





# Cultured beauty

Founded on a designer's taste for the unique and a desire to do things differently, Lark & Berry offers ethical elegance for discerning diamond lovers

**D**iamonds may be a girl's best friend but, until recently, these precious stones have come at a significant human and environmental cost. Consumers today want to feel good, as well as look good – so, when the Duchess of Sussex pioneers ethical, cultured diamonds over mined ones, the fashion world sits up and takes notice.

“I really admire Meghan as a promoter of sustainable products,” says Laura Chavez, whose jewellery company Lark & Berry only uses lab-grown, cultured diamonds. An endorsement from the Duchess, as an established style-influencer, more than confirms the quality and desirability of such gems.

These things are important to Chavez. Growing up in Mexico, she gained her degree at Rice University in Texas in the United States, before working as a hotelier in Argentina. An MBA brought her to the London Business School in 2015, but, Chavez explains, she always wanted to start a jewellery brand. So, in 2016, Chavez found a private teacher in world-renowned London jewellery hub Hatton Garden. “I wanted to work one-to-one,” she says, “to understand the craft deeply.”

While Chavez had always been drawn to diamonds, she admits that she was anxious about their provenance. She'd been deeply affected by the movie *Blood Diamond* with Leonardo DiCaprio, which shows how the diamond-mining industry in Sierra Leone financed conflict and profited warlords. “It needn't be that way,” explains Chavez. “I learned on my course that now, with advanced tech, we can grow diamonds – which means that they're guaranteed conflict-free.”

Additionally, cultured diamonds don't lead to deforestation or require mining, so they're better for the environment. The stones themselves are more affordable than mined diamonds, and, says Chavez, they're better quality. “These cultured diamonds are identical to mined diamonds in every way – chemically, physically and optically. The only difference is that they are actually more perfect because we can control the environment they're grown in.”

Chavez felt empowered by this knowledge. “I thought not only should I do this, but I have to do this now,” she says. “I know this is an industry that's going to thrive. The technology to grow diamonds has actually been around for about 50 years, but it was used for

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*Lark & Berry Dune collection, made from 14-carat gold with cultured diamonds and stones*



industrial purposes, so the diamonds were dark. They're now gem-quality. It's perfect timing."

As one of only a handful of jewellers ready to embrace this new opportunity, Chavez initially encountered some resistance within the industry. "Some factories didn't want to work with us," she says. "Now – just a year later – we have companies emailing us every single week." Lark & Berry's Creative Director had some initial reservations, too. "She was used to working with mined diamonds, so she took a little convincing," says Chavez, "but when she saw the quality of cultured diamonds, she immediately got on board."

Lark & Berry's beautiful pieces attract a diverse audience. "We have quite a spectrum," says Chavez. "It's often women shopping for themselves, sometimes it's a 25-year-old, sometimes a much older lady – we recently had a 70-year-old here for a fine piercing!"

Some customers discover the company because they're specifically looking for ethical diamonds, while others just come in because they like the designs, says Chavez – "and when they hear our story, they love us even more." She accepts that it can take time for people to understand cultured diamonds, "But once they discover them, they never look back. That's why we've grown so fast!"

Chavez's business was always going to be both stylish as well as sustainable. "We're design-led," she says. "A lot of sustainable brands are ethical, but when that becomes the sole focus, the design suffers." Chavez saw a unique position for Lark & Berry. "There were only a few other brands using cultured diamonds, and they were mainly making engagement rings and traditional, understated pieces," she says. "We wanted a cool, fashion-led, quality brand. It's important to remember that diamonds aren't limited to one type of jewellery for one type of person or



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*Opposite: Lark & Berry Trinity collection, using 14-carat gold with cultured diamonds and stones*

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*Above: Lark & Berry Veto collection, using 14-carat gold with cultured diamonds and stones*

occasion. You can have beautiful diamonds for every taste and every day, as well as statement pieces for a special event.”

Lark & Berry jewellery sits in the high-end luxury market, yet it’s effortlessly wearable. Chavez is keen to put her customers at their ease, so everything is designed to feel welcoming and relaxed – from the layout of her new chic Marylebone store, to the language on the bright, eye-catching website. “We want the company to have personality,” she says, “to be engaging and fun.”

