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When Less is More: 4 Ways to Solve The Modern Engagement Ring Dilemma July 2nd, 2016 | Stephanie Dore

You're giving us the side-eye, thinking that when it comes to something as emotionally weighted and culturally significant as a sparkly diamond engagement ring, "how could less ever be more?" Well, surprise! We're all about helping you put your hard-earned cash to work, so you can #BeEngaged with your life, and your love, instead of worrying about breaking the bank.

Let's be real, we're all a little crazy when it comes to love, not to mention money. And that euphoric, "I've finally found the one" feeling can be a bit overwhelming. The last thing you need is to feel overwhelmed by finding the perfect way to pop the big question, or the perfect ring with which to do so.

Because an engagement ring means something different to everyone, let's start with a few questions. Answer yourself, or with your partner, and you'll shop with a better understanding of what you want, making you less likely to spend your budget on things you don't.

Question One:

This is a biggie. Do you want an engagement ring? Now, we're assuming that because you're here, you (or your partner) probably do want a ring. But knowing what it means to you, whether just one or both of you want a ring, for example, are important things to talk about right up front.

Question Two:

What is your budget? You've heard the one, two, or three-month salary guideline rattling through the back of your mind, and you want us to settle it once and for all. Well, we hate to break it to you, but let's just go ahead and throw that one out the window right away. Your budget should be exactly, and only, what you feel comfortable spending. Decide who is paying – you, your partner, both—and be honest about what you can afford.

Evaluate your wants versus your needs. Just because a celebrity has a whopper of a rock doesn't mean you need one, even if you wouldn't turn it down. Think about all the other things you might be shelling out for: the

wedding, the honeymoon, the house. Make sure your budget works for your own lifestyle and you'll start your future off on the right foot.

Question Three:

Consider Cut, Color, Clarity, Carat, AKA, the 4Cs, and which one is your favorite. Does size matter? Does it have to be #FLAWLESS? Once you know your highest and lowest priorities, it's easy to look at the 4Cs and determine where to spend more, and where you can scale back. (BTW, the general consensus is that cut is the most important C.)

This is where you get to practice those compromising skills that will come in handy for married life! For instance, if you have a \$5,000 diamond budget but size is really important, go a little lower on color and clarity to get more weight. If having a flawless diamond is essential, but your budget can't change (hence why we make it the first question), you might have to downsize a bit. Once you have this basic concept down, try our diamond search out, enter your budget and play with the filter variations until you arrive at your own perfect balance.

There are also a few little tricks to know. Diamond prices jump dramatically at the whole and half-carat marks, so instead of going with a 1-carat diamond, try shopping around the .90-carat mark. For minuscule difference in visual size, this can be a dramatic savings. Or, go for a diamond with medium or strong fluorescence. Again, for something that won't be noticeable in daily wear, this can save significant dollars—dollars you can spend on a bigger diamond, a designer setting, or that margarita-in-hand beach honeymoon.

Question Four:

What is your style? Whether you're looking for a simple stunner or a barrage of glittering stones, there are ways to stretch your budget that will get you the look you want for less. A halo-style ring (where your center stone is encircled by smaller diamonds) can mean a significantly larger look overall, so even if you go with a smaller center diamond, you're getting a major impact.

A three-stone ring (where the carat weight is split up) can offer a bigger look against a solitaire with a single, slightly larger diamond. If you're not sure about a diamond, many people are choosing precious gemstone centers or

sidestones. This is great for someone who likes a bit of color or wants to include a birthstone, and can also save your wallet in the homestretch.

Fancy shaped diamonds are also a great thing to consider. While a classic round brilliant-cut center diamond is still the most popular shape – with the square princess-cut coming in second – that also means it's typically the most expensive, all other characteristics considered. There are eight other common diamond shapes that can give you significantly more bang for your buck, and a uniquely brilliant look to show off with it.

So what are you waiting for? We think that half the fun is in finding just the right ring. After all, you know yourself, and your partner, far better than any jeweler. The endless combinations—while possibly daunting at first—will quickly whittle themselves down now that you have your preferences in your pocket.