

What you need to know about silver and silver jewelry

Silver is perhaps the most readily available and affordable precious metals on the planet. What makes silver jewelry truly special is that silver jewelry has a way of blending in with any type of clothing and is ideal for embedding gemstones. Compare silver to gold and the subtle and classy look of silver comes to the forefront. Today, there is so much variety available in silver jewelry that it has become increasingly difficult to keep up with the latest fashions and also with the various terms associated with silver jewelry. If you have no idea what sterling silver is and what the difference between antique silver and antique silver finish is, read on.

Sterling silver is an alloy of silver that has close to 93% (92.5% to be precise) silver and usually another metal like copper. The most common form of silver (known as 925 or sterling silver) is actually a combination of 92.5% silver and 7.5% copper. The number 925 denotes the amount of pure silver in 1000 parts of metal. Sterling silver is the minimum acceptable quality of silver for jewelry; there are purer alloys of silver also available. Fine silver is 99.9% silver and is used exclusively for making bullion bars as pure silver is too soft for making silver jewelry.

Apart from 925 sterling silver, Britannia silver and Mexican silver is also used for jewelry and other silverware. Britannia silver is composed of 95.84% silver and 4.16% copper. Today jewelry made from Britannia silver is marked with the symbol for Britannia or has the numbers '958' engraved indicating the percentage of silver in the alloy used. Apart from sterling silver and Britannia silver, Mexican silver is also used for making jewelry. Mexican silver has 95% silver and 5% copper; the number 950 is used for silverware made from Mexican silver. Coins are made from 900 (90% silver) and utensils and cutlery is usually crafted from German silver (800 or 80% silver).

The next time you are buying silver jewelry, make sure you read the hallmark. By law all hallmarked silver in the US has to mention the percentage of the silver used in the jewelry. So if you see the words 'sterling silver' or '925' engraved on a piece of jewelry you can easily ascertain the percentage of silver in the jewelry. In fact, the same system of indicating the percentage is also used for gold and platinum, and is called the Millesimal fineness system. Interestingly, Mexican silver is called Mexican silver not because the silver is from Mexico, but because some time ago all silver jewelry in Mexico was made from an alloy with 95% silver, the same holds good for Britannia and German silver.

If you are looking for pure silver then the only way to buy pure silver is in the form of specially crafted coins or bullion bars. A majority of jewelry made today is crafted from sterling silver and other alloys of silver like Britannia silver are rarely used for making silver jewelry.

What is Antique Silver?

Antique silver is basically sterling silver that is given an antique finish. This means, while the silver can be brand new; the finish given to the silver will make it look like an antique. If you are looking to buy jewelry make sure you understand the difference between an antique finish and genuine antiques. It is essential to understand that jewelers are not trying to mislead you when they say their jewelry is made in antique silver, they are simply referring to the finish of the jewelry. Antique silver acquires its look due to the slow oxidization of silver over a period of time, using various techniques jewelers can impart an antique look to silver.

Resource Box

www.fashionislandjewelry.com is one of the leading silver jewelry sites on the internet.

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