

STUDSDIRECT · IGI CERTIFIED

The Honest Lab-Grown Diamond Buyer's Guide

Written by our founder

20 years manufacturing diamonds in Mumbai SEEPZ

The same playbook our customers use to avoid \$3,000+ in markup.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. How Diamonds Are Made & Priced
2. The Lab-Grown Earrings Buyer's Guide
3. StudsDirect vs. Tiffany — The Real Comparison
4. The Engagement Ring Buyer's Guide

How Diamonds Are Made & Priced

I grew up around diamonds. Not as a buyer — as someone who made them.

For 20 years I worked in Mumbai's SEEPZ (Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone), one of the world's most concentrated diamond manufacturing districts. At peak operation, SEEPZ processed roughly 80% of the world's cut and polished diamonds. I learned the trade from the inside: how a rough stone becomes a finished gem, how it gets graded, and — critically — how the markup gets added at every step between the mine and the Midtown Manhattan showcase.

Here's what the industry doesn't advertise: by the time a diamond reaches a retail jeweler, it has typically passed through 5–7 hands. Each hand takes a cut. A stone that costs \$400 at the manufacturing level can retail for \$3,000+ after brand premiums, storefront overhead, and the cost of advertising you to buy it.

Lab-grown diamonds changed this equation.

How Lab-Grown Diamonds Are Made

There are two main methods: HPHT (High Pressure, High Temperature) and CVD (Chemical Vapor Deposition). Both create genuine diamond crystal — carbon atoms arranged in the same tetrahedral lattice as mined diamonds. The difference is the origin story, not the stone.

HPHT mimics conditions deep in the earth: extreme pressure and heat around a diamond seed. CVD grows diamonds in a chamber from a carbon-rich gas, layer by atomic layer. Either way, the result is optically, chemically, and physically identical to a mined diamond.

The IGI (International Gemological Institute) grades lab-grown diamonds on the same 4Cs as mined: Cut, Color, Clarity, Carat. A G VS1 lab-grown diamond is a G VS1 diamond. Full stop.

Why the Price Is So Different

Lab-grown diamonds don't come with the supply chain overhead of mining — no geological exploration, no land rights, no heavy machinery, no environmental reclamation costs. The manufacturing cost is predictable and declining as the technology matures.

This means a 1ct F VS1 lab-grown diamond that might retail for \$6,500 at Tiffany can be had for \$1,200–\$1,500 direct from a manufacturer-connected source. The stone is the same. The certificate is the same. The difference is how many hands touched it — and how much each hand cost.

At StudsDirect, we source directly from SEEPZ-area manufacturers I have personal

relationships with. No intermediary markups. Every stone comes with its IGI certificate, which you can verify independently online.

The Lab-Grown Diamond Earrings Buyer's Guide

Diamond stud earrings are the most universally worn fine jewelry. They work for every occasion — from Tuesday morning to a black-tie event. But most buyers approach them the same way: walk into a store, point at something that sparkles, and wince at the price.

You can do better. Here's the practical framework I use when helping customers choose earrings.

The 4Cs — What Actually Matters for Studs

Cut: This is the most important factor for earrings. A well-cut diamond reflects light brilliantly, creating the sparkle most buyers are after. For round brilliants, look for Excellent or Very Good cut grades on the IGI certificate. Don't compromise here — a poorly cut diamond looks dull regardless of its other grades.

Color: For earrings, H–J color is the sweet spot for value. The human eye has difficulty distinguishing color in diamonds below 1ct when set in metal. G–H in white gold/platinum looks near-colorless. If you're setting in yellow gold, you can go I–J and save meaningfully — the gold metal absorbs any warmth in the stone.

Clarity: For earrings (not worn under a loupe), VS2–SI1 is the best value range. SI1 clarity inclusions are typically invisible to the naked eye in a moving, sparkling stone. The premium you pay for VVS is largely aesthetic certification, not visible quality.

Carat: For everyday studs, 0.5–1ct total weight (0.25–0.5ct each) is the practical range. They're present without being statement pieces. For special occasions, 1–2ct total weight makes a visible difference. Above 2ct total weight is a clear fashion statement.

Metals: White Gold vs. Platinum vs. Yellow Gold

14K white gold: Most affordable, looks identical to platinum in person, requires rhodium plating over time but refreshes easily. This is what 90% of our customers choose.

Platinum: More expensive, denser, naturally white (no rhodium needed). Worth it if you're hard on your jewelry or prefer the weight.

14K yellow gold: Pairs beautifully with warmer-colored stones (I–J). Classic look, lower maintenance than white gold.

