

NO White metals' cool allure has captured imaginations for centuries. You may prefer one kind of white metal, or you may be surprised to discover a new favorite among the wide range of white metals used in jewelry today. Each has its distinct advantages and some have unique looks and applications for jewelry. Understanding the qualities of each different white jewelry metal can help ensure that the piece you select today will offer a lifetime of joy and satisfaction.

What Are The White Jewelry Metals?

Sterling Silver: From the ancient worlds of Byzantium and Egypt 4,000 years ago, to the New World mines of Mexico and Peru during the 17th and 18th centuries, the lure of silver has fascinated kings and conquerors. Today, silver has drawn some of our top jewelry designers to craft affordable, must-have items for the most stylish consumers.

Platinum: Pure, rare, eternal — these qualities set platinum apart. A favorite of famous jewelry designer Peter Carl Fabergé and the metal of choice for “platinum blondes” in Hollywood’s heyday, this precious metal has enjoyed yet another surge in popularity in recent years, particularly among discriminating bridal buyers.

White Gold: A World War II favorite, white gold meant patriotism for that era’s marrying couples, when platinum was taken off the market for use in the war effort. Today, white gold offers affordability and fashionable fun.

Palladium: Palladium is the “newest” white metal to make a splash among jewelry makers. A platinum group metal that’s not actually new, palladium shares many of platinum’s rich benefits at more affordable prices. Its qualities make it a favorite metal for many different styles of jewelry.

Titanium, Tungsten Carbide, Stainless Steel: These three industrial metals fascinate men and women alike — but the guys dominate. That’s probably due to the metals’ popularity in watches and their “technical” qualities. They are tough and can take a lot of wear and tear — another plus.

Sterling Silver

The Look

Sterling silver is a versatile metal and can have a high polish, matte, brushed, satin, sandblasted, oxidized (chemically blackened), or antiqued finish.

Insider Details

Silver is a naturally soft metal and must be mixed with other metals to create an alloy; it is commonly mixed with copper. For jewelry to be labeled sterling silver, it must contain at least 92.5% pure silver. Genuine sterling silver jewelry will be marked with a 925, .925, 92.5 or “Ster.”

Advantages & Disadvantages

Sterling silver’s versatility and affordability create limitless options for fashionable jewelry. While sterling silver can tarnish or darken, it is easy to return silver to its natural finish with proper care and cleaning.



Sterling silver Frozen Tears bracelet by Emanuela Duca

Platinum

The Look

Platinum’s luster complements the sparkle of diamonds and gems. Its finish can range from a bright polish to a soft matte texture.

Insider Details

Jewelry made with platinum will have markings of Platinum, Pt, or Plat, meaning that it contains at least 95% pure platinum. If marked “iridplat,” it contains 90% platinum and 10% iridium, another platinum group metal. Platinum content is shown as 999 for 99.9% pure platinum, 950 for 95%, 900 for 90%, 850 for 85%, and so on.

Advantages, Disadvantages

Platinum’s strength assures you that your most precious diamonds and gems will be protected and secured. Platinum’s purity makes it hypoallergenic and thus the perfect choice for those with sensitive skin, and its durability makes it ideal for wearing every day, as it sustains very little metal loss over a lifetime of wear. Some wearers of brightly polished platinum jewelry may not like the “patina” that platinum naturally develops with time, but the bright shine can be restored with a simple repolishing. Others may find that platinum’s heaviness doesn’t suit certain styles, such as large earrings.



Martin Flyer platinum and diamond engagement ring

White Gold

The Look

White gold gets its color by mixing yellow gold with alloys like nickel, zinc, and palladium. Due to the variety of the alloys used, white gold colors will vary. Sometimes, white gold is covered with rhodium plating to create a bright, pure white finish.

Insider Details

White gold is available in karatages up to 21 karat; it is not possible to have 22K or 24K white gold. Eighteen-karat gold is 75% pure, 14K is 58.5% pure, and 10K (the lowest karatage legally sold as gold jewelry in the U.S.) is 41.7% pure.

Advantages, Disadvantages

White gold is a more affordable yet still durable and precious alternative to platinum. It doesn’t tarnish like silver. But some rhodium-plated white gold can “yellow” over time and may need to be occasionally replated with rhodium. However, some manufacturers are creating white gold alloys that are white enough to not need rhodium plating. Be sure to ask your jeweler about these newer alloys. When gold is alloyed with nickel, it can be allergenic to a small percentage of wearers who have sensitive skin. In response, many refiners and manufacturers are now offering white gold that doesn’t contain nickel.



