

## She's a Ring Concierge. We Asked Her Questions.



Emily Berl for The New York Times

By **Alix Strauss**

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Michelle Demaree is a little like a global adventurer when it comes to engagement rings.

Four years ago, she founded [Miss Diamond Ring](#), a boutique concierge service in Beverly Hills, Calif., that sources diamonds and gemstones and creates custom settings for clients whose budgets typically average between \$35,000 and \$60,000. (Her most expensive purchase to date was \$450,000.)

Stints at luxury jewelers like Harry Winston, Tiffany & Company and Van Cleef & Arpels have trained her eye, she says, and also connected her to numerous diamond specialists and wholesalers, from whom she buys at a discount.

“When you go to a store, you’re buying what inventory they have on hand, which can be limited, and it may not be the best option for your budget,” said Ms. Demaree, 38, who lives in Sherman Oaks, Calif., with her 5-year-old daughter, Charlotte.

“They want to sell their inventory, or they will pull from one or two wholesalers,” she added. “I can pull from all over the world, and get them something that’s bespoke and personalized while cutting out the middle man markup.”

Like home buyers working with a real estate broker, clients won't be asked to pay any additional fees. Ms. Demaree says she earns a prenegotiated commission or a portion of a wholesaler's profit.

She explained further how the concierge business operates.

## How does it all work?

There's a 15-minute call to see if we're a good fit, and if we are, then we speak for 30 additional minutes to go over exactly what they're looking for. If they want a ready-made ring, I call jewelers and wholesalers that meet the couple's criteria, and they choose which one they want from the selection of four to eight. If I'm searching for a stone or diamond, the next two weeks are spent connecting with 40 to 50 wholesalers and jewelry manufacturers from around the world. I narrow all of the submissions down to five to eight selections. Then I pick three, which I present to the couple. Then they choose the winner. Most of this is done over email thanks to photos and videos.

## So people will buy a \$50,000-plus ring, say, that they've never physically tried on?

Yes. Ninety percent of my clients buy that way. We go over the G.I.A. certificates, which are emailed as well. If they want to try them on, and they live in a big city, I have the stones flown in so they can view them in person.

## What do you bring to the hunt?

People don't know what to look for, like inclusions, top make or character. All stones are different. Once I've sourced and sorted, I look for sparkle, life, light, brilliance, scintillation, and the overall beauty. The network I have is really my commodity. That took years. People don't know the bench jeweler the Kardashians or Blake Lively used, along with the big name luxury jewelry houses. I do.

## What are the advantages of having a customized ring?

When you're having something handmade you can choose everything. That's very appealing, and makes a ring special. People are hiding halos underneath the basket, so only that person can see it. Couples are having engravings in the bands, and on the stones. One client etched "always and forever" on the diamond that you can only see it with a 10 power magnifying glass, but she knows it's there. Others are putting their partner's fingerprint on the inside of the band, so that the couple always feel connected.

## What do you like most about this business?

There's a story behind every ring; it's the couple's story. Everything represented in that ring has led up to buying it. Whether it's eight years of breakups and the couple finally got back together, or they were high schools sweethearts who found each other 15 years later, their love story is in the ring they buy. And I get to hear each one. They've set their intentions on that ring for their future.

## What's your best advice for someone searching for an engagement ring?

Know the pros and cons of the diamond shape you're choosing. Clarity, color and carat weight selections differ with every shape. Don't get lost in analysis paralysis with the certificate. Instead, ask yourself, Does this stone or diamond light me up? How does that ring look and make you feel? And, Am I paying for something I can't see? In many cases, if you're buying a round brilliant and you get a VS1, you're pay \$10,000 more than an SII, and you can only tell the difference by looking at the G.I.A. certificate.

## What's your favorite diamond shape?

It changes every year. It used to be the cushion, then the oval, but I'm gaga over pears. The pear shape embodies both sides of a woman, soft and feminine and fierce and powerful. It has a large spread and tons of sparkle!

## What's trendy right now?

Ovals are strong. Pear shapes are the next up and coming. Both of these are elongated and flattering and show larger than other shapes. Setting-wise, the halo is out, and the classic solitaire with a hidden halo and three stone rings are requested more. Yellow gold rings with a vintage flair are big because the '70s, bohemian look is back.

## Who was the your most difficult client?

A woman was searching for a large stone and had me and my wholesalers jumping through hoops. She insisted on meeting at different locations, at all hours, with millions of dollars in inventory. Everyone had to take out insurance policies on the stones. Then she decided she didn't want them, so we shipped them away. Then she decided she did, so we shipped them back. Then after she bought a ring, she didn't want it anymore.

## What's the best part about your job?

After we find the ring, I feel I did something meaningful. It's not just about finding the stone, it's that I helped transition them to the next stage of their life.