

Nip/tuck



TCStyle
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Plastic surgery is a common thing in my industry. And no, I'm not a doctor and I'm not referring to augmentations, facelifts or botox. I'm talking about clarity enhancement and diamonds.

The process is one of the most misunderstood and even often ignored practices in the jewelry industry. Two of the most common forms are laser drilling and fracture filling. Without question, the technology necessary for both is fascinating and the results can be incredible.

However, both treatments can be extremely difficult to identify and if you are buying a treated stone, there are some reasons you should know about before you buy. One such reason, is that of the 4 Cs (Cut, Color, Clarity, and Carat weight) clarity can often affect price the most. It is extremely rare to have a diamond with few or no inclusions and most diamonds have inclusions you can see with your naked eye.

First things first, though. What is an inclusion? Basically, these are mother nature's birthmarks. The Gemological Institute of America defines an inclusion as a clarity characteristic totally enclosed in a polished gemstone or extending into it from the surface. They have been there for millions of years, and up until about 20 years ago, there was very little that could either remove or disguise them.

Laser drilling uses a carbon dioxide laser to drill tiny tunnels (smaller than the width of a human hair) down to unattractive inclusions within the diamond. This tunnel makes it possible to vaporize or even bleach this dark inclusion so it becomes much more difficult to see. Sounds like a great bit of surgery, but it can also complicate your search for the “perfect” diamond.

Think about what has been done. The treader has added an inclusion (the laser drill hole) to only lessen another inclusion (the dark spot inside the stone) not remove it. So, at the end of this highly complicated process they may have even actually lowered the clarity grade.

Fracture filling involves injecting a molten glass material into a diamonds internal fractures or, as they are commonly called, feathers. In many cases this process can make the inclusion almost seem to disappear. The advantage to this process is obvious. Clients who thought they could never afford the larger diamond they dream of, now have a much less expensive alternative. But remember, just like with laser drilling, the treader has not improved the actual clarity of the diamond ... just the appearance of clarity.

The disadvantages to fracture filling are much more significant than those of laser drilling. The filler may very likely become damaged during even the simplest repair or cleaning procedures. A jeweler’s ultrasonic cleaner, for example, can damage this filler or discolor it. However, the biggest damage can occur during any repair where a jeweler’s torch is necessary (sizing rings, setting stones, etc.). This can blacken the filler (never to be lightened again) or can even result in a fracture filled diamond ending up broken into several pieces.

These treated diamonds can be great alternatives to their more expensive counterparts but only if you are aware of what you are buying. Because the pros and cons of these treatments are so significant, disclosure is absolutely essential. A properly educated and ethical jeweler will always let you know which diamonds have been treated. And to keep us all on our toes, the latest and greatest technologies are now producing synthetic diamonds! I will keep you posted on those in the months to come.