

Gems & Jewellery

Spring 2026 / Volume 35 / No. 1



TRENDS AT THE
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Gems & Jewellery

SPRING 2026

REFLECTING ON THE 2026 TUCSON GEM SHOWS

Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta reviews the challenges and successes at this year's Gem Showcase.



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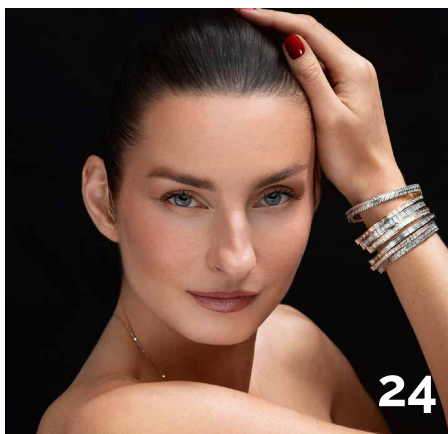
WILL 2026 BRING A DIAMOND REBOUND?

Russell Shor forecasts the year ahead for the global diamond market.

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JIS MIAMI 2026

Olga González FGA DGA explores the show that has become the gateway to the jewellery trade for Latin America and the Caribbean.



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Cover Picture

Both platinum rings on our cover were created by Mary van der Aa, with centre stones cut by Todd Wacks (Tucson Todd's Gems). The Cosmic Candy ring uses a 4.34 ct Mahenge spinel, 100 tcw natural diamonds and 2.69 tcw coloured sapphires. The Aurora Hex ring features a 4.72 ct bicolour pink-and-yellow tanzanite (zoisite) and accented with 0.84 tcw natural, untreated pink and yellow sapphires. Photo by Robert Weldon, courtesy of Mary van der Aa Iconic Jewels.

Published by

Gem-A (The Gemmological Association of Great Britain)

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Registered charity no. 1109555

Copyright 2026 ISSN 1746-8043

Gem-A is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England, number 01945780

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Design and Production

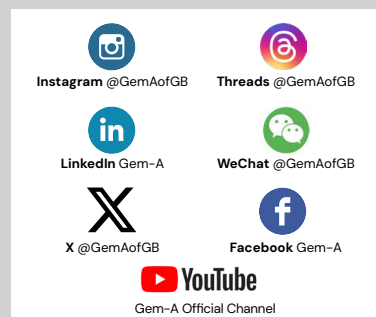
Zest Design +44 (0)7768 233653

Editorial and Advertising

For editorial enquiries, media pack and advertising rates please contact editor@gem-a.com.

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Gems & Jewellery

Spring 2026 Edition Featured Contributors

1. Britni LeCroy

A senior staff gemmologist at GIA in Carlsbad, California, Britni LeCroy received her bachelor's degree in geoscience from the University of Texas in Dallas before receiving her GG from GIA and her Gemmology Diploma from Gem-A. Ms LeCroy is a frequent contributor to *Gems & Gemology*. Her areas of interest include pearls, organic gem materials and historical gemmology.

2. Christopher Dobranski

Originally a wood carver and sculptor from Edmonton, Canada, Christopher Dobranski was introduced to jade and the World Jade Symposium in 2011. Currently located near Idar-Oberstein, Germany, he is a former student of world-renowned master gem carver Alfred Zimmermann. Mr Dobranski is constantly working to learn new techniques and hone his craft. Among his accolades is the World Jade Symposium People's Choice Award in 2014. Mr Dobranski's work has been featured in books, galleries and museums around the world. His carving in quartz of his cat, Spartacus,

is currently on display at the German Gemstone Museum in Idar-Oberstein.

3. Russell Shor

Based in San Diego, California, Russell Shor is the owner of Russell Shor Communications and Consulting. He has more than forty years of experience in the diamond industry, including nineteen years at GIA as a senior industry analyst. Previously Mr Shor served as a senior diamonds/economics editor at *JCK Magazine* and as editor of *New York Diamonds*. He holds degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University in the United States.