Setting Styles

Prong/solitaire: Maximum brilliance, classic look. 4-prong shows more diamond; 3-prong (martini) has a lighter, more delicate profile.

Bezel: Metal rim surrounds the stone. More secure, modern aesthetic, slightly reduces light entry but more protected.

Halo: Small stones surround the center diamond. Maximizes perceived size, more decorative.

Our Recommendation

For most buyers: a pair of 0.5–1ct total weight, round brilliant, H–I color, VS2 clarity, Excellent cut, set in 14K white gold. This hits every performance mark, looks exceptional, and comes in at a price that won't haunt you. Use the savings from choosing lab-grown to upgrade cut and size.

StudsDirect vs. Tiffany — The Real Comparison

This is the question I get asked most often: why is your price so much lower? Are these the same quality?

The short answer: Yes. The same quality, different supply chain.

What You're Paying For at Tiffany

Tiffany's Midtown Manhattan flagship occupies 10 floors of premium real estate. They spend over \$500M annually on marketing. Their iconic blue box is a brand artifact — you're paying for the unboxing experience as much as the diamond. None of this makes their diamonds better. It makes their brand more valuable to them.

When I source a diamond from a SEEPZ manufacturer and sell it to you directly, here's where the money doesn't go: retail real estate, advertising spend, celebrity partnerships, institutional brand building, or the cost of running 300+ global stores.

The Price Comparison

Round 1ct F VS1 Lab-Grown Solitaire (2025 estimates):

Tiffany & Co: ~\$6,500–\$8,500 (varies by setting)

Blue Nile: ~\$3,200–\$4,000

StudsDirect: ~\$1,100–\$1,400

All three stones: IGI-certified, F color, VS1 clarity, Excellent cut. The difference isn't the diamond. It's the business model.

The Certificate Is the Equalizer

This is the most important thing I can tell you: an IGI certificate is an objective, third-party assessment of the diamond. It doesn't care who sold it. A G VS2 Excellent from StudsDirect is the same grade as a G VS2 Excellent from Tiffany. You can verify it independently at [igi.org](https://www.igi.org) using the report number.

What We Don't Offer (and Why That's Fine)

We don't have a flagship store. We don't have a celebrity ambassador. We don't have a velvet pouch with an embossed logo. If those things matter to you, they're genuinely worth paying for — brand experiences have real value for some buyers. But if what you want is the highest

quality diamond for the money, with a certificate to prove it, the logic of paying a 5x premium is hard to justify.

The Engagement Ring Buyer's Guide

Buying an engagement ring is one of the largest purchases most people make. It's also one of the most emotionally charged — which is exactly why the jewelry industry targets it so aggressively. The "two months salary" rule was invented by De Beers in 1947. It's advertising, not tradition.

Step 1: Start with the Setting, Not the Stone

Solitaire: Timeless, focuses all attention on the center stone. Brilliant choice if your partner has classic taste or doesn't want something that can snag on things.

Halo: Surrounds the center stone with smaller diamonds, making it appear larger. Great if size matters and budget is constrained.

Three-stone: A center stone flanked by two side stones. Symbolically rich ("past, present, future"). The side stones should be well-matched in cut and color.

Step 2: The 4Cs Priority Order for Rings

Cut first, always. A poorly cut diamond looks lifeless. Excellent cut is worth the premium. Then carat target — know your size goal based on budget and preference. Then color: for white gold/platinum, G–H is ideal; for yellow gold, I–J is fine. Then clarity: VS1–VS2 is the right range for rings worn daily.

Step 3: Budget Reality

A genuinely excellent engagement ring — 1ct F VS1 Excellent cut round brilliant in a well-made solitaire setting — can be assembled for \$1,800–\$2,500 from a direct manufacturer like StudsDirect. The same configuration at a traditional retailer: \$8,000–\$15,000. That difference is real money: a vacation, a down payment contribution, a year of student loans. The diamond on your partner's finger is the same. The certificate says so.

Step 4: Sizing

The US average woman's ring size is 6–6.5. If you're buying secretly, borrow a ring she wears on that finger and trace the inside, or ask a friend. Most rings can be resized 1–2 sizes after purchase — this is a standard service.

Closing Thought

Diamonds are extraordinary objects. Carbon atoms arranged in a crystal lattice, formed under intense conditions, cut with mathematical precision to capture and reflect light. They deserve to be appreciated for what they actually are — not for the mythology the industry has layered on

top. When you buy direct, you remove the mythology and keep the diamond. That's the entire StudsDirect proposition.

READY TO BUY DIRECT?

See Our Collection

Every stone IGI-certified. Free shipping. 30-day returns.

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