MOJEH
JEWELLERY & WATCHES
THE JEWELLERY & WATCH BOOK 2019
Lab-grown diamonds can now be marketed in the United States as real gemstones, as long as they “clearly and conspicuously convey that the product is not a mined stone,” according to the United States Federal Trade Commission. In July 2018, the organisation amended its jewellery guidelines to accommodate, “Lab-created products that have essentially the same optical, physical and chemical properties as mined diamonds.” It’s another step towards shattering the belief that lab-grown diamonds aren’t real, and it’s expected to erode the mining industry’s efforts to undermine the use of these gems in pieces. “Lab-grown diamonds provide consumers with another choice when purchasing gems,” elucidates Dr James Shigley, Gemological Institute of America (GIA) distinguished research fellow, before adding that the increased popularity for such items isn’t threatening the demand for traditional stones. “The market for natural coloured gems like ruby, sapphire and emerald has co-existed with laboratory-grown gems for more than a century,” he explains, “and demand for natural rubies, sapphires and emeralds remains as strong as ever.”

Despite this assessment, the trade commission’s action, although limited the the United States, could have significant repercussions globally. Today, lab-grown diamonds only represent 2 per cent of the world’s diamond supply; CitiBank analysts have said that is expected to reach 10 per cent by 2030. David Johnson is head of strategic communications at De Beers Group. “Natural diamonds are a rare and finite resource, and nature has limited their availability – they are all between one billion and three billion years old, and there are no more being made. As inherently rare and precious natural products, they have enduring value,” he says. “Laboratory-created diamonds, on the other hand, have a potentially limitless supply as they are products of technology – this means that, while they are still pretty and sparkly, they have a different value proposition.”

Despite their benefits, for GIA, the difference is obvious. “GIA can confidently and accurately differentiate natural diamonds from laboratory-grown diamonds,” says Dr Shigley. “We have conducted research on laboratory-grown diamonds since they were first created more than 60 years ago.” David agrees, “There are differences in how natural and man-made diamonds respond to certain light. Both of these differences are picked up in the detection technology that is used to ensure laboratory-grown stones are not misrepresented as natural diamonds.”

But more importantly, for David, the main differentiation is a lab-grown diamond’s rarity, not in terms of composition (many more lab-grown diamonds are type IIA – the rarest category of diamond – than mined ones), but in terms of heritage. Each mined diamond is totally unique in terms of quality and flawlessness but with man-made, that’s not the case. “Man-made diamonds don’t offer the romance of unique, finite products of nature,” he says. “Synthetic diamonds do provide the potential for sparkle and colour at a low price, which is an interesting proposition for fashion jewellery products and something we’ve already seen with synthetic emeralds, sapphires and rubies.”

Daniel Koren is founder of Dani by Daniel K, which uses simulated diamonds and gemstones, that artisans hand-set in sterling silver to exceptional standards. “The Dani by Daniel K collection not only features pure colourless simulated diamonds, but also features spinel and corundum, minerals that come in all colours of the rainbow, all developed in the best labs,” says Daniel. “Following on from the launch of my luxury brand, Daniel K in New York in 1989, in 2014 I recognised a gap in the market for more attainable jewellery,” he reveals. “In 2014, I launched my diffusion line, Dani by Daniel K.” It would become hugely popular. “By using more affordable simulated diamonds, I was able to offer an accessible line without compromising on the technical expertise and fine craftsmanship, which had made Daniel K a success. “Using the top 10 to 20 per cent of the best cubic zirconia rough, Dani by Daniel K only works with flawless simulated diamonds,” he furthers. “Hand-cut on a diamond wheel in the same way as natural diamonds.” There are practical perks, reveals Daniel, to working with lab-grown diamonds, as well. “The process of working with simulated stones is easier since we are able to cut each stone to ideally match, meaning we can create pieces that are visually perfect in finish.”

Anna-Mieke Anderson is a consumer-turned-philanthropist, and is the CEO of MiaDonna and Company, which specialises in the lab-grown diamond industry. “The lab-grown diamond is the evolution of the diamond; a greener, more efficient, more affordable diamond that better represents today’s diamond consumer,” she says. “Diamond mining is extremely destructive to the environment. The process involves carving out huge craters, consequently destroying eco-systems and wild habitats. A lab-grown diamond has seven times less the environmental impact than diamonds mined from the earth,” she reveals. “Additionally, the mining industry has a long history of human and workers’ rights violations, and while there have been reforms, blood diamond conflicts between rebel groups still continue.” It would seem this, in addition to lab-grown diamonds’ flawlessness, is why they’re gaining momentum in the jewellery industry.