4. Craig O'Donnell

Craig O'Donnell BA FGA is head valuer at the Birmingham Assay Office, where he has worked as a jewellery valuer for the last twenty-five years. For the past ten years he has also been curator of the office's extensive silver collection. His responsibilities include training the next generation of professional jewellery valuers, as well as giving talks and practical workshops on valuing, antique jewellery and silver-related

topics, and taking on expert witness work. He has a passion for the Arts and Crafts movement and has a personal library of over 3,500 books on jewellery, gemmology and silverware. Mr O'Donnell has proudly served as the chairman of the Gem-A Midlands Branch for the last four years.

5. Susi Smither

As the founder of The Rock Hound, Susi Smither FGA JDT BSc has dedicated herself to the craft of designing and creating jewellery that is transparent and ethically and responsibly sourced. Her designs show the intersection of her interest in science and her obsession with colour. Since starting The Rock Hound in 2015, her award-winning work has been featured on the pages of *Vogue*, *Professional Jeweller* and other publications. Ms Smither earned her Gemmology Diploma in 2011; she also holds a JDT from GIA and a BSc in maths and management from Kings College London.

Special thanks to Lily Faber FGA DGA, John I. Koivula FGA, Nathan Renfro, Todd Wacks and Robert Weldon.



From the CEO

Opinion and comment from CEO Cath Hill

Spring is in full swing in London, and we at Gem-A Headquarters are fully involved in the business of 2026!

This February, I attended my first Tucson Gem Showcase. I was joined at our booth at the AGTA Gem Show by Lily Faber FGA DGA and Claire Scragg FGA DGA GG, where we met prospective students and other members of the industry. The trade shows and events I attended gave me a first-hand understanding of the importance of the Tucson shows. For more on the Gem Showcase, please see the article by Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta on pp. 10–19.

I have continued to attend events on behalf of the Association, including the Goldsmiths' Craft and Design Council awards ceremony in March. Gem-A has long been a patron of these awards, and in that capacity we offer the Gem-A Award, which gives winners the opportunity to take our online distance-learning (ODL) Foundation course (see p. 6). Please welcome this year's winners, Liu Yang and Xiaoyu Li, to our community.

Finally, I ask you all to save the date for the 2026 Conference, which will be held 7–8 November 2026 at the Leonardo Royal Hotel St. Paul's. As always, we are planning a weekend full of stimulating and timely content and networking opportunities for attendees. Please check the Conference website (<http://www.gem-a.com/conference>) for updates.

Now, we turn to the Spring issue of *Gems&Jewellery*. Our lead article is on the trends and topics on everyone's minds in Tucson. But the Tucson gem shows are not the only events that have a global impact. The JIS Spring show, held in Miami Beach, Florida, in March, has become a vital commercial enterprise that links the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean. Attendee Olga González FGA DGA witnessed firsthand how JIS connects retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers in an environment that fosters business and establishes Miami as a trade hub.

In addition to our insights on these shows, the issue is packed with educational and entertaining content. In the final part of our two-part series,



(BCU) has included a BSc (Hons) programme in Gemmology and Jewellery Studies that is the UK's only full-time higher-education course. Gem-A Alumni who are members in good standing of the Association may be accepted to the third year of the university's BSc programme. Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta travelled to Birmingham to learn more about the BCU curriculum and student body.

The United Kingdom has a long history of craftsmanship, but over time many of these skills have been lost. Founded in 2010, Heritage Crafts is the only UK-based UNESCO-accredited nongovernmental organisation (NGO) actively preserving skills related to traditional craftsmanship. Their work includes The Red List, which denotes traditional crafts that are endangered or extinct in the UK. Britni LeCroy describes Heritage Crafts' work and considers the current state of craftsmanship.

Other content includes a report on the state of the natural and lab-grown diamond industry; a review of Solange Azagury-Partridge's book; and *G&J's* newest feature, Getting To Know... This section allows readers to become acquainted with their colleagues on a personal and professional basis. We are grateful to John Koivula FGA, the world-renowned analytical microscopist at the Gemological Institute of America, for his participation.

