

This ring really sings

Custom wedding bands let couples express love in non-traditional ways

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

A hundred years from now, your great-granddaughter comes across your wedding ring in an old jewellery box.

As she admires it, she wonders what her great-grandfather might have said to his bride-to-be when they were young and full of hope for the future.

So she rolls the ring across an ink-pad and then across a sheet of paper, which she then scans into her laptop. A little digital manipulation and, across the century, her forebear speaks to her!

This is designer Danielle Crampsie's "Soundwave Ring," a wedding band that boasts something even Prince William's bride, Kate Middleton, doesn't have on her ring: A voice.

When Crampsie is designing rings for a couple, she can record either their voices pledging their love (or whatever) or a favourite piece of music. She then prints a computer read-out of the sound wave and engraves it on the jewellery.

"It becomes living history. It's a piece of you that will endure," says Sarah Hamel, who runs Made You Look, a Queen St. W. shop that provides workspace for about 20 self-employed jewellery designers, including Crampsie, and sells jewellery from more than



Designer Danielle Crampsie, top, consults with Sarah Hamel, who runs Made You Look, a Queen St. W. shop that showcases custom jewellery from more than 100 local artists.

100 local designers.

These are not your great-grandmother's wedding bands!

- Deborah Lavery will etch you and your spouse-to-be's fingerprints onto each other's ring.
- Zsolt Szekely combines gold and cocobolo wood into rings that are distinctive and durable. "Cocobolo has about the same wear-rate as gold and better than silver," says Hamel, adding it's cheaper than an all-gold band.
- Jon Pollack works with titanium and Delrin, a robust plastic compound used in joint-replacement surgery and available either in black or white.
- Andrea Golden uses the 17th-century Japa-

nese technique of mokume-gane to create intricate laminates of different metals.

"Those are just a handful of examples," says Hamel. "We encourage clients to pick a designer and meet with them before they commission a piece.

"It's not so much following trends or even creating trends. But we want to break down old-fashioned ideas."

Two of Crampsie's clients are just leaving, both giving her a warm hug. They're musicians, she says, and their rings will have sound waves "one octave higher than the other."

Her earrings are sound waves, too, for a line from a song: "On a bus full of empty seats,

who wants to sit with me?"

Rising gold prices mean more people are choosing composite rings, Hamel says, or bringing in "old gold, passed on from various family members that they want turned into something."

Wedding bands don't have to be flashy, she says. "Something with a sound wave or fingerprint etching is purely for the couple. It's special."

Nor do the rings have to match.

"There may be a little anxiety if one wants one thing and the other something different. But you can have two completely different rings made by the same artist, or have something engraved that links the two.

"Our customers tend not to have the old-school mindset. They regard it as buying a little piece of art. We find, too, that where engagement rings seem to be all about the girl, with wedding bands, it's the guy's chance to express himself."

Birks, which has 35 stores across Canada, has rings starting at about \$600, says spokesperson Eva Hartling, and rising to the high side of \$100,000.

"But that would be for an eternity-style ring with diamonds all the way around," says Hartling from Birks' Montreal headquarters.

Price is definitely a factor for most customers, with some opting for platinum over gold. Men, especially, are also choosing silver or titanium, she says. "With gold bands, women are going back to slimmer styles; much slimmer than, say, the late '90s, early 2000s. That's partly for economic reasons."

With fashion jewellery, she says yellow gold — more typical of the 1970s — is starting to make a comeback. But there's no sign yet of that being the choice for wedding bands. "White gold has been the choice for more than a decade."

Some women want a wedding band with a stone. Styles include micro-pavé, with the ring literally "paved" with tiny diamonds, and large pavé, with bigger but fewer stones.

Hartling says most couples go for different style bands, especially if the woman's has a stone. Same-sex couples tend to choose matching bands.

As for Kate Middleton's ring, it hasn't had much impact here. Nor has Prince William's decision not to wear a ring.

"That's Europe versus North America," Hartling says. "North American men traditionally wear a wedding band."

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Made You Look's unusual wares include:
1. Jewellery designer Zsolt Szekely's gold and cocobolo-wood ring.
2. Deborah Lavery's wedding bands with the partner's fingerprint.
3. Danielle Crampsie's rings engraved with a music or voice sound wave.