

What is a White Gold?

VIEWS OF INDUSTRY SOUGHT ON THE ISSUES....

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At this year's Kraftwerks seminar in California, I was fortunate to be involved in a round table discussion on white golds, particularly focused on the newer nickel- and palladium-free 'alternative' alloys appearing on the market in response to the European legislation on nickel. A number of issues came up, several centred on the need to rhodium-plate many commercial white golds due to their inherent poor colour (another was the likelihood of the USA adopting European type legislation at some stage). There was some agreement that these issues needed to be resolved.

Is rhodium plating fraudulent?

In response to a question, I made the point that we would all agree that rhodium plating a conventional yellow gold and passing it off as a white gold is fraudulent. However, many commercial white golds, including some of the newer 'alternative' whites, are not 'detergent white' in colour but, at best, off-white and, at worst, a pale yellow or brown. When does rhodium-plating such off-colour whites constitute a fraud on the public is a question that needs answering. It is a real problem for 'alternative white alloy' developers, for example. They must make a subjective judgement on what is acceptable in colour terms when developing new alloys. Trying to balance obtaining adequate alloy properties with acceptable colour is no easy task. The legal implications if a customer claims fraudulent representation in the courts and seeks redress must also worry the retailer.

Legal definition needed

The problem is that we do not have a legal definition of what is meant by the term 'white'. The end consumers view is more likely to be 'detergent whiteness', I would guess from the frequent phone calls and e-mails I get from complaining consumers (I just had one this morning). Part of this is due to the fact that jewellery retailers often do not tell customers that their white gold is rhodium plated (or why)!

Action needed

It is very clear to me and many others that we, the jewellery industry, need to get our house in order:

1. To agree a quantitative definition of 'white' colour for white golds. [See Massimo Poliero's article in *Gold Technology* no 31, Spring 2001 for his proposal; this is a good starting point] This could be the basis of a voluntary industry standard.
2. Where rhodium plating is necessary, to agree on what minimum thickness (or performance life) rhodium plating of white golds should be. Again, this could form an industry standard.

3. Where a piece of white gold jewellery has been rhodium plated, it should be a Code of Practice to inform the customer that it is rhodium-plated (to the industry standard). *My recommendation is to record this fact on the customer's receipt of purchase, so protecting the retailer in any subsequent dispute.* This requires manufacturers to label their products to this effect, of course.

Your views

In the interests of initiating some industry action, I would like to invite readers to let us know your views on these and other issues surrounding white golds. The MISA in the USA, for example, is keen to see some resolution of this matter and your views can contribute to the debate. Whatever is agreed should be on an international basis, not just the USA or Europe.

We would like to hear the views of alloy suppliers, jewellery manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers and representative industry organisations. If you would like to be present at - or put your views to - a proposed industry roundtable meeting at Expo New York in March 2003 to discuss action on these matters, please indicate on your reply.

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