The Complete Guide to Diamond Settings
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Introduction

If you are in the market for a new diamond ring, it is important to research every aspect of the ring-buying experience, from the diamonds themselves to the upgrade and shipping policies of the seller, before going through with the purchase. An engagement ring is one of the most special pieces of jewelry a woman will even own, and often one of the most valuable. Whether you are shopping for yourself or a loved one, it is well worth the time to do your homework before making the purchase.

One important area to look at is the diamond setting you prefer for your ring. It's easy to get overwhelmed by the hundreds of styles available and the unfamiliar terminology used to describe the settings. Plus, many of the diamond rings you look at look very similar to each other, and it can be hard to figure out the nuanced differences in design that sets one ring apart from another.

This is the definitive guide to diamond settings for engagement rings and many other pieces of diamond jewelry. Everything you need to know about prong, pavé and tiffany-style settings is here, explained in everyday language that even the diamond novice can easily understand.

First, we will look at the two settings most often used to hold the center stone of most engagement rings in place. Almost every engagement ring you will find, whether it is a solitaire, three-stone, or diamond-embellished setting, will use a variation of these two settings to hold the center stone in place. Choosing between the two will instantly narrow down your search and give you a much better idea of what kind of ring you are looking for.
The Prong Setting

When Levi Fields set out to buy an engagement ring for his fiancée, Rachel Gitlin, she told him that she really wanted to wear a ring from her grandmother, a simple gold band set with small diamonds, alongside her engagement ring. Levi began looking at ring styles, hoping to find a setting simple enough to work alongside the heirloom ring, but still eye-catching enough to be the focal point of her hand. After deliberating between several styles, Levi and Rachel chose the six-prong tiffany-style prong setting in yellow gold. Today, Rachel wears the ring every day, even when her grandmother’s ring rests in her jewelry box.

This is the classic four prong Tiffany style, so called for the arrangement of the prongs, which was developed by Tiffany and Co. in the 19th century. It is the single most popular and classic engagement ring style style to this day.

Long considered the gold standard in engagement ring settings, the prong setting remains the single most popular setting style, used by itself in solitaire styles such as the Tiffany style setting and in combinations with other decorative accents. The prong setting uses thin metal prongs extending from the base of the ring and holding the diamond in place by resting on its top edge. This setting style anchors the center diamond securely in place while raising it above the rest of the ring, creating that raised profile that is so popular.

This dramatic and elegant cathedral setting takes the classic cathedral as its inspiration, with arches from the band to the central stone, accentuating the diamond.
The Prong Setting

The number one advantage of the prong setting is the percentage of the diamond that can be seen, from both the top and side perspectives. No other diamond setting exposes as much of the stone to the light, while still holding it securely in place. The classic variation of the prong setting, the **tiffany-style setting**, was developed to scientifically cast as much light as possible into the stone, making the center stone the entire focal point of the ring. This is why the prong setting has remained the most popular diamond setting for solitaires, where the simplicity of the rest of the ring demands that the center stone be given an eye-catching display.

Prong settings are also typically one of the less expensive diamond settings, due to their popularity and simplicity of design, which means that you can focus most of your ring budget on getting a fabulous stone without compromising on setting quality. Of course, it is never a good idea to entrust the security of your diamond to a “discount” ring setting, but a simple prong setting from a reliable jeweler should be moderately priced and solidly made. Prong settings also typically raise the stone slightly above the rest of the ring, which can make the stone look larger (although low-profile prong settings are also available).
The Prong Setting

The two reasons people might not opt for the prong diamond setting is comfort and convenience. For someone with an active lifestyle or small children, the prong setting, especially one with a high profile, can snag too easily on clothing or other materials.

Also, the prong setting is not as damage-resistant as the bezel setting; someone with an active life, like a rock climber or dancer, might be better off with at least a partial bezel setting. However, as long as the ring is worn under normal conditions and the prongs are inspected regularly, nearly all customers wear their prong-set diamonds for years without any problems. If you choose a prong diamond setting, make sure to check frequently to make sure all the prongs are undamaged and are lying securely against the stone.

