals and gems is the main way the jewelry industry impacts the planet. Some 95% of the trade's carbon dioxide emissions come from the production of metals, according to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) engineering professor Yang Shao-Horn. Speaking at the recent State of the Art Jewelry Summit at Harvard, she added that gold, silver and platinum accounted for a ►

much higher carbon footprint than iron ore or aluminum.

Recycling gold is also more efficient than mining it, says Eliza Walter, founder of jewelry brand Lylie, which manufactures its jewelry out of e-waste. “One tonne of the earth’s core yields fewer than 30 grams of gold, while one tonne of electronic waste can get 300 grams,” she says.

Still, that model comes with challenges. Kinraden struggled for years to scale its business before finding a reliable source of recycled gold. And Charlie Betts, whose family has been supplying gold since the 18th century, advocates taking a critical approach to recycled metals. If one doesn’t know the metal’s origins, there’s a chance it could be tainted with environmental or human-rights violations. Instead, Betts stresses the need to improve mining operations and traceability.

Tiffany Stevens shares that view. The CEO and general counsel of the Jewelers Vigilance Committee (JVC) points to illegal gold-mining operations in South America with links to drug trafficking. The products of these ventures often end up bearing “recycled” labels, she says, with both sellers and buyers none the wiser.

PROVING THEIR METAL

To combat this problem, Betts’s company launched the Single Mine Origin (SMO) kitemark — which certifies that the metal was responsibly extracted from a single mine — and the new AgAIN program for silver, which the company retrieves from X-ray films. Designers such as London-based Emefa Cole opt for Betts’s products as more responsible and traceable choices.

Thinking of the long-term implications is also important, according to Federica Levato and Matteo Capellini, respectively senior partner and expert associate partner at Bain & Company.

“One of the main goals of any industry to reduce its impact is to decouple the use of resources from growth,” they tell Rapaport in a joint message. “In this sense, using waste as a feedstock to new, valuable products is a laudable initiative. However, we should also look at the end of life of the products manufactured with those resources to be sure that they can be recycled as well.”

RETHINKING PRECIOUS: BOUCHERON AND COFALIT

One of the most thought-provoking uses of waste in jewelry is the Jack de Boucheron Ultime capsule collection that Boucheron released last year. The three-piece line features Cofalit, a material made from vitrified asbestos — the cancer-causing substance that was once common in the building industry and is now banned. While that may sound alarming, Cofalit is safe; the material undergoes processing to render it harmless before it goes into jewelry.

Boucheron’s aim with the collection was to redefine notions of preciousness by transforming a material that had no use into something that had value. “Cofalit is the complete opposite of what is considered precious in the collective imagination,” says creative director Claire Choisne. “I appreciate the radicality and aesthetic appearance of this recycled industrial byproduct, which has reached the end of its life cycle. I took inspiration from the fact that this material is deemed to have no further utility. I wanted to restore its value in a lasting way through this capsule collection.”

This is not the first time Boucheron has employed unusual materials in its jewelry. A few years ago, it encased aerogel in rock crystal and made it the center stone of a high-jewelry necklace. In its newest collection, More Is More, the search for a material lighter than gold and titanium led Boucheron’s artisans to set diamonds in magnesium. Another recent initiative is the new packaging for the house’s iconic Quatre design. Consisting of just two materials — aluminum and wood — these boxes are four times lighter than its classic ones.

“Turning waste into a luxury product is risky, but also avant-garde,” comments jewelry brand consultant Valery Demure. “Aren’t diamonds simply carbon atoms, after all?”

