

THANKS TO NEW FINDS AND INNOVATIVE CUTS COLORED GEMSTONES ARE EXPERIENCING A BOOM. EXAMPLES FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: ATELIER BUNZ, ERICH ZIMMERMANN, ATELIER MUNSTEINER



GEMSTONES OLD MYTHS - NEW FORMS

The striving for perfection is as old as mankind. Our ancestors regarded the gemstones' natural crystals, colors, hardness and durability as magical signs and symbols of divine perfection. New finds, fascinating cuts and the longing for colors in our life have contributed to the renaissance gemstones are currently experiencing.

Many cultures attributed special powers to gemstones. People perceived them as "supernaturally" perfect and beautiful, but also as cold and invulnerable. They quite often believed that by means of their radiant power the sparkling stones could ward off evil, bring good luck and cure diseases. Out of respect for this highly treasured material people in India, a country with a multifaceted jewelry tradition, used to treat gemstones as little as possible before setting them in usually high-carat gold.

SYMBOLS OF POWER

For thousands of years the possession of gemstones had been a privilege of aristocrats, monarchs and the clergy. Jewelry and gemstone-studded showcase objects, weapons or other decorative objects found their way into the treasure chambers and curiosity cabinets of royal houses. The monasteries in the Middle Ages also had their share of gemstones. Sacred objects or book covers were lavishly adorned with beautiful stones.

Therefore, it was not only feminine beauty that was effectively reflected by the gemstones in women's jewelry. Encrusted with gemstones such symbols of power as crowns, scepters or orbs were used to demonstra-

tively express a monarchs' wealth and spiritual power. Another popular practice was to set antique jewels among the gemstones decorating Christian symbols in order to express the suppression of pagan religions.

THE MAGIC OF COLORS

The term "precious stone" has been used since 8000 B.C. However, the stones considered most precious were not always the same. Early civilizations treasured all the colored minerals. Later, for many centuries and in different cultures, only rubies, emeralds, sapphires and diamonds were regarded as really precious stones. In the pieces of jewelry crafted in northern India in the Mogul era, for example, that harmonious combination of red, green, white, blue and deep gold can be found as well as in European jewelry.

For many thousands of years the ruby, a corundum variety, has been considered one of the most valuable gemstones. Its color has often been compared to glowing fire, mankind's earliest, most impacting color experience. The ruby's inner fire, people thought, was unable to consume the stone, which is one of the reasons why the ruby is regarded as a symbol of power, the stone of life and the guardian of love. The Russian Tsar Peter the Great, for example, is said to have always carried a few rubies in his pocket as talismans.

"The emerald is created early in the morning when the green of the earth is still fresh, when the air is still cold but the sun already warm, when the herbs suckle the color green as heartily as young lambs their mother's milk", is what Hildegard von Bingen once wrote about this



gem. Inclusions and fissures in the crystal are characteristic of this brittle beryl variety which is difficult to work. The emerald was highly valued as early as in the classical ancient world. Polycrates, for example, fearing his good luck would evoke the vengeance of the gods, sacrificed an emerald ring, Nero is said to have worn an emerald monocle to strengthen his eyes, and according to a legend, even the Holy Grail, that most sacred cup, is crafted from this rare gemstone.

The blue sapphire, a corundum variety, is regarded as the stone of faithfulness, love and chastity. The British Imperial State Crown is adorned with 17 magnificent sapphires, and Charles the Great wore a golden pendant enhanced by two sapphires as a talisman. The healing power of sapphires was also repeatedly praised in the past, and people used it to "treat" tumors as well as kidney and lung diseases.

NEW DISCOVERIES

Today we know precious stones in all the colors of the rainbow. New finds have constantly increased the range of jewelry stones. Many of the newly discovered varieties such as turquoise Paraiba tourmalines, for example, deep blue tansanites, green demantoids or brightly orange Mandarin garnets display the same magnificent colors and achieve the same high prices as the classics, and experts have long since discarded the old distinction between gemstones and semi-precious stones anyway.

The jewelry stone that probably presents the largest range of colors is the tourmaline. Experts distinguish as many as 27 hues ranging from petrol green to gold, from indigo blue to pigeon blood red or gray.

COLOR PSYCHOLOGY

As recent findings show colors are closely associated with emotions and experiences. Color tests make use of the connection between colors, feelings and a person's personality in order to gain a better understanding of the human race. The color test invented by the Swiss psychologist Max Lüscher, for example, assigns a different category of emotional state and motivation to each color: blue stands for satisfaction, green for self-respect, red for self-confidence and yellow for development. Those who love blue are considered to be deliberate and reasonable, those who love red to be active and dynamic, those who prefer yellow to be imaginative, and those who have a penchant

for green are regarded as well-balanced and discreet. Which color appeals most to a woman often depends on her frame of mind and how she sees herself. A gemstone, even if it is of an intense color, never appears obtrusive but, thanks to its charisma, can contribute a lot to a person's well-being.

EMOTION

For any jewelry designer, the most appropriate and also absolutely contemporary way of approaching those fascinating gemstones is to treat the material in a careful and artistic manner. When left in their natural state, even the most precious stones are often unimpressive. They only unfold their breathtaking beauty when they have been perfectly cut and polished. In the course of the centuries gemstone cutters have perfected their art. Even the use of laser technology is very common by now. And technically, it is even possible to scan uncut stones and find the optimum cut with the help of special software programs. In addition to the classic gemstone cuts today's creative goldsmiths and jewelers also use artistic cuts for new designs and, above all, are open for experiments.

Also, the traditional criteria for determining the value of a gemstone such as the depth of its color and absolute purity are often left aside nowadays out of respect of its natural beauty. After all, do inclusions or tinges of other colors – so far rather unpopular – make a stone less desirable? Is a careful cut that respects the natural shape of a stone principally worse than the perfectly symmetrical form stipulated by the classic dogma? Isn't a rough stone, which has been treated only slightly, equally charming? Can minerals of lower hardness be as beautiful as the gemstone classics or are they indeed "second-rate"?

Aficionados of modern jewelry appreciate that goldsmiths raise such questions and, more and more often, use stones that have been treated unconventionally so as to create very individual pieces of jewelry. Because these pieces have that same archaic, deeply emotional quality inherent in those "magical" jewels of our ancestors. Experts are convinced that individually crafted pieces of jewelry have that special aura our ancestors tried to bring about by means of decorative gemstones, that aura that results from an artistic and respectful way of treating these fascinating gifts of nature. **Sabine Kurz**