This Lotus ring features a petal setting, which seems like an entirely different setting style. However, if you look closely you can see that the center stone is still held in place by prongs extending from the tip of the decorative petals.

There are many styles and variations on the prong setting. Many of them will use company-specific terms like tiffany-style, cathedral, and petal settings, but really, any setting that uses thin metal bands extending from the ring's base and wrapping over the edge of the diamond falls into this category.
The Prong Setting

Most prong styles are referred to by the number of prongs used, a small difference that can drastically alter the look of the ring. Three-prong styles are not recommended for engagement rings, but four and six prong settings are popular, as well as eight prong settings that group two prongs closely together for extra security. Look carefully at the many styles of prong settings and you'll see the subtle, but important differences.

This Hand Over Hand setting is an example of a double-prong setting, which groups two prongs together for a more stylish look. This style is popular for stones of unusual shapes.
The Bezel Setting

Long appreciated by everyone from preschool teachers to rock stars, the humble bezel setting is finally getting its turn in the spotlight. The bezel setting, second in popularity only to the prong setting, is quickly gaining fans, and is being used in new and more creative ways every day. The bezel setting encircles the center stone in a metal rim, or collar that extends slightly above the girdle, or top surface of the stone. It can be full, in which the metal completely encircles the stone, or partial, in which the collar cuts away and reveals part of the stone’s side profile. It is one of the safest, most protected environments for your diamond, making it perfect for someone with an active lifestyle.

Maryanne O’Neill explains the appeal of the bezel setting, which she chose for her engagement ring. “I was looking for something a little modern, a little different,” explains the pediatric nurse from Tennessee. “The bezel style was perfect for me. As a nurse, I’m always working with my hands, so I wanted a ring I could wear all the time without worrying about getting dirt in it, or even worse, scratching someone.”

Strategic cutouts inside the bezel setting give the setting a more modern look.
The Bezel Setting

The number one advantage of the bezel setting is security. A bezel setting is custom-made for the stone that it will hold, so it is always exactly the right size. The outer girdle (the widest portion of the stone) is placed in a small ridge inside the bezel setting, and then the top lip of metal is bent down around the crown (or upper portion) of the stone. The stone is held in place by the pressure exerted by this lip, which creates a low, well-protected profile.

A variation of the bezel setting is the flush setting, in which the stone is placed directly into an opening in the ring band, and the top of the diamond is allowed to extend only a small amount from the base. Flush settings are more commonly used for the decorative diamond melee on the ring shank, however, and are rarely utilized for the center stone setting.

Another advantage of the bezel setting is the modern, understated look it gives to the ring. A sleek diamond setting like the bezel can also help improve the appearance of a slightly flawed diamond, such as a family heirloom stone, by reflecting white light into a yellow-tinted stone or covering flaws. A bezel setting can also be protective enough for a gemstone that might otherwise not be considered hard enough for use in a solitaire ring, such as a tanzanite or an opal.
The Bezel Setting

The main disadvantage of the bezel setting is the slightly lower level of light that penetrates the stone. However, a well-designed bezel setting, especially if it is set with pavé diamonds in a halo setting, can still reflect plenty of light for that sparkly look. In fact, it is for this reason that partial bezel settings and intricate halo settings are among the most popular variations of the bezel setting.

The halo bezel setting offers the perfect balance of glamour and security.
Tension Setting

Among diamond settings, the tension setting is set apart as one of the most unusual and bold diamond styles to hit the market in years. For someone looking for a unique and modern fashion statement in their diamond setting, the tension setting, and similar tension-style setting is a great option. Although it is not nearly as popular as the two heavyweight diamond settings, the prong and bezel styles, it is a creative and interesting style and well worth a look.

