



ELIXYR

The Ring Compass

A STYLING GUIDE FOR FINDING THE RING
YOU ALREADY KNOW YOU WANT

THEELIXYR.COM

ONE TO ONE RING DESIGN

DM [@theelixyratelier](https://www.instagram.com/theelixyratelier)
to book a private consultation

You already have taste. You just haven't named it yet.

Nobody walks into this with a blank mind. You have years of opinions about beauty already sitting in your wardrobe, your camera roll and your living room. The problem was never that you don't know what you like — it's that nobody handed you the vocabulary to say it out loud in a jeweller's showroom.

That's what this guide does. It is not a catalogue and it will not tell you what to buy. It reads the evidence you've already produced and translates it into six or seven words a jeweller can work with: a shape, a setting, a metal, a scale, and a short list of things you refuse to compromise on.

Most people do this the other way round: scroll a thousand rings, get overwhelmed somewhere around ring four hundred, and choose the one they've simply seen most often. That is how you end up with a ring that is perfectly nice and not remotely yours. Taste doesn't emerge from volume. It emerges from a few good questions.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

A pencil. Roughly twenty-five uninterrupted minutes. Ideally your jewellery box within reach, and your phone for the parts where we look through your saved images.

HOW TO ANSWER

Quickly and selfishly. The first instinct is nearly always the honest one. Don't answer as the person you're planning to become.

THE FOUR FRAMEWORKS

One — The Ten Questions. A taste quiz that resolves into one of five ring archetypes.

Two — The Wardrobe Proxy. Reading the jewellery and shoes you already chose.

Three — The Room Test. Your home as evidence, because nobody decorates for an audience.

Four — The Life Test. The unglamorous filter. What your hands actually do all day.

Then two *overlays*, a reference section, and a one-page brief to hand to a jeweller.

Three of these frameworks find what you love. The fourth stops you buying something you'll quietly take off after a fortnight.

A note on order: do the quiz first, before you read the archetype descriptions. Read them first and you'll answer towards the one you like the sound of, which defeats the point.

WHEN YOU'VE FINISHED THE BRIEF

Elixir designs from a brief rather than a catalogue — and shows you the ring on your own hand before anything is made.

theelixyr.com

The Ten Questions

Tick one option per question. Not the admirable answer — the true one. Keys are tallied on page 5.

1 A free Saturday, nothing owed to anyone. You are —

- ☐ C In a gallery, then lunch at the same restaurant you always go to
- ☐ R At the flower market, then reading somewhere green until it gets cold
- ☐ M Walking an unfamiliar part of the city with no plan and no map
- ☐ X At a long, loud lunch that turns into something else entirely
- ☐ A An estate sale, a secondhand bookshop, anywhere with a bit of dust

2 The compliment that actually lands —

- ☐ C "You always look so put together."
- ☐ R "There's something so soft about the way you do things."
- ☐ M "Everything you own seems chosen."
- ☐ X "You have the best presence in any room."
- ☐ A "Where on earth did you find that?"

3 Scroll back through your camera roll. Most of it is —

- ☐ C People you love, framed properly, faces in focus
- ☐ R Skies, petals, light falling across a wall
- ☐ M One clean object, shot straight on, nothing else in frame
- ☐ X Nights out, outfits, the whole evening documented
- ☐ A Doorways, floor tiles, old shopfronts, painted ceilings

4 Above everything, a ring should make you feel —

- ☐ C Certain
- ☐ R Cherished
- ☐ M Calm
- ☐ X Alive
- ☐ A Connected to something older than you

5 Buying something genuinely expensive, you —

- ☐ C Buy the version that's been made the same way for eighty years
- ☐ R Buy the one that made you feel something in the shop
- ☐ M Research it for three months, then buy once, then never think about it
- ☐ X Buy the boldest one available and refuse to look back
- ☐ A Keep looking until you find the one with a story attached

6 Which would you rather inherit?

- ☐ C Her pearls, restrung and kept properly
- ☐ R Her letters
- ☐ M Her wristwatch
- ☐ X Her coat, the impractical one
- ☐ A The whole jewellery box, unsorted, tangled, all of it

7 On the subject of being noticed —

- ☐ C I'd like it noticed, not discussed
- ☐ R I'd like it to feel personal rather than public
- ☐ M I'd almost rather it were missed
- ☐ X I'd like it visible from across the room
- ☐ A I'd like to be asked about it

8 Your ideal wedding, answered honestly —

- ☐ C A proper ceremony, then a seated dinner, done well
- ☐ R A garden, low light, someone crying happily in the second row
- ☐ M Eleven people, a registry office, an extremely good restaurant after
- ☐ X Three hundred people and a band that doesn't stop
- ☐ A Somewhere half-crumbling with a history you had to look up

9 Trends, generally —

- ☐ C I ignore them and I'm always fine
- ☐ R I follow the pretty ones
- ☐ M I notice them, then wait to see what survives
- ☐ X I get there first
- ☐ A I'm about forty years behind and perfectly happy there

10 Ten years in, the ring you'd still love is the one that —

- ☐ C Never once needed defending
- ☐ R Still feels like the day he asked
- ☐ M Disappeared into your hand and became part of it
- ☐ X Still stops people mid-sentence
- ☐ A Looks better worn than it did new

The Scorecard

Write the letter you ticked for each question in the row below, then count how many times each letter appears.

Q 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Key

LETTER	ARCHETYPE	TOTAL	IN ONE LINE
C	The Classicist		Right the first time, right in forty years
R	The Romantic		Softness, warmth, feeling over form
M	The Minimalist		Nothing extra, everything considered
X	The Maximalist		Scale, confidence, presence
A	The Antiquarian		History, hand-work, character over polish

READING YOUR RESULT

A clear winner (4+ of one letter). Go straight to that archetype. It will be uncannily accurate and mildly annoying.

A close pair. Extremely common, and usually the most interesting outcome — the best rings tend to live on the border between two archetypes. Read both, then use the tie-breaker on page 16.

Scattered across four or five. It means your taste is genuinely broad, which is a gift and a nuisance. Skip ahead to Frameworks Two and Three — the physical evidence will resolve what the questions couldn't.

