



The Color

PURPLE

WHICH CAME FIRST— THE VALUE OF a gem or the gemstone lover? While the jury is still out on that one, it's clear that in some cases enthusiasm for an adored gemstone by a designer can trigger an upsurge in collecting by the public. And when a jeweler adores a particular gemstone, it's bound to become linked with their brand. So it is with Judi Anderson of Bijoux Extraordinaire. Anderson's appreciation for the potpourri of colors produced in purple sapphire fuels her inspiration for original designs where each unique shade of purple sapphire owns the spotlight. Anderson insists that much of her clientele is colored sapphire savvy. And they may owe that

acquired taste to Anderson, who raves, "It's the hue! I personally am a huge fan of violet and purple colors. I also love the durability of sapphire; it's a great combination."

Certain colored gemstones have seemingly always known global recognition. Still, other gems of rarity and beauty find their way into the international spotlight over time. Such is the case with purple sapphire.

While natural purple sapphire is not a recent discovery, it is gaining momentum as a standout amongst fancy colored sapphires. In fact, fancy purple sapphires turn up as Old European cuts in Edwardian jewels, notes Suzanne Martinez, buyer for

Lang Antiques, San Francisco. The red-violet hues appear more often in vintage sapphire pieces, Martinez finds.

Colored gemstone pricing guide publisher, (The Guide) Richard Drucker's annual "**Best Buys in Tucson**" presentation at the Tucson Gem & Mineral shows provide a much anticipated industry update. Designers want to know what they should buy to satisfy a sometimes fickle buying public. Retailers and designers need to know what they should be devoting their energy to creating. At the 2007 Tucson Shows, Drucker reported a curious shift among leading colored stones sold the previous year. Sapphire earned first place, with the number 5 slot going to fancy colored

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By Diana Jarrett

LEFT Photo courtesy of Brellion Inc.
ABOVE Natural purple (plum) sapphire provided by Bijoux Extraordinaire.

sapphire. Drucker highlighted the increased demand for purple sapphire, commenting that they are not as yet readily available.

The species corundum may be found as a clear crystal, and then it is marketed as white sapphire. Impurities, such as chrome, in corundum create a red gem, or ruby. When used alone, sapphire specifically means the blue variety. The rainbow of other colored sapphire formed by impurities are labeled “fancy colored sapphire”, including the extraordinary lilacs to blue-violets of purple sapphire.

Corundum (ruby and sapphire) ranks highest on a Mohs scale next to diamond. The importance of this fact is not status—but rather utility. Ranking 9 on a Mohs scale indicates sapphire’s extreme durability. Little pampering of this hard stone is required and an owner can expect years of pleasure from their sapphire jewelry, while it looks nearly new as the day they bought it.

Purple sapphire is produced in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Thailand and even Montana. Since the 1990s, Madagascar has produced an enormous quantity of fancy colored sapphire including purple, which has contributed to its broader recognition. Gemologist Charles Carmona, president

of Guild Laboratories, Los Angeles, also serves as World Bank Consultant to Madagascar at their gemology institute. Carmona points out, “Approximately 60 million years ago, Madagascar was part of East Africa so its gem wealth comes from the same geological deposits”

And the frenzied obsession for colored diamonds celebrities are seen sporting at awards ceremonies have created a greater call for fancy colored sapphire. Because purple and other fancy colored sapphire’s dispersion closely parallels that of colored diamonds, it becomes an affordable alternative to colored diamonds. A “fine violetish blue 4.66 carat certified natural oval cut sapphire”



The many shades of the **Purple SAPPHIRE**



ABOVE This natural purple (plum) sapphires were provided by Bijoux Extraordinaire. **RIGHT** Purple sapphire photo courtesy of Lang Antiques, San Francisco.



These photos show the same stone under different lighting conditions, a rare color-change 2.51ct sapphire, colored by vanadium, of Moguk Burma origin. One (left) is show in daylight, and one (right) in yellow light. Photo Credit: Wimon Manorotkul / Palagems

is wholesale priced at \$1,200 per carat at Pala International. By contrast, a similarly toned 8 carat natural purple diamond ring purchased for the wife of a basketball star set him back by \$8 million.

Rarely, purple sapphire exhibits a natural occurring color-change. The optical phenomenon in these purple sapphires observed when the stone moves from natural daylight to incandescent lighting and is the result of selective light absorption. Pala Gems recently showed an example of this curiosity on their website, with images of a 3.75 carat violet-blue radiant cut Madagascar fancy sapphire changing to purple under different lighting conditions.

Veteran colored gem dealer Laurie Watt of Mayer and Watt travels the world with her husband, partner Simon Watt. She finds purple sapphires more abundantly in Sri Lanka than at other mining sites for fancy sapphires, leading her to speculate that the unique geological environs of that region favor their production. “The rarity factor of purple sapphire’s occurrence in nature, the durability of the stone, and the breathtaking purple hue bring to mind royalty.”

Lately, purple sapphire is featured in the most luxurious of goods. Tony designers are recognizing purple sapphire’s charm when creating spectacular jewels; for both starring and in supporting roles with deluxe

jewelry. The much sought after Parisian jeweler, Lorenz Baumer, acknowledged for his flair of unusual ‘gem’ choices, such as meteorites and pebbles, mixes purple sapphire alongside other intensely saturated bold gemstones like rubellite and amethyst with dazzling results, in his current collection. At Zeira in New York, Sami Zeira, hand-fashions high carat gold, custom jewels reminiscent of exceptional old world craftsmanship. Fancy colored sapphire features prominently in his current colored gemstone picks, as evidenced with his 22kt yellow gold and diamond “Sunshine” pendant showcasing a vivid brilliant cut purple sapphire.

The predominating attribute of purple sapphire is the interminable range of purple, lilac, violet, reddish-purples and blue-violets to be found, Bijoux Extraordinaire’s Anderson reflects. “If you’re offered amethyst for instance, you pretty much know what the color will be.” Because nature creates the surprising color combinations discovered in purple sapphire, Anderson envisions an enduring future for this jewel which has yet to reach broad public exposure.

Diana Jarrett (www.DianaJarrett.com) is a frequent lecturer on gem and jewelry subjects throughout the U.S. Most recently she earned the designation of Registered Master Valuer after successfully completing jewelry appraisal certification in the Master Value Program.