In a true tension setting, the pressure of the metal band is used to hold the diamond in place, rather than the prongs or bars of a typical diamond setting. The diamond is set in small grooves cut into the sides of the ring shank, so it appears to float in midair between the sides of the shank. Because the stone is held in place by the spring-loaded metal, this setting can only be used with relatively hard stones such as diamonds and sapphires.

Because the band of a tension setting is created only for a specific diamond, it is manufactured only after the diamond has been purchased. The setting is calibrated exactly to fit the diamond that has been chosen, and cannot be changed or resized once it is purchased. Lasers are used to calibrate the setting in order to apply perfectly-proportioned pressure to the diamond so it will be held securely without shattering. Although a tension setting is a very secure setting, the diamond and setting can be damaged if the ring suffers a blunt impact.

Although the tension setting is a relatively new diamond setting, it is gaining popularity for its unusual appearance. At the same time, new tension-style settings are also gaining widespread acclaim for mimicking the intriguing look of a tension setting without the price and complicated creation process.
Tension Setting

The tension-style setting is a creative and bold diamond setting choice that uses a hidden bridge to create the dramatic look of the true tension setting for a fraction of the price. The tension-style setting also incorporates the security advantages of both kinds of diamond settings --the secure hold of prongs with the smooth silhouette of a tension setting.

The Lily style has the dramatic appearance of a true tension setting...

...but as you can see from this rear view, it is anchored beneath the stone with a metal base, making it more secure and easier to maintain.
Melée Settings

The word melée (pronounced “melly” or “meh-lay”) comes from the French word for a mixture, and refers to the many styles of small stones that can embellish an engagement ring. In the industry, this kind of setting is often referred to as a “diamond setting,” which can be confusing, but separates this kind of embellished setting from simple solitaire settings or three-stone settings.

The center stone in a diamond setting is usually secured with one of the diamond settings described above, but the small stones of the melée have their own setting styles that can drastically alter the look of the ring. An engagement ring can have anywhere from three or four melée stones to up to a hundred. These small diamonds can decorate only the head of the ring, where the center stone sits, they can extend down the shoulders of the ring, or they can completely encircle the ring band in a glittering shower of diamond.

Pavé Setting

The building block of most intricate diamond settings is the pavé setting, in which many small gemstones are set closely together, held in place with nearly invisible metal beads, creating the effect of a continuous, sparkling surface of diamond. This setting style can also be called a bead setting, or a micro-pavé setting if the stones are especially small and closely set. A pavé setting can be as simple as a halo of small stones around the center stone or as dramatic as a three-sided diamond-encrusted stunner.
Melée Settings

Channel Setting

The channel setting is popular on eternity bands and for the smaller diamonds on the band of an engagement ring. In this diamond setting, a row of small gems are placed into a metal channel that holds them in place, creating the illusion of an uninterrupted line of diamond. It can be used with round or princess-cut diamonds, and adds a more modern note of glamour.

Shared Prong Setting

As its name implies, this setting holds a row of diamonds in place with linked prong settings, giving each stone its own prominence while giving a dynamic appearance to the entire ring. This style is popular for eternity bands, as well eternity-inspired engagement rings. Because the melée stones tend to be larger and more significant, this is one of the more valuable diamond settings.
Melée Settings

Flush Setting

A cousin of the bezel setting described above, the flush setting places small stones directly into the metal band of the ring, fitting them into a groove in the metal without the decorative lip associated with the bezel setting. This creates a sleek, low-profile look without sacrificing the elegance of a diamond-embellished band. A creative and different version is the champagne setting, which sets small diamonds randomly throughout the band, creating sparks of light like bubbles in a glass of champagne.
Armed with these terms and images, you will be surprised at your newfound ability to identify and understand engagement ring terminology. These eight diamond settings account for nearly all engagement ring settings - although they can be combined endlessly into new and innovative styles. Simply by choosing your favorite settings, you are well on your way to discovering that perfect engagement ring. Happy Shopping!

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