

Why an Opal Engagement Ring May Not Be Your Best Choice

Opals, with their mesmerizing play of colors, have been capturing hearts for centuries. These gems symbolized love and hope in ancient Rome, were associated with good luck during the Middle Ages, and even believed to have prophetic powers by the ancient Greeks¹²³.

Despite this rich history and their undeniably unique beauty, opals may not be the wisest choice for an engagement ring.

Here's why.

The Vulnerability of Opals

Opals are formed when liquefied silica washes down into fissures in the surrounding rock, where it solidifies into a hardened gel⁴. This process makes for a beautiful gem, but it also results in a stone that is softer and less durable than many other precious gems.

On the Mohs scale of mineral hardness, opals score between 5.5 and 6.5, making them relatively soft compared to diamonds (10), sapphires (9), and emeralds (7.5-8). This means opals are more prone to scratches, chips, and cracks, which can be problematic for a ring intended for everyday wear.

Opals are also very porous which means they can draw in and trap dirt, oils and other substances from the environment. This makes them more difficult to clean than harder gems — and a dirty, discolored or dull stone isn't likely to be appreciated by the wearer.

For all these reasons, the vulnerability of Opals makes them less desirable for an engagement ring that you will want to wear daily, for many years.

An Unfortunate Opal Ring Tale

As a seasoned custom jeweler, Emily Gill, had seen a variety of precious stones in varying states. But the most alarming case to date involves a uniquely breathtaking opal ring. The owner, a diligent woman working tirelessly in the service industry during the pandemic, brought to her this once beautiful opal ring.

During the COVID era, hand hygiene had become more critical than ever. This woman, like all of us, washed her hands frequently, unaware of the impact it would have on her opal ring. As Emily recalls, the moment she saw the ring, she couldn't believe her eyes. The once mesmerizing

opal had turned an unsettling shade of burnt orange, losing its glorious play-of-color, and instead, it looked grungy - a far cry from its original allure.

Emily knew opals were delicate, but this was a whole new level. The constant exposure to hand sanitizer, water and soap had taken a significant toll on the opal, causing it to absorb chemicals, grime and change color dramatically. Despite her vast expertise, Emily felt a pang of helplessness. Washing hands, a simple act of self-protection, had inadvertently morphed this opal gem into an unrecognizable state, a grim testament to the vulnerability of opals.

The damage to the opal was so severe that there was no recourse but to take the drastic step of completely removing the opal from the ring. Emily, with a heavy heart, had to break the news to the woman. She explained that the only way to restore the ring's beauty was to chip out the damaged gem and replace it with a new one. It was a distressing decision, but an inevitable one given the extent of the damage.

The opal's vulnerability had not just led to its ruin, but also necessitated a complete replacement - a stark reminder of the issues one may face when choosing an opal engagement ring.

Maintenance and Care of Opal Rings

Taking care of opal rings requires continuous and attentive maintenance. The delicate nature of this gemstone necessitates gentle handling and specific care measures to preserve its beauty and prolong its life.

1. **Avoid Harsh Environments:** Opals contain a significant amount of water, which makes them vulnerable to temperature variations. As a result, it's essential to keep your opal ring away from extreme heat or cold, which can cause the water inside to expand or contract, leading to cracking.
2. **Cleaning:** When it comes to cleaning, use warm soapy water and a soft cloth to gently clean the opal. It's best to avoid harsh chemicals, ultrasonic cleaners, or steam cleaning, as these can damage the stone's structure.
3. **Storage:** Store your opal ring separately in a soft cloth or padded bag to prevent it from being scratched by other jewelry. Additionally, it's recommended to keep it in a moderately humid environment to prevent it from drying out. Depending on your geographical location and environmental conditions you may seek out advice from us on how to store your opals.
4. **Day-to-Day Wear:** Considering opal's softness, it's wise to take off the ring when doing tasks that might expose it to hard knocks or abrasive materials, such as gardening, cleaning, or exercising.

By following these care tips, you can help preserve the mystical charm of your opal ring and keep it looking as captivating as the day it was first worn.

Harder Precious Gems: Diamonds, Sapphires, Emeralds, Rubies and Spinel

Diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, rubies and also spinel are more commonly used in engagement rings due to their superior hardness and durability.

Diamond Ring ([link to article](#))

Diamonds, the hardest known natural substance, are nearly four times harder than opals. They are incredibly resistant to scratching and can retain their brilliance for a lifetime with proper care.

