

# Understanding Diamond Clarity



TCStyle  
Monday, July 23, 2007 2:39 PM CDT

Take a close look at your fingers, paying particular attention to your fingerprints; those unique “barcodes” that help make us unique. In diamonds, these unique birthmarks are called **INCLUSIONS**. You may be more familiar with an older term used to describe them; “Flaws”. Most jewelry industry professionals will avoid this term as we feel that it implies there is something wrong with a diamond that has “flaws.” Actually this couldn’t be more incorrect. The vast majority of diamonds have more than an inclusion or two and most truly flawless diamonds belong in a museum.

The definition of an inclusion according to The Gemological Institute of America is a clarity characteristic totally enclosed in a polished gemstone or extending into it from the surface. When a clarity grade is assigned to a diamond, the grader is looking for the following: the size of the inclusion, the position of the

inclusion, and the relief of the inclusion (how the texture and shape of the inclusion affects its visibility).

Inclusions take on many forms. The most common of which is called a crystal. A crystal is really just any other mineral that became trapped in that diamond during the formation process. These are most commonly crystals of other diamonds but can be other minerals such as graphite and even garnet.

A pinpoint is a very small almost indistinguishable characteristic (a very tightly packed group of many pinpoints is called a cloud). A pinpoint is what the name implies and can often be incorrectly identified as a gas bubble because of its appearance. Actually, the presence of gas bubbles is one way for a gemologist to tell the difference between diamonds and their simulants (manmade gemstones created to imitate the appearance of diamonds). Natural diamonds will never possess gas bubbles because the formation conditions are so severe (extremely high pressure and heat) that any bubbles would be forced out during this process.

A feather is basically a crack inside of the diamond that reaches the surface area at some point. It is generally considered to be the worst type of inclusion. This is because if a feather is large enough and in the wrong place, it can actually threaten the durability of the stone. If the diamond is hit in with the right velocity and at just the right angle, sometimes these feathers can grow and the diamond may even break.

What I find at Jack Lewis Fine Jewelry, is that most consumers are not concerned with clarity unless they can visibly see the inclusions with their naked eye. The bad news about clarity is that in many cases, it is the characteristic that affects price the most (sometimes even more than size!).

Notice that until we get to I1, I2, & I3, clarity is generally something you need magnification to see. Therefore, as I explain to my clients, why not put the money into a characteristic that is more noticeable? Size perhaps? Most would agree that bigger is better when it comes to diamonds! Color? Remember from my last article that color is generally pretty visible in any grade below a "J". What about the quality of the cut? I have been waiting to get to this. My personal favorite- CUT!

Oh, just wait until next month! These past articles are just a segue into what we all love best about diamonds. The way they sparkle! Believe it or not, this has VERY little to do with color, clarity or size. What makes a diamond pop from across a dimly lit room is the way it is cut and polished. It is this characteristic that is most overlooked, not because it is unimportant (quite the contrary) but because it can be the most difficult to understand.

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## Clarity vocabulary:

FL: Flawless

IF: Internally Flawless: no inclusions present internally in this diamond but there may be some minor scratches or other surface blemishes

VVS1 & VVS2: Very Very Slightly Included: Inclusions are difficult to see and located under 10x magnification

VS1 & VS2: Very Slightly Included: Inclusions are present but less difficult to see and locate under 10x magnification

SI1 & SI2: Slightly Included; Inclusions are readily seen at 10x magnification although they remain invisible from the unaided eye when the Diamond is viewed face up (looking down through the diamond from the table or top of the diamond)

I1: Included: One or more inclusions, or their affect can be seen by the unaided eye.

I2: Included: Inclusions are easily visible to the unaided eye

I3: Included: Inclusions are so obvious that they affect the brilliance, the beauty, and potentially, the durability of the diamond

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