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Something Old: Estate Engagement Rings or Wedding Bands Offer A Unique Appeal And A Sense Of History

by *Sandra Mardenfeld*

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Tired of looking at the same engagement rings and wedding bands everyone has? Do you want something original? Well, then, estate jewelry might be for you.

Estate jewelry is defined in two ways, according to William Noble, owner of William Noble Diamonds in Dallas, TX. It's any pre-owned jewelry bought one year ago to 200 years ago or it is any antique or period jewelry such as art deco, Victorian or Edwardian period. Don't get confused, though. There is a difference between antique jewelry and estate jewelry according to Ruth Fortunoff, VP of Fortunoff. "Antique jewelry is 100 years old or older. Estate jewelry is anything in-between and usually previously owned."

So why is someone else's cast-off better than a brand new engagement or wedding ring? Well, when you buy an estate piece you're buying a little bit of history. "For those who adore nostalgia and a link back to a bygone era, an antique diamond engagement ring could be the right choice," said Richard A. Winick, a partner at New York's Manny Winick & Son, Inc. Estate jewelry is also known for its top-notch workmanship and a one-of-a-kind look. Sometimes older pieces are even more valuable than newer ones.

Like any jewelry, it is important to examine your estate ring carefully. Ask the history of the piece:

- Has it been altered or changed since the original construction?
- Are any of the stones treated?
- What period or part of the world is it from?
- Any famous ownership?

Ken Gold, owner of Stardust Antiques in New York, suggests

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checking all the settings since resizing a ring, as well as daily wear, can often make stones loose. Remember, since this ring is previously owned, it may appear worn - this is frequently a sign of authenticity. Also according to Gold, older stones (prior to the 1920s) were cut flat. So make sure the culet (the stone's bottom) isn't pointed (aka a brilliant cut). If it is, the stone, if not the ring, is fairly modern.

Most importantly, you should *love* the ring. Don't buy it solely for its value - how many of us end up selling our engagement or wedding rings anyway? As Winick says, "Remember this is an investment not only of the pocketbook, but of the heart as well."

Although you can find estate sales through posted auctions, you might want to consider purchasing your ring from a reputable wholesale, retail or antique jewelry store where you can benefit from the advice of an experienced jeweler. After all, "estate sale bargains can be no bargain at all if the jewelry turns out to be something other than as described or represented," says Winick.

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