We hope you enjoy the Spring issue of *Gems&Jewellery*! ■

I ask you all to save the date for the 2026 Conference, which will be held 7–8 November 2026.

We were delighted to welcome so many new Foundation, Gemmology Diploma and Diamond Diploma students earlier this year, and our upcoming courses are continuing with the same level of popularity. We are approaching the June exam period and I would like to wish everyone who will take their Foundation, Gemmology Diploma and Diamond Diploma exams at that time the best of luck. I also congratulate everyone who was successful in the January exams and commiserate with those who were not.

Craig O'Donnell FGA looks at the history Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day. He explains the effect of WWI and WWII on the workforce, and how current activities compare to those at the time of the Quarter's founding two hundred and fifty years ago.

The many jewellery-related businesses located in Birmingham are not the only reason the city is so important to the industry. For ten years, the School of Jewellery at Birmingham City University

Gem-A News

A round-up of the latest industry news from Gem-A

ODL FOUNDATION COURSES AWARDED AT GOLDSMITHS' CRAFT & DESIGN COUNCIL COMPETITION

The Gem-A community added two members to its ranks at the annual Goldsmiths' Craft & Design Council (GCDC) Competition ceremony, held at the Taylor Merchants' Hall on Monday, 9 March. The Gem-A Award, in the form of an online-distance learning (ODL) Foundation course, was given to Xiaoyu Li and Liu Yang for their Vessel pendant and Artefacta ring, respectively. Gem-A CEO Cath Hill was on-hand to confer the awards and congratulate the winners. *Gems&Jewellery* sends its best wishes to both winners.

The Gem-A Award is open to all GCDC competition entrants that include a gemstone, or multiple gemstones, in their 2D and 3D submissions. Applicants who are interested in this award must tick the entry-form box and submit a 200-word statement explaining how the coursework would benefit the craftsperson and support their career development.

The two pieces, along with the other award-winning designs, will be on exhibition at the Goldsmiths' Centre in London from 1 July to 10 September 2026.



In recognition of their jewellery, submitted to the Craft & Design Council Competition, Xiaoyu Li (creator of the Vessel pendant, top) and Liu Yang (who crafted the Artefacta ring, bottom) have each won an online-distance learning Foundation course from Gem-A. Photos by Julia Skupny, courtesy of the Goldsmiths' Craft & Design Council.

NATIONAL DIAMOND COUNCIL DECLARES WORLD DIAMOND DAY

The National Diamond Council (NDC) declared 8 April the first World Diamond Day. The designation was created to focus on the positive contributions of the natural-diamond industry, including community development and conservation efforts. A not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting the integrity of the global natural-diamond trade, the NDC supports the livelihoods of over 10

million people around the world. In a social media post on 8 April, the NDC explained that "we are celebrating the stories behind natural diamonds, from meaningful moments like engagement rings or diamond heirlooms to the positive impact diamonds have in communities around the world... this is our opportunity to show the world the true meaning and value of natural diamonds, together."

Individuals, businesses, organisations and diamond-producing countries alike participated in the events, many using the customisable assets for social media created by the NDC specifically for the day. By midday, there were more than 1,000 #worlddiamondday posts on Instagram alone; the hashtag #NaturalDiamonds was also used. In a press release dated 14 April, the NDC estimated that the effort had a 30 million+ total social reach, with 300+ participating industry voices and a 30% spike in global search demand for 'natural diamonds' compared to weekly averages.