COMMON PAIRS, AND WHAT THEY MEAN

C + M — you want quiet permanence. Look at bezel-set rounds and emerald cuts on plain bands.

R + A — the most natural pairing of all. Ovals and old cushions, milgrain, rose or yellow gold.

C + X — a classic shape at generous scale. A large round or oval solitaire, wider band.

M + A — unusual and excellent. Asscher or rose cut in a clean bezel, no ornament.

R + X — glamour with warmth. Pear or elongated oval, pavé everywhere, yellow gold.

Then read pages 11 and 12. Those two are overlays rather than archetypes — they sit on top of whatever you scored here, and each has a four-question test of its own. Skip them and you may end up with the right shape in the wrong spirit.

Do not average your two archetypes into a compromise. A ring that is half-minimalist and half-maximalist is not balanced, it is confused. Pick the dominant one for the shape and setting, and let the second one influence one single detail — the metal, the band, or the scale.



ARCHETYPE ONE

The Classicist

RIGHT THE FIRST TIME · RIGHT IN FORTY YEARS

You are not interested in being early to anything. You are interested in being right, and you've noticed that the two are rarely the same thing. Your instinct is to find the version of an object that has already survived several generations of opinion, buy that one, and stop thinking about it — which is, incidentally, exactly the correct way to buy an engagement ring.

The risk for you is not bad taste. It's blandness. There is a narrow but real difference between a classic ring and a default one, and it lives entirely in proportion and finish: the height of the setting, the thinness of the band, how the prongs taper, whether the stone sits close to the finger or floats above it. Two round solitaires can cost the same and look a decade apart in quality. Spend your attention there rather than on ornament.

STONE SHAPES	Round brilliant first, oval a close second. Cushion if you want a fraction more softness.
SETTINGS	Four- or six-prong solitaire; hidden halo if you want quiet extra sparkle; classic three-stone.
METALS	Platinum, or white gold if you'd rather not think about it. Yellow gold only if it runs in the family.
BAND	Slim, plain, or knife-edge. Nothing on it. The stone is the whole idea.
AVOID	Anything with a named silhouette that didn't exist ten years ago.



ARCHETYPE TWO

The Romantic

SOFTNESS · WARMTH · FEELING OVER FORM

You choose things the way you choose people — by how they make you feel in the first ten seconds, then you spend the rest of the time justifying it. This works far better than the people who plan everything would like to admit. You are drawn to curves over corners, warm metals over cool ones, and detail you have to lean in to see.

Your risk is fragility. Romantic rings tend to accumulate delicate features — fine pavé, thin scalloped bands, tiny stones set close to the surface — and every one of those is something that can loosen, catch or wear thin over twenty years of real life. You don't need to give up the softness. You need one structural decision underneath it: a slightly thicker band than the sketch suggests, or pavé that stops before the underside of the finger.

STONE SHAPES	Oval above all. Then pear, cushion, and elongated cushion. Heart only if you truly mean it.
SETTINGS	Pavé or scalloped bands, east-west orientation, soft clusters, a delicate halo.
METALS	Rose gold, or warm yellow gold. Both flatter warm skin and make the stone read whiter.
BAND	Fine but not wafer-thin. Ask for 1.8mm rather than 1.4mm and thank yourself later.
AVOID	Sharp step cuts and hard geometry. They'll photograph beautifully and feel like someone else's ring.



ARCHETYPE THREE

The Minimalist

NOTHING EXTRA · EVERYTHING CONSIDERED

You own fewer things than most people and like all of them. Your version of luxury is not abundance, it's the absence of anything you'd want to change. You'd rather a ring were mistaken for modest than caught trying, and you have a quiet, slightly ruthless eye for proportion that most people don't realise you're using on them.

Here is the thing nobody warns minimalists about: your archetype is the least forgiving. Ornament hides flaws. A plain bezel-set emerald cut hides nothing — not a slightly off-centre stone, not a millimetre of asymmetry in the band, not a stone with visible inclusions, because step cuts show everything a brilliant cut would scatter into sparkle. Your budget belongs in clarity and craftsmanship, not carat weight. A smaller, cleaner, better-cut stone is the whole strategy.

STONE SHAPES	Emerald cut, asscher, or a plain round. Elongated cushion if you want softer edges.
SETTINGS	Full bezel, half bezel, or flush. Low profile, close to the finger, no gallery detail.
METALS	Platinum or brushed white gold. Matte finishes suit you better than high polish.
BAND	Squared or flat rather than rounded. Clean edges. One continuous line.
AVOID	Halos, pavé, milgrain, engraving. Also: buying more carat than clarity.



ARCHETYPE FOUR

The Maximalist

SCALE · CONFIDENCE · PRESENCE

You have never once been accused of underdressing. You understand something that restrained people find slightly vulgar and secretly envy: that jewellery is supposed to be seen, that an engagement ring is a public object, and that there is no prize for owning the most tasteful ring at a party nobody remembers you at.

Your risk is buying spread instead of quality, because scale is seductive and there is always a bigger stone one grade down. The other risk is weight — a genuinely substantial ring you wear every day needs to be balanced, not just large, or it will spin and you'll stop wearing it. Ask for a slightly wider band than feels necessary; it carries the head, sits flat, and reads as intentional rather than top-heavy.

STONE SHAPES	Pear, marquise, radiant, or a long oval — shapes that cover the most finger for the weight.
SETTINGS	Three-stone with tapered baguettes, a proper halo, or a five-stone. Cathedral shoulders.
METALS	Yellow gold for warmth and drama. Platinum if you want the stone to do all the talking.
BAND	Wide and substantial, 2.5mm and up, pavé along the top if you like. It needs to hold its own.
AVOID	Trading two clarity grades for half a carat. Visible inclusions get more visible with size.



ARCHETYPE FIVE

The Antiquarian

HISTORY · HAND-WORK · CHARACTER OVER POLISH

You find new things faintly suspicious. Not out of contrarianism — you've simply noticed that objects made when labour was cheap and machines were bad have a warmth that modern precision engineers out. You would rather own something slightly irregular that a person clearly touched than something flawless a laser produced.

