

BEAUTIFUL BEADS

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK FROM BEGINNING TO END

Because it is pride in craftsmanship that translates into prestige in possession, you should always begin your beaded project by selecting from the finest materials available. Look for qualities that are the mark of fine craftsmanship.

Aside from the obvious considerations when choosing your beads; i.e. color, clarity, cut, carat & condition, you should look deeper into what a bead is. What makes a bead a bead? Simply put, a gemstone becomes a bead when a hole is drilled into it.

The drill hole in a bead is often mistakenly overlooked. It is quite revealing and much more important than most people realize. Elegant draping and longevity in your finished jewelry is contingent upon the drilling process. A properly drilled bead can literally *make or break* your piece!

First, let's examine how drill holes can *make* a piece. When a client tries on beaded jewelry they ask themselves, "Does this look good on me?" In part, they are looking for elegant draping. A finished piece that drapes elegantly is one that is harmoniously balanced. It flows seamlessly as it rests upon the contours of the body and moves effortlessly with the wearer. Elegant draping is directly associated with a proper drill hole. To ensure this, inspect the beads carefully before you purchase them.

1. Look in all directions at the strand of beads you are inspecting and feel them too. Inspect their outline, from beginning to end, laying flat as well as hanging freely. Expect that they be seated next to one another in a smooth even line.
2. If you are buying loose beads, test them on a piece of stringing material that you bring with you.
3. If the beads are going to hang freely, as in the case of earrings, they should hang with symmetry and balance with regard to weight.
4. The holes should not be overly conspicuous. They should have accurate & pleasing placement and be of an appropriate size for the bead's circumference.
5. The holes should be of all the same size in a parcel.

Beads that do not meet these criteria to begin with, will ultimately fail to deliver in the end--*ipso facto*.

Now let's explore how drill holes can *break* a piece. Drill holes that are rough, splintery, crooked or interrupted can cause detrimental harm.

1. Using magnification, inspect the opening. The outside rim of the hole should be centered, flush, smooth and free from flaws.
2. Peer down into the drill hole. Look down the hole from one side, then the other. Internally, the hole should be smooth, free from jagged edges or debris and continue, uninterrupted, in a straight line.

Drill holes that do not have these features will wear on its neighboring bead as well as the stringing material. This will result in unsightly premature wear to the gemstones and possibly ruination by breakage.

Understanding the bead making process may help you to understand the importance of precision drilling. When a master beadsmith has pride in craftsmanship, it shows in their finished product. They begin by using quality tools and supplies plus they take time to make sure all steps are properly done.

The first steps that play a key role in creating a high-grade bead are choosing top grade material, paying attention to orientation, cutting a symmetrical blank and proper drilling. In beads that are drilled before shaping, everything else that follows absolutely relies on proper drilling. Beads that are very hard, need very small holes or need drilling after shaping are gently drilled by hand or ultrasonically. This task is usually reserved for experts.

Proper drilling is the mark of a craftsman with experience, dexterity and patience. In India, where they have been hand-making fine beads for thousands of years, the task of drilling is one that is left to the expert who has had about twenty years experience. They understand the importance of a finished hole that is straight, clean, flawless and uniform in size from the first to the last bead and have the skills necessary to insure this.

Making beautiful beads is a highly skilled art form. Though it is color, clarity & cut that make a gemstone beautiful; it is really the drill hole that makes a bead, a beautiful bead, from beginning to end.