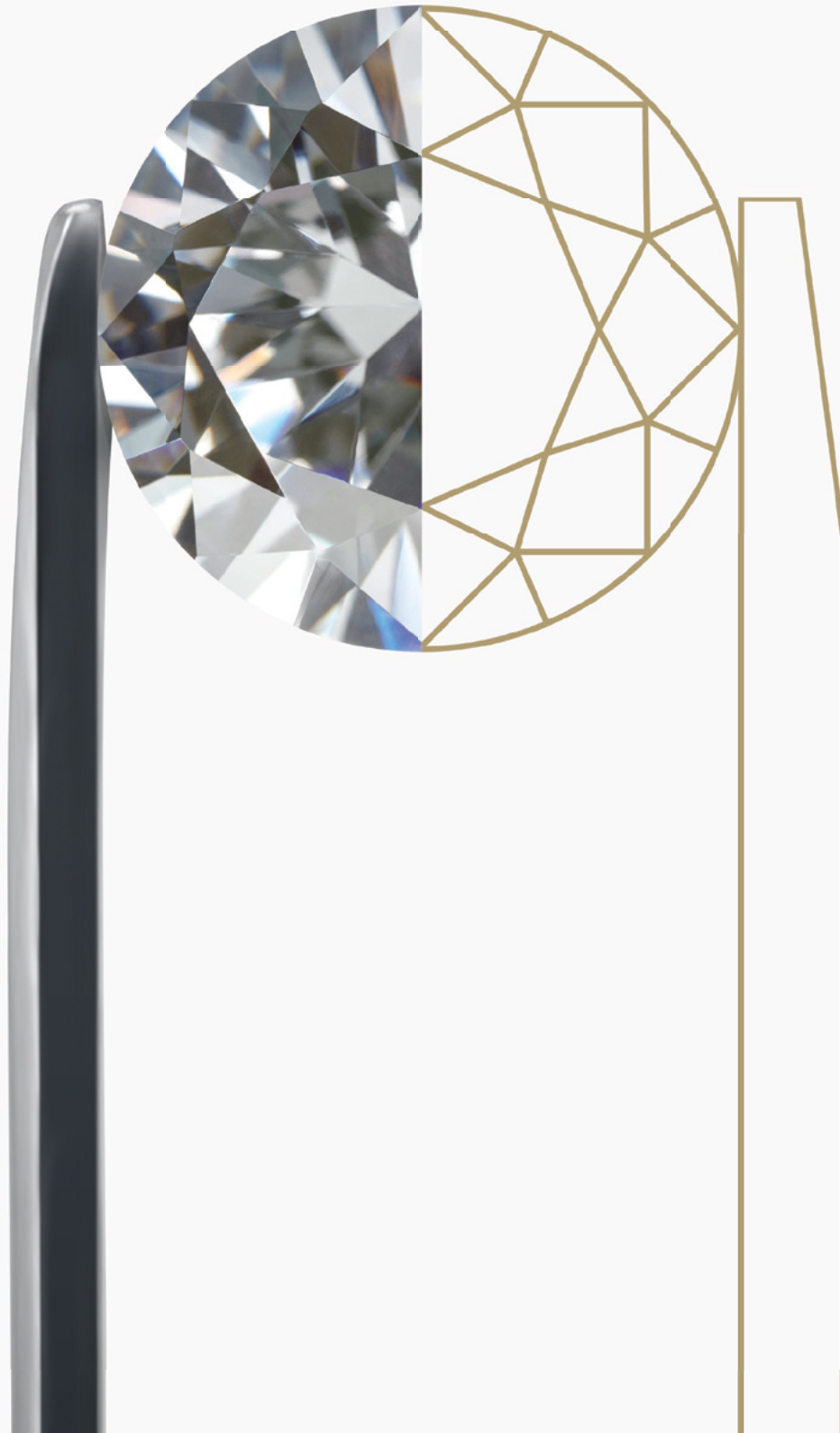
Some industry insiders have questioned the wisdom of spotlighting a substance like asbestos, which has so many negative associations — especially in a product like jewelry, for which the emotional component is a key driver of purchases. Nevertheless, the Cofalit experiment is a testament to Boucheron’s environmental commitment.



Cofalit brooch from the Jack de Boucheron Ultime collection.

IMAGE: BOUCHERON

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