This is the most rewarding archetype and the most work. Genuine antique stones — old mine cushions, old European rounds, rose cuts — are cut for candlelight, not for a jeweller's spotlight. They glow rather than sparkle, they often grade poorly on paper, and they will look underwhelming in a showroom and extraordinary at dinner. Insist on seeing any old stone in daylight and lamplight before deciding, and ignore the certificate's opinion of it entirely.

STONE SHAPES	Old mine cushion, old European round, asscher, rose cut. Chunky facets, soft outlines.
SETTINGS	Engraved bezel, milgrain edges, filigree gallery, visible hand-work on the shoulders.
METALS	Yellow gold, ideally 18k with some warmth to it. Rose gold for later Victorian feeling.
BAND	Modest width with detail carried around the shoulders. Patina is a feature, not a fault.
AVOID	Over-restoration. Having the engraving sharpened or the metal re-polished erases the point.

Two things the quiz cannot ask you

The five archetypes are points on one spectrum of taste, so a quiz can resolve them. The next two are not. They are a *stance* and a set of *values*, and they sit on top of whichever archetype you landed on rather than replacing it — a Minimalist can be a Naturalist; a Classicist can be an Individualist, though she'll hide it better.



OVERLAY ONE

The Individualist

NOBODY ELSE'S RING · ON PURPOSE

You have a low tolerance for owning the same object as everyone you know. It isn't contrarianism — you simply lose interest in a thing the moment it becomes the obvious choice, and you'd rather explain a ring than have it explain itself.

The trap is choosing strange over good. Unusual cuts are made in small numbers, so quality varies wildly and symmetry is the first thing sacrificed. Asymmetry a designer intended reads confident; asymmetry that happened by accident reads cheap — and on a kite the difference is a fraction of a millimetre.

DOES IT APPLY TO YOU?

- ☐ I've talked myself out of something I loved because it got popular
- ☐ I would rather be asked about a ring than complimented on it
- ☐ The phrase "classic for a reason" makes me tired
- ☐ I own at least one thing nobody I know owns

Three or four ticks: the overlay applies. Two: it's a flavour, not a driver. One or none: skip it, and don't let anyone talk you into unusual for its own sake.

WHAT IT CHANGES IN YOUR BRIEF

SHAPE	Trade the canonical version for its odd cousin: hexagon, kite, half-moon, elongated cushion, or an old rose cut.
SETTING	Toi et moi, east-west orientation, an off-centre or bypass band, a cluster that isn't symmetrical.
METAL	Mixed is permitted here and nowhere else — a warm band with a white-metal head, deliberately.
INSIST ON	Seeing the actual stone, not a render. Symmetry, and a jeweller who has cut this shape before.

UNUSUAL SHAPES, DONE PROPERLY

Elixir designs to a brief rather than from a catalogue, which is the only sane way to buy a shape that isn't sitting in a tray somewhere. Visualise it on your own hand before anything is cut — theelixyr.com

The Naturalist

ORIGIN MATTERS · SO DOES THE MAKER

This one isn't about how a ring looks, it's about what you need to be true of it before you can enjoy wearing it. You want to know where the stone came from and who set it, you're drawn to materials that look like materials rather than like products, and a certificate that answers none of those questions doesn't reassure you much.

The good news is that this is the easiest overlay to satisfy and the one that has changed most in the last five years. Lab-grown stones, reclaimed gold, traceable rough and small independent makers are all genuinely available now rather than aspirational — and choosing them costs you nothing aesthetically.



DOES IT APPLY TO YOU?

- ☐ I've checked where something came from before buying it
- ☐ An inclusion or a mark of the hand reads as character, not fault
- ☐ I'd choose a smaller stone with a story I trust over a larger one without
- ☐ I'd rather buy from a person than from a brand

Three or four ticks: the overlay applies, and it should go at the top of your brief — it's a filter on *who you buy from*, which you settle before you discuss a single shape.

WHAT IT CHANGES IN YOUR BRIEF

STONE	Lab-grown, a traceable natural, or a coloured stone — sapphire, spinel, a salt-and-pepper diamond.
METAL	Recycled or reclaimed gold. Ask for it by name; most makers can source it and few volunteer it.
SETTING	Organic, hand-carved, textured or leaf-and-vine work. Visible hand-finishing rather than machine polish.
ASK	Where the stone was cut, who set the ring, and whether it can be repaired by the person who made it.

A note on coloured stones, since this overlay tends towards them: only sapphire and ruby are hard enough for genuinely daily wear. Emerald, opal and moonstone are beautiful and will not survive a decade on your left hand without care you have to remember to take.

THREE QUESTIONS THAT SEPARATE A MAKER FROM A MIDDLEMAN

“Who sets the stone?” If the answer is a name and a workshop, you're talking to a maker. If it's a vague third party in another country, you're talking to a retailer with a website.

“Can you source recycled gold?” Almost everyone can. Very few mention it unprompted, and the way they answer tells you how much of this they've actually thought about.

“Who repairs it in ten years?” The best answer is “we do.” A ring you can bring back to the person who made it is a different object from one you can only send away.

ONE HONEST CAVEAT

Nobody's supply chain is spotless, and any maker who tells you theirs is should worry you slightly. What you're looking for is not perfection — it's specificity. Someone who can name the cutter, the alloy and the workshop is doing the work. Someone who answers with adjectives is not.

Ask for the specifics in writing before you pay. Anyone doing this properly will be pleased you asked.

We answer all three in the first conversation, before a design exists — theelixyr.com

The Wardrobe Proxy

Every morning for years you have made small, unsupervised decisions about metal, scale and finish. That is a decade of data, and it is far more honest than any quiz — because you weren't being asked, so you had no reason to perform.

