

Diamond color ... easy as d to z



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Imagine a canary bird flying overhead as you read these first few sentences.

Got the image? Good! Just like a cartoon. Well, in this thought, what characteristic stands out the most in your mind? It's the color, right? The most vivid, brightest yellow that you can possibly imagine. Now imagine Mother Nature reaching into her bag of tricks and implanting that intense yellow inside of a diamond. Not only does this gemstone have the brilliance and dazzle of a diamond, but it also has a flaming yellow color that you could almost see from the top of Waterson Towers.

When looking at a fancy intense yellow diamond, it is not difficult to see why the term "canary" has been used to describe the color. It is a yellow that, in nature, seems to be found only on this exquisite bird. Because of this, some people will

use “canary” to describe any diamond that has a noticeable hint of yellow in its body color. This can often be incorrect. The term “canary” is what is a “trade term” and sometimes can be overused in the jewelry industry.

In order to be considered a true canary diamond it should come with a certificate from an independent gemological laboratory. Canary yellow is an off-the-charts vivid yellow color. It is very rare and such grades are not given out lightly as it will change the value of the diamond considerably.

Such diamonds, however, are not a typical purchase for the average consumer as they can range (in the larger sizes) from the tens of thousands to several hundreds of thousands of dollars. So, for those of us without a checking account the size of Oprah’s, generally the diamonds that fall into the near colorless range will have to do.

So what causes this yellow in a diamond? Most of the world’s diamonds are yellow or brown in color (this is the reason that truly colorless diamonds are so valuable). They pick up this color in their formation process and a diamond’s color depends on the kinds of atoms that are found in its crystal structure. Nitrogen is the element that is responsible for the yellow we see. Therefore, the more nitrogen present, the more yellow the diamond.

It is, of course, possible for diamonds to be other colors as well. When boron atoms are present we may see the diamond as blue. Natural or unnatural radiation can cause a diamond to turn green. And while science can explain a lot, there is still much about diamonds that we do not understand. For instance, experts do not know exactly what causes some diamonds to be brown, pink, or red. The rarest of the fancy colored diamonds is purple followed by red and green. But these fancy colors are so rare that in general we focus just on the absence or presence of yellow (sometimes brown or gray).

We use a very simple alphabet based scale to describe color (or the lack thereof). This scale starts with the letter D and goes all the way through Z. D is the most colorless of all diamonds and Z has the most color. What makes a fancy yellow diamond, as in the canary I discussed above, is when a diamond has so much yellow that it is below Z. In this case, the diamond is even rarer than colorless and near-colorless diamonds, hence they will command premium prices.

As you can see, these letter grades are further broken down into ranges. It can be somewhat confusing though to rely solely on the descriptions of color. For instance, D, E, & F are all categorized as being “colorless”. Obviously, if a diamond is truly colorless it would be graded as a D and not an E or F.

What “colorless” means is that when we look at a diamond from the table side up (the top of the diamond) the differences in color are negligible at best. In other

words, even a trained diamond grader would have a difficult time discerning the difference between the D and the F diamonds.

The “near colorless” range has a similar connotation. In this range there will be subtle differences in color face up but very noticeable differences from the grading position.

At the very top of the scale, the colors are so close that even an expert can struggle at seeing the differences. In the next range we need to flip a diamond over into the color grading position to clearly see what separates them.

I am constantly telling my clients at Jack Lewis Fine Jewelry to spend their money where it makes sense on areas that they can see. If a diamond is cut extremely well (which we will cover in another article) it can be VERY difficult to spot much body color in anything higher than a J. So why not sacrifice a bit of body color if it means you can get a larger diamond that is cut nicer? Trust me, in the long run no one will see the color. All they will see is the extra sparkle that your very well cut diamond possesses (can you tell which of the 4 Cs I think is most important?).

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