White gold earrings by Lorinzi Jewelry

Palladium

The Look

Palladium has garnered much attention from jewelers since it offers many of the benefits of platinum — bright white color, purity, and strength — at a more affordable price. Jewelry designers are taking advantage of palladium’s strong, light characteristics and creating new white-metal jewelry that is solid and bold but affordable.



Frederick Goldman palladium rings

Insider Details

Palladium, like platinum, is a very pure metal. Look for 950 Palladium, which means that the metal used is 95% pure, and usually mixed with 5% ruthenium. Sometimes jewelers use a 90% palladium/10% iridium combination. Both ruthenium and iridium, like palladium, are among the group of metals related to platinum.

Advantages, disadvantages

Palladium does not require plating to maintain its lustrous white color, and it is hypoallergenic. It will not tarnish. However, palladium is neither as rare nor as heavy as platinum.

Alternative Metals: Titanium, Stainless Steel, & Tungsten Carbide

Although not as commonly used in fine jewelry as sterling silver, white gold or platinum, Titanium, Stainless Steel and Tungsten Carbide are gaining popularity — especially with men. Often used for their durability in active accessories, like golf clubs, the metals are well suited to active consumers who will wear the jewelry on a daily basis.

The Look

The metals' steely, gray appearance especially appeals to men. Titanium also has a unique property that allows it to be transformed, using heat or chemicals, into bright colors like blue, purple, and black. The metals are often used in inlay designs, with contrasting metals and patterns in rings and bracelets. Jewelry made from these metals often feature contemporary designs in rings, bracelets, cufflinks, earrings, money clips, and necklaces.



Gold and titanium bracelet by I.B. Goodman Co.



Trew Tungsten® ring by Trent West

laboratory. The alternative metals have the dual benefits of being very strong, and also lightweight. And they are durable. In fact, tungsten is considered the world's hardest metal substance; it ranks 8-9 on the Mohs hardness scale (diamonds are a 10). It is roughly ten times harder than gold and four times harder than titanium.

Advantages, Disadvantages

Titanium, stainless steel, and tungsten carbide offer affordable alternatives to precious white metal jewelry. They are non-corrosive and hypoallergenic. Jewelry made using these industrial metals is scratch resistant and will retain its polish longer than other metals. When used in chain or link bracelets, the metals are less likely to snap or break — making the need for repair infrequent. However, their strength also limits their applications. They are so tough that resizing rings is sometimes difficult — though many manufacturers do offer a resizing service to retailers who cannot resize the rings themselves.

Quality White Metal Purchases

When purchasing white metal jewelry, always look for quality construction. Pay special attention to fasteners or clasps, making sure catches are secure and work easily. Pin backs and earring posts should be strong and firmly attached with no visible marks. Lay chains flat to make sure the links don't kink or bend. If you're purchasing rhodium-plated items, inspect the piece to ensure that the plating completely covers it.

Care & Cleaning

You should always take care when cleaning your fine jewelry. You can do it yourself using a mild non-detergent soap (like hand soap), warm water and soft cloth or brush, or have your jewelry cleaned by a professional jeweler. Always rinse and dry your jewelry thoroughly before putting it away. Avoid having pieces touch or scratch each other by storing them in separate compartments or wrapped in individual soft cloths. It's important to store non-tarnish-resistant sterling silver jewelry in tarnish prevention cloths or bags and in a cool, dry place. You can clean sterling silver to remove light tarnish, using specialized products created for this purpose, such as polish or cleaning cloths. Keep gold jewelry away from chlorine (cleaning products, swimming pools, Jacuzzis) — exposure can weaken gold's structure and cause breakage. When in doubt, ask your professional jeweler.

Where to Buy White Metal Jewelry

To make sure you get the best white metal jewelry available — pieces that you will be happy with for years to come — follow a simple rule: buy from a professional, someone you can trust. Choose a retailer who has been serving the community and has an established reputation.

Ask if the jeweler is a member of Jewelers of America, the national association for retail jewelers, or look for the "J" logo on the door, which must be updated with the current year. JA jewelers are knowledgeable and provide a wide selection of fine jewelry and gifts, which will make selecting your white metal jewelry a pleasure. Your professional jeweler will not only help you with your purchases, but will also be there in the future to answer all your questions and help you with repairs, cleaning and custom design.



Stainless steel bracelet from I.B. Goodman Co.'s STEL collection



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On the cover:
Clockwise from Left: Scott Kay Cypress Bracelet in palladium, Deborah Miller sterling silver ring, Catherine Zadeh sterling silver cufflinks, Aaron Henry Designs white gold and diamond chain necklace, Frederick Goldman diamond and platinum ring. All images courtesy of Jewelry Information Center.



WHAT YOU
SHOULD KNOW
ABOUT
WHITE
JEWELRY
METALS