THE EVIDENCE	WHAT YOU'LL FIND	POINTS TO
Your everyday earrings	Small gold hoops or studs you never take out	Classicist
	Anything with movement, pearls, or a drop	Romantic
	One flat geometric stud, both ears the same	Minimalist
	Large, sculptural, impossible to miss	Maximalist
	Mismatched, secondhand, slightly tarnished	Antiquarian
Necklaces	One fine chain, worn alone, always	Classicist / Minimalist
	Three or four layered at different lengths	Romantic / Maximalist
	A locket, a charm, something with meaning in it	Antiquarian
Metal you reach for	Consistently silver-toned	Classicist / Minimalist
	Consistently warm gold	Maximalist / Antiquarian
	Rose, or happily mixed	Romantic
Your watch	Small and mechanical on leather, or slim and minimal on mesh	Classicist / Minimalist
	Gold bracelet, visible presence	Maximalist
Shoes you wear most	A good loafer or a plain court shoe	Classicist
	Something with a strap, a bow, a soft shape	Romantic
	Immaculate white trainers or a flat black boot	Minimalist
Sunglasses	Aviators or a small tortoiseshell frame; or thin wire, barely there	Classicist / Minimalist
	Oversized, tinted, a statement	Maximalist

HOW TO USE THE RESULT

Count the archetype that appears most. If it agrees with your quiz, you're finished with the taste question and can go straight to page 15. If it disagrees, the wardrobe wins on **metal and scale** — those are habits, and habits don't lie — while the quiz wins on **shape and setting**, which are aspirations you've never had the budget to express before.

Two smaller tells worth adding to the tally: bare or sheer nails lean Classicist and Minimalist while a soft pink or a proper red leans Romantic and Maximalist; and polished gold bag hardware leans Maximalist, no visible hardware at all leans Minimalist.

The Room Test

Nobody decorates for an audience. Your home is the one aesthetic decision you made entirely for yourself, with no dress code, no colleagues and nobody's opinion to manage — which makes it the purest signal of taste you own.

Stand in your living room and look at it as though it belonged to someone else. Which of these is it, honestly?

The warm collected room

Wood, brass, worn leather, books in stacks rather than rows, lamps rather than ceiling lights, at least one thing inherited. Nothing matches and it all works.

Your ring: warm metal, without question — yellow or rose gold. Softer outlines over sharp geometry: cushion, oval, old cuts. Detail you discover rather than detail that announces itself. **Antiquarian, Romantic.**

The gallery room

White or bone walls, very few objects, one good chair, one large piece of art, surfaces genuinely clear. What's there is deliberate and expensive and there isn't much of it.

Your ring: cool metal, low profile, no ornament. Step cuts and clean bezels. Spend on the quality of the stone rather than the amount of it, because there is nowhere for a flaw to hide. **Minimalist.**

The soft room

Textiles everywhere, cushions you actually use, fresh flowers or the intention of them, warm dimmable light, a colour palette that leans pink, sand, sage or cream.

Your ring: curves, warmth and fine detail. Oval or pear, pavé shoulders, rose or yellow gold. Nothing that reads as sharp or engineered. **Romantic.**

The composed room

Symmetrical, tidy, matching lamps either side of the sofa, a proper dining table, good linen, everything with a place it returns to. Guests always comment on it.

Your ring: the canonical version, executed well. Round or oval solitaire, platinum, slim band, perfect proportion. Balance matters more to you than novelty. **Classicist.**

The maximal room

Colour on the walls, pattern on the pattern, a gallery wall, big lighting, at least one piece of furniture that made someone in your family raise an eyebrow.

Your ring: scale and structure. Pear, marquise or radiant, three-stone or halo, yellow gold, a band with real substance. Under-buying will haunt you. **Maximalist.**

If your room is one thing because you rent, inherited the furniture, or share it with someone whose taste you're negotiating around — answer for the room you'd have if none of that were true. That's the one that counts.

The Life Test

This is the framework that saves the ring. Taste tells you what you'll love in a showroom. This tells you what you'll still be wearing on a Tuesday in year six, which is the only test that has ever mattered.

Tick everything that is true of an ordinary week. Not a good week — an ordinary one.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ I lift weights or use gym equipment | ☐ I swim, climb, ride or play a racquet sport |
| ☐ I type for more than four hours a day | ☐ My hands are in and out of water all day |
| ☐ I work with my hands, tools or machinery | ☐ I use hand sanitiser or strong soap constantly |
| ☐ I cook most nights, properly | ☐ I care for patients, animals or the elderly |
| ☐ I garden, pot, throw clay or paint | ☐ My fingers change size noticeably with heat or salt |
| ☐ I have small children, or will soon | ☐ I'm rough with my things and I know it |
| ☐ I wear gloves for work of any kind | ☐ I never take jewellery off, for anything |

TICKS

WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE RING

0–2	You have a free hand. Prongs, height, delicacy — all fine. Choose entirely on taste and simply keep it insured.
3–5	Stay under a medium profile. Six prongs rather than four, or a half bezel. Skip pavé on the underside of the band. Expect one prong check a year.
6–8	Low profile, bezel or half-bezel, and a band of at least 2mm. Avoid marquise points, pear tips and princess corners unless they're protected. Consider a plain band for work days and the ring for the rest.
9+	Full bezel, flush setting, sturdy band, and accept from the start that you'll take it off for some things. This is not a compromise on beauty — bezels are having their best decade in a century.

THE THREE FAILURES NOBODY PREDICTS

Spin. A heavy head on a light band rotates on the finger all day. The fix is band weight, not a tighter size — a ring sized too small to stop spinning will hurt by evening and won't come off in summer.

Snag. High cathedral settings and exposed prongs catch on knitwear, hair, upholstery and children. You'll notice within a week and resent it within a month.

Wear. Rose gold and 18k yellow hold up well. Very thin bands of any metal thin out where they meet the palm, and eventually need rebuilding.

YOUR NON-NEGOTIABLES

Write the three things this page decided for you. These override taste, and they go on your brief on page 26.

The Tie-Breaker

Most people finish these frameworks holding two archetypes and a suspicion that they've been indecisive. You haven't. Real taste is nearly always a dominant instinct with a second one arguing underneath it. These three questions decide which is which.

One — The vanishing test

Imagine you lost the ring and had to describe it from memory to someone who'd never seen it. What comes out of your mouth first — the *stone*, the *metal*, or the *detail*?

Stone first → your dominant archetype is the one that decides shape (Classicist, Minimalist or Maximalist). **Metal or detail first** → it's the warm one (Romantic or Antiquarian). Whatever you name first is the thing that must not be compromised.

Two — The witness test

Whose reaction are you imagining when you picture showing it off? Your mother, your closest friend, a room of colleagues, or nobody — just your own hand on a steering wheel.

