Melvyn Kirtley, Tiffany & Co.'s chief gemologist.

Tiffany & Co. Gemologist Melvyn Kirtley

Precious stones.

STORY: *Catherine Dunwoody*

When one asks Tiffany & Co.'s chief gemologist, Melvyn Kirtley, to comment on global trends in luxury jewellery, the answer he gives may surprise. Seemingly in a self-admitted bit of a bubble, he laughs, "I keep in touch with trends in gemstones, but I've pretty much stayed within the Tiffany world." Considering that most every competitive luxury jewellery brand keeps an eye on what those famous blue boxes contain every season, perhaps creating within said bubble is the secret to Tiffany & Co.'s success.

Truly an Englishman in New York, the charming Kirtley is the ultimate expert on the brand's diamond legacy, as he's been with the company for some 30 years, travelling the globe, and is now based at headquarters. His decades of experience and deep knowledge of Tiffany & Co.'s history are impressive, but perhaps it's his skill in breaking down and explaining things when it comes to diamonds, gemstones, and buying tips that sets him apart. Speaking of diamonds, probe Kirtley to determine which of the four Cs—colour, cut, clarity, and carat—is the most important, and without even a pause for a breath, he has the answer: "Hands down, it's cut. If a diamond is not perfectly cut, not proportioned, not beautifully faceted and polished, it's just not going to be brilliant," he says. "It'll be dead." Clearly, not all ice is fiery. As for coloured diamonds, a hot trend from many years ago that is apparently still going strong, Kirtley says "yellow are the most popular," adding that "pure pinks and blues are also highly collectible and hard to find." Coloured gemstones are another specialty of Kirtley's, and he believes rings are the jewellery piece of choice to best show off their shade and sparkle. "We're seeing lovely, unusual cuts here as well," he says. "Like pear shapes, elongated rectangles with rounded corners, and kite-shaped cuts."

Tiffany & Co. offers designs in platinum, which Kirtley maintains is worth every penny for its wear and longevity. Many pieces are created with yellow gold, and a limited collection of rose gold. Mixing and stacking jewellery, without concern for sticking to one colour, is a tendency that has become perfectly acceptable, and most certainly stylish.

One of the most interesting trends in both costume and luxury jewellery to emerge over the last few years is what has been deemed the "statement piece"—a larger, more bold, often colourful accessory designed to, quite simply, make a statement. When looking to purchase such an item, the most important thing is "wearability," Kirtley says. "Even with statement pieces, we want our customers to wear them as much as possible." Whether that piece is an extravagant necklace or a show-stopping bracelet, he believes it "has to fit beautifully, has to work in many different ways in your life." Shine bright.