Sapphire Ring ([link to article](#))

Sapphires are second only to diamonds in hardness. They offer a range of colors, from the iconic blue to pink, yellow, and even colorless varieties, providing versatility in design.

Emerald Ring

Emeralds are not as hard as diamonds or sapphires, but they still surpass opals. However, emeralds often have inclusions and need careful handling to avoid damage.

Ruby Ring

Rubies are similar to sapphires in terms of hardness and durability, but they come with their own set of unique characteristics. Possessing a deep red hue, rubies are one of the most sought-after gemstones for engagement rings.

Spinel Ring

Spinels are a relatively new addition to the world of precious stones and rank right between sapphires and emeralds in terms of hardness. They offer an array of shades, from vibrant reds to

subtle blues and greens, perfect for creating truly unique rings. Due to their stunning looks and excellent durability, Spinel is becoming increasingly popular as a choice for engagement rings.

Despite their hardness, all these gems will still require proper care to maintain their beauty, but are not nearly as vulnerable to the elements as the porous opal.

Caring for Your Precious Gems [*link to FAQs](#)

Whether you choose an opal or a harder gem, proper care is crucial to preserve the beauty of your engagement ring.

Here are some tips:

- Avoid wearing your ring during physical activities that could lead to scratching or chipping.
- Clean your ring regularly with mild soap and warm water, using a soft toothbrush to remove any dirt or oils.
- Store your ring separately from other jewelry to prevent scratches.
- Have your ring professionally checked and cleaned at least once a year.

For **opals** in particular, avoid sudden temperature changes and keep them away from harsh chemicals. Opals contain water, so they can crack or "craze" if they dry out⁴. Some people even recommend storing them in a damp cloth.

While opals are undeniably beautiful and full of history, their relative softness makes them less suitable for an engagement ring that will be worn daily. Choosing a harder gem like a diamond, sapphire, or emerald can provide both the beauty and the durability you need for such a significant piece of jewelry.

When it comes to engagement rings, the variety of precious gems available is truly staggering. Diamonds, sapphires, and emeralds are all popular choices for their impressive hardness and timeless beauty.

While Emily recommends avoiding opals for daily wear, for special occasion rings or heirloom jewelry, there are absolutely stunning choices available if you give them the required care.

The Allure of the Opal

From the Australian opal to iridescent opal and black opals, there's a stunning variety of colors and shapes to choose from. And these can be set in various metals like sterling silver, white gold, or platinum for a truly personalized touch.

For those who prefer a classic style, look no further than a white opal centerpiece with diamond accents. This combination of classic and contemporary can create an absolutely stunning effect, no matter what your taste or style preference!

The perfect ring for yourself or your loved one should be chosen carefully, depending on the lifestyle and comfort level of the wearer. If you're looking for something that will withstand the rigors of everyday wear, opt for a diamond or other harder gem. But if you're looking for a unique and exotic look, don't discount the beauty of an opal! With proper care, an opal ring can last a lifetime.

And with its rainbow of color variations, stunning iridescence, and soft vibes, it's easy to understand why many people are drawn to the allure of the opal. So if you love this precious jewel, don't be afraid to express your unique style with an opal ring!

Regardless of your budget or style preference, it's important to remember that when choosing a precious gem for an engagement ring, quality should always come first. Invest in quality materials that will stand the test of time and keep your ring looking its best for years to come. That way, your engagement ring can continue to be a treasured symbol of love and commitment for generations!

Bottom Line: Opal Engagement Rings Are Beautiful But Require Extra Care

Opals have been used in jewelry since ancient times, but with their softness they may not be ideal for everyday wear. If you're considering an opal engagement ring, it's important to be aware of their delicate nature and take extra care when wearing and storing the ring. Diamonds, sapphires, or emeralds are all harder gems that may better suit an engagement ring worn daily. However, if you still want to show off the unique beauty of opals, there is a wide range of stunning options available in different shapes, sizes, and colors. With proper care, a precious opal ring can last a lifetime!

No matter what type of gemstone you choose for your engagement ring, Emily Gill recommends investing in quality materials that will stand the test of time so you can keep your ring looking its best for years to come.

A lasting symbol of love and commitment, the perfect engagement is out there—you just have to find it.

Let's Talk!

EMILY

Footnotes

1. <https://www.gia.edu/opal-history-lore> ↩
2. <https://www.americangemsociety.org/birthstones/october-birthstones/opal-history/> ↩
3. <https://lynstrong.com/opal-gemstone-history-and-lore/> ↩
4. <https://www.jewelsforme.com/opal-meaning> ↩ ↩²