A room → Maximalist is dominant, and you should stop pretending otherwise. **One person** → Romantic or Antiquarian. **Nobody** → Minimalist or Classicist. There is no wrong answer here, only an unhelpfully polite one.

Three — The budget test

The number is fixed and you must sacrifice one: half a carat of size, one grade of clarity, or the hand-finishing and setting detail.

Sacrifice size → Minimalist or Classicist. **Sacrifice clarity** → Maximalist. **Sacrifice the detail** → you're not the Antiquarian or Romantic you thought you were, and that's genuinely useful to know now rather than later.

Let the dominant archetype choose the shape and the setting. Let the second one choose exactly one thing — the metal, the band, or the scale. That single borrowed detail is what stops a well-chosen ring looking like it came out of a formula.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Quiz says **Minimalist** by four, **Antiquarian** by three. Wardrobe is all warm gold. Vanishing test: she says *metal* first. Life test: seven ticks.

Result — an asscher or old European cut in a clean full bezel, absolutely no ornament, but in warm 18k yellow gold rather than platinum, on a squared 2.2mm band. Minimalist structure, Antiquarian warmth, low enough to survive her week.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not split the difference feature by feature. A pavé band with a bezel head and milgrain on one shoulder is not a synthesis of three archetypes, it's a ring designed by committee. Restraint in *how many* ideas a ring contains is the single largest difference between jewellery that looks expensive and jewellery that cost a lot.

Ring Anatomy, in a Minute

Five words. That is the entire vocabulary you need to be taken seriously in a showroom, and the reason most people feel lost there is that nobody ever bothered to define them.

Stone	The gem itself — the raw material, before anyone decides what to do with it. Diamond, sapphire, moissanite. Its <i>weight</i> is measured in carats, which is not the same thing as its size. This is usually where most of the money goes, and not always where it should.
Cut & shape	Two different things wearing one word. Shape is the outline seen from above: round, oval, emerald, pear. Cut is the quality of the faceting — how precisely the angles were made, and therefore how much light comes back out. Shape is taste. Cut is craftsmanship, and it is the one factor your eye notices from across a room.
Setting	The metalwork that holds the stone, and the single biggest lever over how a ring looks and how it survives. Prongs, bezel, halo, three-stone. Two identical stones in two different settings are two different rings.
Band	The circle that goes round the finger, also called the <i>shank</i> . Measured in millimetres of width. It decides comfort, whether the ring spins, and — more than anyone expects — how long your finger looks.
Metal	Platinum, white gold, yellow gold, rose gold. A decision about colour, about durability, and quietly about maintenance, since some finishes are permanent and one of them isn't.

THE SENTENCE TO SAY OUT LOUD

"I'm looking for an *elongated cushion*, around 7mm across the top, in a *low half-bezel*, on a 2mm yellow gold band." Five terms, one sentence. It ends the browsing phase immediately and moves you to the only conversation worth having, which is about the stone in front of you.

TWO TERMS THAT WILL COME UP

Profile — how high the stone sits above the finger, seen from the side. Nobody mentions it and it decides how much your ring catches on things.

Spread — millimetres across the face-up top of the stone. Ask for it every time. It is the honest measure of size, and carat weight is not.

SKIP THE SHOWROOM VOCABULARY TEST

Describe the ring in your own words and we'll translate it into a design — then show it to you on your own hand. theelixyr.com

The Ten Shapes



Shapes do not only look different, they *read* differently — and they behave differently in real life. This is what each one is actually saying.

SHAPE	WHAT IT READS AS	WHAT TO KNOW
Round brilliant	Certain, safe, unarguable	The most brilliance of any shape and the most expensive per carat, because cutting one wastes the most rough. Hides inclusions well.
Oval	Soft, elegant, quietly fashionable	Lengthens the finger and looks larger than its weight. Check for a “bow-tie” — a dark band across the middle — in daylight.
Cushion	Warm, romantic, a little vintage	A softened square with chunky facets. Ranges from nearly-square to distinctly elongated, and the two look nothing alike.
Emerald	Architectural, composed, grown-up	A step cut: long flashes instead of sparkle. Shows every inclusion, so pay for clarity. Reads larger than a round of equal weight.
Pear	Dramatic, distinctive, elongating	Must be perfectly symmetrical or it reads crooked forever. The point needs a V-tip to protect it.
Marquise	Bold, old-world, deliberately unusual	The largest face-up spread per carat of any shape. Two vulnerable points, and the most lengthening of all.
Princess	Sharp, modern, efficient	Excellent value per carat. The four corners are the weak spot and want protecting in the setting.
Radiant	Lively, glamorous, generous	Cut corners plus brilliant faceting. More sparkle than an emerald cut, more forgiving on clarity, reads wide.
Asscher	Deco, considered, unusual	A square step cut with deep clipped corners and a hall-of-mirrors depth. Rewards clarity, punishes shortcuts.
Heart	Unambiguously romantic	The hardest shape to cut convincingly. Needs real size — much below 0.75ct the outline stops being legible.

Beyond the ten. There is a second tier worth knowing about, cut in far smaller numbers and priced accordingly: *hexagon* and *kite* for hard, deliberate geometry; *half-moon* as a centre stone rather than a flanker; and the *elongated cushion*, which is the single most useful shape on either list — soft outline, real face-up length, and forgiving on clarity. Because these are cut in small batches, symmetry varies far more than it does in the ten above. Always see the actual stone.

What the stone is made of — natural, lab-grown, moissanite, sapphire — is a separate decision from shape, and it changes nothing on this page. Take it on page 23, where it belongs, alongside the only four quality measures worth arguing about.

Hands & Shapes

There is no such thing as an unflattering hand, only a mismatch of proportion. Shape doesn't flatter a hand by being small or large — it does it by running with or against the lines already there.

Lay your hand flat on a table, palm down, relaxed. Find yourself below.

