

REVIEW: The New VL Classic Faceting Machine joins the ULTRA TEC Faceting Family

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The Hashnu Lapidary Studio is fortunate in having all the current ULTRA TEC faceting machines--the VL Classic, V5 Faceting Machine, Glass Tec and Fantasy Machine in-house. This gives me the unique opportunity to discuss the differences and uses of the various faceting machines manufactured by ULTRA TEC. Disclaimer: I am an ULTRA TEC Representative and sell ULTRA TEC faceting machines and supplies. This may imply some bias, but I have always enjoyed faceting more on the ULTRA TEC faceting machines than on others. The newest faceting machine to the ULTRA TEC lineup is the VL Classic. It was announced at the end of 2019 and started shipping in the first week of February 2020.

What is the VL Classic and how does it differ from the other ULTRA TEC faceting machines?

The first thing you notice about the VL Classic is that it is sleek and compact. The new design has several benefits which include precision, ease of use, and a lower cost than the V5. I cut the same design and material on both the VL Classic and the V5 and found that the new VL Classic has the accuracy that I can depend on when using ULTRA TEC equipment. I doubt that anyone without a loupe and a professionally trained eye could tell the difference between the two stones faceted on these distinct machines.

The patterns of hand movement are different between the two machines and it took a bit to unlearn my V5 faceting motions. However, after faceting with the VL Classic for about fifteen minutes, I was in the groove and had my hands dancing smoothly with the new faceting machine. The new styled angle-stop mechanism, index lever, and mast adjustor all came into play for ease of use and repeatable performance.

VL Classic comes with either analog or digital angle readouts. I tested both the analog and digital models and they both faceted precision gemstones; however, I preferred the digital upgrade for faster faceting. The lower cost of the VL Classic can be seen in both models, analog and digital. The price of the VL Classic analog is \$1,500 less than the V5 digital and the VL Classic digital is \$1,000 less than the V5 digital. So, if both VL Classic and the V5 both cut precision gemstones, why is there a difference in price? There are physical and operational distinctions and they are made for different groups of gemstone faceters.

Operationally, there are different ways of doing the same faceting step on each machine. The physical layout of the V5 has the advantage of needing fewer hand movements when adjusting the height and index of the machine when faceting. This allows the faceter the speed necessary for commercial faceting. The lap level is lower on the V5 and is more comfortable to cut for longer durations. The V5 masthead upright locking mechanism snaps into place when you raise the masthead, where the VL Classic involves tightening a knob each time.

I view the VL Classic "analog" as a great machine for a jewelry store or lapidary studio that facets gemstones and does repairs where precision is essential, but they are not faceting on a daily basis.

I envision the VL Classic “digital” for serious faceting beginners, lapidary clubs and production studios.

The ULTRA TEC V5 is the faceting machine that I use the most and I have two of them in the Hashnu studio. This allows me to facet gemstones for my clients while I use the other one for faceting lessons. The V5 is the modern evolution of its predecessor, the V2, and is the finest faceting machine I have used over the years. The V5 precision and speed puts it in the category of a fine commercial faceting machine and it is used by a great many of the finest and award-winning faceters throughout the world. In my opinion, the precision, speed, and added features of the ULTRA TEC V5 make it the perfect faceting machine for the competitive, commercial, or artistic gemstone faceter.

The ULTRA TEC Glass Tec was developed for those in the glass faceting industry wanting to take glass cold work to the next level. The optics of gemstones and glass are very similar in their ability to create designs and patterns in an artistic fashion. Combining the medium of glass with ULTRA TEC level faceting is a creative world worth exploring. The Glass Tec is used in the Hashnu Studio to facet both glass and large gemstones. ULTRA TEC kept their precision, ease of use, and durability mantra when manufacturing the Glass Tec. In order to prove that, I faceted both very small and large gemstones along with four-inch art glass spheres on the Glass Tec with same phenomenal results. The Glass Tec uses the V5 mast and the VL Classic faceting head making it a hybrid of both the V5 and VL Classic. It is the most versatile and precise glass faceting machine on the market.

The ULTRA TEC Fantasy machine is the genesis of a gemstone renaissance. Its multi-faceted capabilities allow the gemstone artist to move from the flat surface of the gemstone into the innermost world of fantasy, concave, and carving of gemstone design. The Fantasy Machine is a major add-on tool to your ULTRA TEC mast (ULTRA TEC makes adapters for other faceting masts). One needs only to facet a gemstone on their ULTRA TEC faceting machine and then move the mast with the gemstone still in place to the Fantasy Machine to start cutting in the contemporary style of fantasy gemstone faceting. I primarily use the Fantasy machine for embellishing a gemstone for originality, while other faceters use it to create award-winning and museum-worthy gemstones.

Having all four ULTRA TEC faceting machines at the Hashnu Studio gives me the ability to use all of them in my gemstone and glass creations and allowing my students to try a variety of machines. Whether you are an absolute beginner (95% of my students are), a glass artist, or looking to take your faceting to the next level, all of these faceting machines are here at the Hashnu studio for you to try and explore.

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Mark is the owner of Hashnu Stones & Gems LLC, providing precision cut gemstones, quality gemstone rough, faceting lessons, and ULTRA TEC faceting machines sales. Mark can be reached at mark@hashnustones.com and would be happy to discuss your faceting and gemstone desires. <https://www.hashnustones.com/learn-to-facet.html>
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