

## CONFLICT-FREE HYBRID DIAMONDS



The diamond has been a girl's best friend for what feels like an eternity. And, it's about time for a makeover. The universal symbol of love and perfection has become the currency of blood, trafficked by rebels and sold to unknowing consumers all around the world. As these rebels prolong the civil wars in Africa, they use rape as their weapon of choice against the helpless. Mass disease and a lack of basic necessities result from the displacement of refugees whose homes are destroyed in the fighting. Paradoxically, while the jewelry industry has the method of determining a stone's perfection down to a science, the method of determining whether a diamond has been mined at the expense of an entire community is more flawed than a Z-grade stone. The process currently in place, that was designed to crack down on the trade of conflict diamonds, is called the Kimberly

process, and it does little more than to give each stone a birth certificate-type of documentation. Basically, that means there is no definite way of knowing whether or not the diamonds in your jewelry box are "rough" or not, unless you were present at the mine itself. Even conflict-free mines are damaging as far as the environment is concerned. It takes one ton of earth to mine just one carat.

Enter former makeup artist Anna-Mieke Anderson, humanitarian jeweler extraordinaire. After asking numerous jewelers where their diamonds had come from, she eerily discovered that the vast majority did not know or care about the origins. Anderson felt compelled to seek out an alternative to the traditional earth-mined diamond. Searching far and wide, she eventually found a modern-day alchemist who managed to produce a diamond alternative that perfectly mimicked diamond crystal structure. These "diamonds" proved so identical that a lab could not tell the difference between this man-made stone and an earth-mined one.

Anderson now sells these man-made diamonds under the name MiaDonna & Co., Mia being her five-year-old daughter and Donna being the name of her mother. As proof that Anderson was destined to make ethical jewelry her life's work, these names combined, just so happen to translate to "my beautiful lady diamond." The MiaDonna website features man-made diamonds of all shapes and sizes as well as a variety of man-made eco-friendly colored gemstones. Every piece of jewelry is made in America and is set on recycled gold and platinum. In addition to the many heirloom and celebrity-inspired styles available on the site, MiaDonna can create any custom style to your exact specifications.

If the environmentally and socially conscious nature of man-made diamonds still doesn't have you convinced that they are the future of fine jewelry, just wait until you hear this little factoid. The diamond hybrids sell for 3% of the price of an earth-mined diamond of the same perfection. This is because, as Anderson says, women would "rather put it [the money] down on a house and have a beautiful ring." This best-of-both-worlds philosophy can also be seen in Anderson's foundation, The Greener Diamond. A portion of the profits made on every piece of jewelry from MiaDonna goes directly to one of the Greener Diamond's three pet charities to restore old diamond communities. Suggests Anderson, "Wouldn't it be ironic that the diamond consumer is now paying for things to be rebuilt in Africa?" Doctors Without Borders provides emergency relief, SOS Children's Villages builds villages for orphans (The Greener Diamond is currently working with them in the Congo) and Youth Action International goes about rebuilding war-torn communities in the most efficient and effective way possible.

The Greener Diamond's annual project this year will begin in May when they begin filling in what was once a diamond mine in Sierra Leone. In its place will go a rice field, and TGD will provide the former child soldiers with the skills needed to grow their own crops. As Anderson points out, when people are forced to mine diamonds or to fight, they lose the opportunity to receive an education or to learn any valuable skills for survival. She and Extreme Home Makeover designer Johnny Littlefield will visit the site in September, so be sure to check the MiaDonna blog for updates.

As for the future of the jewelry industry, Anderson laments that many jewelers are rooted in tradition and are unwilling to break from the old world way of thinking. However, she does predict a huge rise in the number of jewelers using recycled metals, as well as a rise in the popularity of man-made colored gems, which are incredibly easy to create with today's technology. As far as the diamond hybrid is concerned, Bloomberg predicts that it will own about 20% of the diamond industry by 2012. Here's to a bright, sparkling future. [www.MiaDonna.com](http://www.MiaDonna.com)

Photo credit: MiaDonna & Co.