YOUR HAND	BEST SHAPES	ALSO GOOD	THE BAND NOTE
Short fingers	Oval, pear, marquise, emerald — anything longer than it is wide, set north-south	Elongated cushion, radiant	Keep the band narrow. Wide bands eat visual finger length. Avoid wide round or princess stones.
Long, slender fingers	Round, cushion, princess, asscher — shapes with width to balance the line	Almost anything; you have the most freedom	You can carry a wider band and a larger stone than you think. Very long marquise can over-elongate.
Broad or wide fingers	Cushion, radiant, round, oval at generous scale — stones with real face-up width	Emerald cut set north-south	Go wider, 2.5mm and up. A tiny stone on a thin band emphasises width rather than hiding it.
Small hands overall	Round, oval, emerald at modest carat — a smaller stone reads larger here	Asscher, cushion	Fine bands, low profile. Restraint is doing you a favour; scale that fights the hand looks borrowed.
Large hands	Radiant, cushion, large oval, pear — shapes that hold their own	Three-stone and five-stone designs	Substantial band, wider spread. Delicate micro-pavé simply disappears on you.
Prominent knuckles	Oval, cushion, round — softened outlines, always low-set	Bezel-set anything	Wider band for balance and a low profile so it doesn't spin. Sizing must clear the knuckle, so weight matters.
Short nail beds	Oval, pear, marquise — length above draws the eye down the finger	Elongated emerald	Set the stone north-south rather than east-west, which shortens the whole finger.

THREE LEVERS MOST PEOPLE MISS

Orientation. The same oval set east-west (across the finger) reads modern and wide; set north-south it reads elongating and traditional. It's the cheapest change on this list and the most dramatic.

Band width. Band width alters apparent finger length more than stone size does. Narrow lengthens, wide shortens. This is why a beautiful ring can look wrong on a hand it should suit.

Profile height. How far the stone sits above the finger changes how big it looks head-on and how much it snags. High reads larger and catches; low reads sleeker and lasts.

TRY THIS BEFORE YOU COMMIT

Ask to try the same carat weight in three shapes on your own hand, in daylight, with bare nails. Not photographs — hands. Then photograph your own hand rather than looking in a mirror, because you will spend the next forty years seeing this ring from above, at arm's length, on your hand and no one else's.

And try it at the end of the day. Fingers are meaningfully larger in the evening, in heat, and after salt. A ring fitted at 10am in winter is a different ring in August.

The Ten Settings

The setting is the decision people spend the least time on and regret the most. It controls how large the stone reads, how the ring feels on the hand, how much maintenance you have signed up for, and whether the design will still look current in fifteen years.

SETTING	THE LOOK	THE TRADE-OFF
Solitaire	One stone, prongs, nothing else	The purest and least forgiving. Nowhere to hide a mediocre stone.
Bezel	Metal rim fully around the stone	Toughest option and the most modern. Covers a sliver of the stone's edge, so it can read slightly smaller.
Half bezel	Metal on two sides only	The best compromise — most of the protection, most of the light.
Halo	Small stones circling the centre	Makes a modest stone read much larger. Dates faster than anything else here, and needs more maintenance.
Hidden halo	Stones set under the centre, unseen from above	Sparkle from the side, clean from the top. Adds height, which matters if you snag.
Three-stone	Centre flanked by two smaller stones	Presence without a halo's fussiness. Flanking baguettes read deco; round flanks read classic.
Pavé band	Small stones along the shoulders	Beautiful, and the most common repair. Never carry pavé under the finger.
Cathedral	Shoulders arch up to hold the stone high	Elegant in profile, the worst offender for catching on things.
Toi et moi	Two stones side by side, often different shapes	Two-of-us symbolism, and genuinely unusual. Needs deliberate asymmetry and a maker who has done it before.
East-west	An elongated stone turned across the finger	The cheapest way to make a familiar shape look considered. Shortens the apparent finger, so check it on your own hand.

THE RESIZING TRAP

Fingers change — with heat, salt, pregnancy, age, and by half a size across an ordinary decade. Most rings can absorb that. Two cannot.

Eternity bands and full pavé bands resize badly or not at all, because there is no plain metal to cut into and every stone is spaced to a fixed circumference. If you want stones all the way round, buy it knowing that. If you want stones on the shoulders only, you keep the option open for life.

TWO QUESTIONS THE SETTING ANSWERS FOR YOU

How often will this be serviced? Prongs and pavé want checking annually. A bezel is close to fit-and-forget. This is a real cost and nobody quotes it.

Will it sit flush with a wedding band? Cathedral shoulders and low-set solitaires often won't, which means either a shaped band later or a gap you'll notice forever. Ask now, not in three years.

ONE DECISION, THREE VERSIONS

Not sure between a bezel and a low six-prong? We'll render your stone in both, on your hand, before anything is committed —

theelixyr.com

Metals

There is one rule here that overrides everything else on this page, so it goes first: **match the metal she already wears every day**. A ring in a metal that fights ten years of accumulated jewellery will always look slightly borrowed, no matter how good it is.

METAL	SUITS	IN PRACTICE
Platinum	Cool and neutral undertones; anyone who wears silver by instinct; anyone with a nickel sensitivity	Densest and most secure for prongs, and naturally white for life — no plating to maintain. Develops a soft grey patina that can be re-polished. Heaviest and dearest.
White gold	The same as platinum, at lower cost	Yellow gold alloyed pale and rhodium-plated white. The plating wears through at the palm and needs re-dipping every one to three years — inexpensive, but forever. Often contains nickel.
Yellow gold	Warm, olive and deeper undertones; anyone drawn to gold jewellery already	18k is richer in colour and softer; 14k is harder, paler and more scratch-resistant — a real choice, not a downgrade. Warm metal makes a slightly tinted stone read whiter, which is a genuinely useful budget lever.
Rose gold	Almost everyone, and pink undertones especially	The copper in the alloy makes it the hardest-wearing of the golds. Deepens slightly with age, which most people come to like. Never needs plating.

THE UNDERTONE TEST, IN THIRTY SECONDS

Turn your wrist over and look at the veins in daylight, not under a bulb. **Blue or purple** — cool undertone, and white metals will look crisp on you. **Green or olive** — warm undertone, and gold will look like it belongs. **Can't tell** — neutral, which means you get to choose on taste alone. Lucky.

Then check it against the evidence: hold the ring against the inside of your wrist, and look at what your existing jewellery has quietly converged on over a decade. If the test and the habit disagree, the habit wins.

And if you like both, mix them on purpose. A warm band with a white-metal head is a design decision with a long history, not a mistake — but decide it, don't drift into it.

