

## A Gem Of An 'I'm Sorry' Present

*Bryant Gives Wife \$4 Million Diamond*

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Can diamonds be a guy's best friend? Just days after being charged with sexually assaulting a hotel employee in Colorado, pro basketball star Kobe Bryant gave a purple diamond ring worth a reported \$4 million to his wife, Vanessa.

The Los Angeles Laker commissioned the 8-carat ring from Rafinity, a Santa Monica, Calif., jeweler that caters to a celebrity clientele.

The couple picked up the ring last week.

The bauble, which one jeweler said could be as large as a Lifesaver candy, might be a marital peace offering. Although Bryant, 24, denies assaulting his 19-year-old accuser, he has said he had consensual sex with her at the Lodge & Spa at Cordillera on June 30.

Rafi, the jeweler who co-owns Rafinity with partner Ann Whatu, confirmed through a spokesperson that he sold the piece but would not comment further. The carat weight and price tag were reported by People magazine in its Aug. 4 issue. The shop also made the 7-carat diamond engagement ring Bryant gave to Vanessa Laine in happier times, in May 2000, when she was still a student at Huntington Beach's Marina High School. Gwen Stefani, Halle Berry and Celine Dion have also ordered custom pieces from the store.

Purple diamonds are among the rarest colored stones in the world. "If you were to call me and say you were looking for one in that size and color, I would say I don't know if it exists," said Simon Teackle, who heads the fine jewelry department at Christie's in New York.

Alan Bronstein, the gem collector who assembled the famous "Aurora Collection" of colored stones that has been on exhibit for 14 years at New York's Museum of Natural History, said it was difficult to comment on the stone without examining it. "But I'm assuming it's a spectacular purple-pink diamond, because in nature, purple does not exist in an 8-carat stone. Purple is a lavender, thistle color, and diamonds only come in that color in small stones. But a very strong pink color with a purple tint, nature does make those stones."

Thanks to Ben Affleck, who gave Jennifer Lopez a 6.1-carat Harry Winston pink diamond engagement ring, colored stones are hot. (Harry Winston has a waiting list for pink diamonds.)

Colored diamonds have been popular for some time in Asia, according to Amber Michelle, editor-in-chief of Jewelry Connoisseur, a consumer magazine published twice a year. "But in the U.S., people are just now discovering them. People who

have money have often developed collections of white diamonds, so they are looking for something different, unusual and unique." To put some perspective on the rarity of colored stones, Michelle said that most of the pink diamonds in the world come from one mine, the Argyle mine in Australia. Most of these stones weigh less than 2 carats, and each year, the number mined is only enough to fill an ashtray. Blue diamonds are rarer than pink diamonds. And green and red diamonds rarer still. Purple diamonds, she said, are almost unheard of. "I know someone who has been looking for one for a few years."

There is one colored diamond for every 10,000 near-colorless ones. The color comes from a subtle distortion in the atomic structure of the stone, called graining, which changes light absorption, Bronstein said. "It's all based on light."

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