The company name is meaningful, too. When learning English as a child, Chavez discovered that the word “lark” – her favourite species of bird – also translates as “playful”. Years later, she wanted to connect this word and its spirit to her brand. Chavez also wanted a connection to her grandmother, whom she remembers as the most elegant woman she had ever met.

She recalled a pendant her grandmother had given her that resembled a berry, and she put the two words together. Lark & Berry was born.

The brand’s growth and success is certainly impressive. Still only 18 months old, Lark & Berry already employs nine people worldwide, and has a second office in Hong Kong. “It’s a British brand because we started here,” says Chavez. But Lark & Berry has international reach and appeal, and ships all over the world; its biggest markets are currently the United States, Canada and Denmark, and Chavez is looking to open a New York store soon. What’s more, for every Lark & Berry purchase, the company plants five trees. “I want to help repair the damage that’s been done by the mined diamond industry,” says Chavez, “so we’re going beyond, and giving back.”

[www.larkandberry.com](http://www.larkandberry.com)



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# Faultless elegance

A champion of ethically produced precious stones, Lark & Berry provides clients with beautiful jewellery and a spotless supply chain

“Ever since I was a little girl, I have loved fine jewellery and design,” says Laura Chavez, owner and founder of cultured diamond fine jewellers Lark & Berry. “I’ve believed for a long time that at its best, jewellery is an excellent expression of the self.” Since she launched the brand in 2018, she has won awards, a red-carpet clientele and a loyal international fan base attracted by the chance to own diamond jewellery that comes with crystal-clear provenance.

Although Chavez had long dreamed of owning her own jewellery brand, she was conflicted about using mined diamonds. “I found myself very much at odds with the damaging, controversial practices of diamond mining companies.”

While studying for her MBA at the London Business School, she learned about cultured diamonds. “I was blown away,” says Chavez. “Diamonds created in labs are every bit the equal and almost always better in quality than mined diamonds. With diamond culturing we get no groundwater pollution, no land or wildlife displacement and no risk of human conflict. Cultured diamonds are a fresh start for luxury jewellery.”

As well as diamonds, Lark & Berry jewellery uses cultured coloured gemstones in its distinctive, contemporary designs. Chavez was determined that sustainability would not come at the expense of good design. “We have taken care not to sacrifice luxury and artful individualism in our pieces,” she explains.

Lark & Berry’s Bow collection – an 11.6-carat cultured diamond necklace, 2.5-carat cultured diamond earrings and a 2.4-carat engagement ring and wedding band all set in platinum – won the June 2019 JCK Las Vegas Editor’s Choice award in design. “This shows that cultured diamonds are

every bit the equal of mined diamonds,” says Chavez. “They are finally starting to get the recognition they deserve.”

In Lark & Berry’s Marylebone boutique, the glass cases of trend-setting stackable rings and delicate pendants are complemented by diamond and coloured-gem hoops and labrets designed specifically for the in-house piercing salon. “We are the only boutique piercing with cultured diamonds,” says Chavez. “Our piercing experience is a great gift for a loved one, or a fabulous activity for mothers and daughters to experience together. Or you can just treat yourself to something fun, new and luxurious.”

The in-house professional stylist and piercer is on hand during customer consultations to help them select the right purple sapphire labret, say, or pavé diamond small hoop for single or multiple piercings. “We’ve gone a long way to ensure that our jewellery for piercings is very fine and elegant. These aren’t standard studs – we ‘curate your ear’, as we say, in a luxury experience while keeping a style that works for you.”

Having only launched in 2018, Lark & Berry’s game-changing stance on cultured versus mined diamonds has attracted fans such as Helen Mirren, Jordan Dunn and Oscar-winner Regina King. The collection is already expanding, with additions to its best-selling Veto ring range and rainbow-hued Modernist Stackable rings.

Overseas, Lark & Berry already has a base in Hong Kong and is launching in Scandinavia, with pop-up concepts planned in Los Angeles and New York. “Lark & Berry was born from my passionate desire to bring cultured diamonds into the mainstream,” says Chavez. “Our customers love what we’re doing and a rapidly increasing number of people are looking for a more sustainable option in luxury jewellery.”

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*Left: Some of the beautifully crafted pieces from Lark & Berry’s award-winning Bow collection*