IF JEWELLERY EVER IRRITATES YOUR SKIN

Say so before you choose. Nickel is the usual culprit and it lives in most white gold alloys. Platinum is close to inert and is the correct answer for a sensitive skin; palladium white gold is the cheaper alternative. This is not a small comfort issue — it decides whether a ring gets worn.

THE THREE-PART RULE

Colour is taste. **Hardness** is lifestyle — 14k and platinum for hands that work, 18k for hands that don't.

Maintenance is temperament, and white gold is the only one that asks anything of you.

Choose in that order and you cannot get it wrong.

Scale & Proportion



Carat is a measure of weight, not of size. This single misunderstanding is responsible for more disappointing rings than any other, and correcting it is the closest thing to free money in this entire process.

A carat weighs a fifth of a gram. Where that weight sits is a choice: a stone can be cut deep, hoarding weight below the surface where nobody will ever see it, or spread wide, putting the weight into the face that shows. Two one-carat stones can differ by more than fifteen per cent in the area they actually cover on your finger.

So the number to care about is **spread** — millimetres across the top — and the ratio of that to your own finger. Ask for the mm dimensions of every stone you consider, not just the weight. Any jeweller worth buying from will have them to hand.

THE FINGER-WIDTH EFFECT

The same stone looks materially different across ring sizes, because the eye judges the stone against the finger it sits on, not in isolation. If your ring size is small, you can go a quarter-carat lighter than you planned and lose nothing visually. If it's larger, the same stone reads modest and you should budget for spread rather than pay for depth.

FACE-UP SIZE AT ONE CARAT

SHAPE	APPROX. MM	READS
Marquise	10.0 × 5.0	Largest
Pear	8.0 × 5.0	Very large
Oval	7.7 × 5.7	Very large
Emerald	7.0 × 5.0	Large
Radiant	6.5 × 5.0	Medium
Round	6.4 × 6.4	Medium
Heart	6.5 × 6.5	Medium
Cushion	5.6 × 5.6	Smaller
Princess	5.5 × 5.5	Smaller
Asscher	5.5 × 5.5	Smallest

Typical figures for well-proportioned stones; individual cuts vary. The lesson is the ranking, not the decimals — an elongated shape buys you visible size that a square one keeps hidden underneath.

THREE WAYS TO BUY VISIBLE SIZE WITHOUT BUYING WEIGHT

- One.** Choose an elongated shape. An oval or marquise gives you the look of a noticeably heavier round.
- Two.** Sit just under a round weight. A 0.92ct and a 1.00ct are indistinguishable on a hand and not at all indistinguishable on an invoice.
- Three.** Use the setting. A hidden halo, a thin band, or a bezel with a slim rim all make the same stone read larger by changing what surrounds it.

Stones, Honestly

This page exists to save you from the four-hour version of this conversation. Two decisions matter: what the stone is, and which of its four graded qualities your eye can actually detect. Everything else is a salesman's structure, not yours.

WHAT THE STONE IS

OPTION	WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS	CHOOSE IT IF
Natural diamond	Mined; formed over a geological timescale	Origin and continuity matter to you, or it's a family expectation you're happy to meet. Ask for traceability if that matters — increasingly it can be given.
Lab-grown diamond	Chemically and optically diamond, grown in weeks rather than aeons	You want visibly more stone for the same money. Identical hardness and sparkle; no resale value to speak of, and prices are still falling.
Moissanite	A different mineral entirely, not a fake diamond	You like a livelier, more rainbow-flashing sparkle and a fraction of the cost. Hard enough for daily wear. Some people see the extra fire immediately; most never do.
Sapphire or ruby	Corundum — the only coloured stones genuinely tough enough for a ring worn every day	You want colour, and something that reads as a considered choice rather than a substitution. Emerald, opal and moonstone are lovely and will not survive the decade.

Lab-grown versus natural is a values question, not a styling one. It changes nothing about shape, proportion or how a ring flatters a hand — and well-cut examples of either are indistinguishable to every person who will ever see your finger.

THE FOUR CS, RANKED BY WHAT THE EYE NOTICES

IN ORDER	WHAT IT IS	WHERE TO SPEND, AND WHERE NOT TO
1. Cut	The precision of the faceting — how well light returns	Spend here first, always. Cut is the only C you can see from across a room, and a poorly cut large stone looks duller than a beautifully cut smaller one. Never compromise it for weight.
2. Colour	How far from colourless the stone sits	Aim for near-colourless rather than top of the scale. Warm metal disguises a faint tint entirely, so a yellow gold setting buys you two grades free.
3. Clarity	Internal inclusions and surface marks	You want eye-clean , not flawless — no visible inclusion at arm's length. Paying for perfection only a loupe can verify is the most common way to waste money in this process. Step cuts are the exception: they hide nothing, so buy clarity there.
4. Carat	Weight, not size	The number everyone leads with and the one that matters least. Sit just under a round weight, and buy spread rather than depth.

One line to remember for the showroom: **well-proportioned beats large, and eye-clean beats flawless.** A stone chosen that way looks more expensive than a heavier one chosen the other way round, every single time.

The Practical Page

Three unglamorous things that decide whether this goes well: getting the size right without spoiling a surprise, ignoring a rule you've been told is tradition, and having a way out if you've guessed wrong.

SIZING, WITHOUT ASKING

Borrow a ring — the right one. Take one she already wears on the *correct finger of the correct hand*. Hands differ by up to half a size, and a thumb or index ring will send you two sizes wrong.

If you can only borrow it briefly: trace the inner circle on paper and measure the inner diameter in millimetres, or press the ring into a bar of soap to leave a clean impression. Either gives a jeweller enough to work from.

Err larger, not smaller. Cold fingers run measurably smaller and evening fingers run larger. A ring that is slightly loose can be sized down routinely; one that won't pass the knuckle is a problem on the day itself.

And check the setting first: a plain or partly-set band resizes easily, an eternity or full pavé band barely resizes at all.

HOW LONG IT ACTUALLY TAKES

Plan on **four to eight weeks** for something designed rather than bought off a tray, and longer if you want an unusual shape or an antique stone found for you. Sourcing takes as long as making. Add a fortnight if you want to see it and change your mind once, which you should.

If you're working to a date — a holiday, an anniversary, a family gathering — say so in the first conversation, not the third. It changes what's realistic.

INSURANCE, IN ONE PARAGRAPH

Get it valued and insured *before* the first near-miss, not after. Ask the maker for a written valuation on collection; most provide one and few mention it. Then photograph the ring from four angles and keep the valuation somewhere that isn't the ring box.

THE RULE THAT ISN'T A RULE

"Two to three months' salary" is not tradition, etiquette, or anything anyone's grandmother invented. It was written by an advertising agency in the twentieth century to sell diamonds, and it worked so well that people now quote it back as heritage.

There is no correct number. There is only a number that doesn't damage the first year of your marriage. Spend it well — on cut, on proportion, on a setting that lasts — and spend less of it than the folklore says.

THE SAFETY NET

If you have worked through the partner pages and still aren't certain, take one of these two exits. Neither is a failure of romance.

Shop together. A ring she helped choose is not a lesser ring. The proposal is still yours to plan, keep secret and get right.

Propose with a placeholder. A simple band, an heirloom, or a temporary stone — then design the real one together in the weeks after. Increasingly common, and it removes the only genuinely irreversible risk in this whole process.

BOOK A 1:1 RING DESIGN CONSULTATION

Send us your completed brief and we'll take it from there — shape, stone, setting and scale, visualised on your own hand before anything is made. No showroom, no pressure, no browsing four hundred rings.

DM [@theelixyratelier](https://www.instagram.com/theelixyratelier) or start at theelixyr.com

Reading the Signals

If you're doing this without her knowing, you don't have to guess. She has almost certainly left a detailed, timestamped record of her taste on her phone. You just need to know how to read it, and which ninety per cent of it to ignore.

WHERE THE REAL EVIDENCE IS

Her saved posts, not her likes. Likes are politeness and boredom. A save is intent — she went back for it. If you can see a saved collection with rings in it, that is the highest-quality signal available to you anywhere.

Pinterest boards, sorted by date. Look at what she pinned in the last six months, not what's been sitting there since 2019. Taste moves. The old pins tell you who she was.

Repetition beats enthusiasm. One dramatic ring she gasped at means less than the same understated oval appearing eleven times across four boards. Count, don't interpret.

Unprompted verdicts on other people's rings. The single best source you have, and it costs nothing. When a colleague gets engaged, she will tell you exactly what she thinks — “gorgeous, but I could never wear something that big,” “I love that it's so simple.” Write those down the same day. They are honest in a way nothing she'd say to a direct question ever is.

WHAT TO ACTUALLY RECORD

For each ring that recurs, note four things only: **stone shape, metal colour, setting height** (does it sit up or lie flat), and **whether the band has stones on it**. Four data points across ten saved images will give you a shape, a metal and a setting with real confidence. That is more than enough to walk into a jeweller with.

WHAT TO IGNORE

Anything on a hand that isn't a hand — renders, stock images and studio shots on white flatter every ring equally and tell you nothing about scale.

Celebrity rings. She's admiring the wedding, not the setting.

Anything she pinned during a friend's engagement. That's participation, not preference.

RECRUIT ONE ACCOMPLICE

A sister, her closest friend, or her mother — whoever can genuinely keep a secret, which is a narrower group than it looks. One person who can go shopping with her, admire something and report back is worth more than a hundred saved images. Ask well, though. Not “what ring does she want” — you'll get a description of one specific ring from one specific afternoon. Ask these three instead:

- “Has she ever said what she *doesn't* want?” The negatives are always more reliable than the positives, and they're what saves you.
- “Gold or silver — what does she actually wear?”
- “Does she want to be surprised, or does she want to be involved?” This is the most important question on the page.

SIZE, AND THE WAY OUT

Both are handled properly on page 24 — how to get her size from a borrowed ring without asking, and the two entirely respectable exits if you finish this page and still aren't sure.

If the answer to the third question is “involved” — believe it. A ring she helped choose is not a less romantic ring. It's one she'll wear for fifty years.

THE OUTCOME

Your Ring Brief

Everything in this guide was built to fill in this one page. Complete it, photograph it, and hand it to any jeweller. It replaces four showroom appointments and every conversation that begins "I'm not really sure what I'm looking for."

DOMINANT ARCHETYPE

SECONDARY ARCHETYPE

OVERLAYS — INDIVIDUALIST / NATURALIST / NEITHER

STONE SHAPE — FIRST CHOICE

STONE SHAPE — ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE

ORIENTATION (NORTH-SOUTH / EAST-WEST)

SETTING

PROFILE HEIGHT (LOW / MEDIUM / HIGH)

METAL

BAND WIDTH (MM)

STONES ON THE BAND? (YES / NO / TOP ONLY)

TARGET SPREAD (MM ACROSS THE TOP)

CARAT RANGE

STONE — NATURAL / LAB-GROWN / OTHER

RING SIZE (AND HAND)

NON-NEGOTIABLES — FROM PAGE 15

ABSOLUTE NOS — THINGS I DON'T WANT TO BE SHOWN

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU PAY

One. What are the stone's millimetre dimensions, and may I see it in daylight as well as under your lights?

Two. How is this setting maintained, how often, and is that included?

Three. If she wants it resized in five years, what can and cannot be changed about this design?

BRING THIS PAGE TO US

Photograph the completed brief and send it over — we'll design directly from it and render it on your own hand. DM [@theelixyratelier](https://www.instagram.com/theelixyratelier) or go to theelixyr.com

ELIXYR

One good decision, made properly

If you've worked through all four frameworks, you now know more about your own taste than most people learn in a year of browsing — and you have it written down in a form a jeweller can build from. That was the whole point. Not to narrow the world down to one ring, but to make the ring you choose unmistakably yours.

Bring your completed brief to Elixir and we'll design from it directly — shape, setting, metal and scale exactly as you've specified, visualised on your own hand before anything is made.

BOOK A 1:1 RING DESIGN CONSULTATION

Twenty-five minutes, one to one. We read your brief, tell you honestly where to spend and where not to, and design from there.

DM [@theelixyratelier](#) — or begin at theelixyr.com

THE RING COMPASS · A STYLING GUIDE BY ELIXYR