CIBJO STARTS SECOND ROUND OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION FOR SUPPLY CHAIN TERMS

The World Jewellery Confederation (CIBJO) has launched the second round of public consultation for *The Blue List – The Responsible Jewellery Supply Chain Lexicon*. The intent of this publication is to develop a harmonised set of definitions for the description of responsible supply chains and sustainability – especially when marketing jewellery – that are 'accurate, substantiated, clear and easily understood by all stakeholders and consumers'. The first round of

consultation, which ran from 5 May to 6 September 2025, yielded a number of recommendations to the draft version that was released by CIBJO's Jewellery Industry Supply Chain Nomenclature Committee. "Our goal is to produce a lexicon of terms that can be practically applied and comprehended worldwide, and to do that in the most transparent and inclusive way possible," said CIBJO president and committee co-chair Gaetano Cavalieri. "We had hoped that one round of public consultation

would be sufficient, and, while almost all the terminology and definitions in the original draft were widely accepted, there were a number of points raised during the consultative process that we agreed should be addressed, leading to few amendments to the proposed text. In the same spirit of openness, we are commencing the second round to ascertain public opinion about the changes." The second round of public consultation will end on 12 June 2026.

SOTHEBY'S AUCTIONS JWANENG DIAMOND FOR £1.9 MILLION

The High Jewelry auction at Sotheby's Hong Kong location, which closed on 23 April 2026, yielded sales of HKD 256.90 million (£24.34 million) for 178 lots. Among the items sold were the de Beers Jwaneng 28.88, a type Ila, D-colour specimen of flawless clarity and exceptional quality, named for the legendary Botswana mine where the original 114.83 carat rough was mined. After analysis and cutting, a 28.88-carat round-brilliant diamond was produced; this stone sold for HKD 21.03 million, or approximately £1.99 million. The Jwaneng 28.88 and two other lots of comparable colour and quality were offered without reserve, and a portion of the proceeds from the sales were donated to benefit the Peace Parks Foundation,

specifically the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) project. Also sold were a pair of gold- and-platinum cluster earclips from Harry Winston – each with a step-cut emerald of Colombian origin weighing 21.60 or 21.11

carats and embellished with pear-shaped emeralds, pear-shaped and brilliant-cut diamonds – for HKD 12.80 million (£1.21 million).

Other jewels at the auction included a 6.12 ct oval modified-brilliant-cut Paraiba tourmaline (HKD 1.28 million/~£ 121,305), a ring set with a 17.17 ct step-cut padparadscha sapphire and brilliant-cut diamonds mounted in 18K white and pink gold (HKD 1.53 million/~£ 145,566) and a Cartier Tutti-Frutti necklace depicting a pair of embracing parrots (HKD 21.64 million/~£2.05 million).



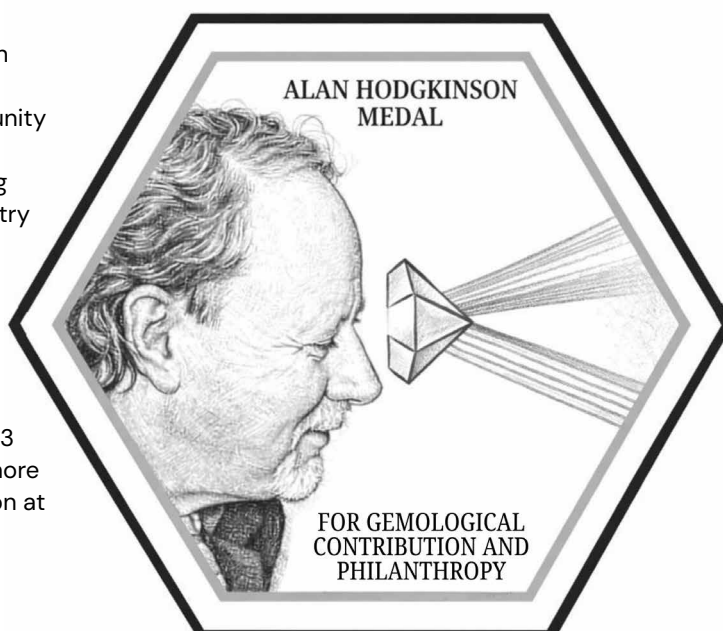
Sotheby's High Jewelry auction, held in Hong Kong in April 2026, achieved HKD 21.03 million for the 28.88 ct Jwaneng diamond (left) and HKD 12.80 million for a pair of emerald, diamond, gold and platinum earrings from Harry Winston (top). Photos courtesy of Sotheby's.

AWARD IN HONOR OF ALAN HODGKINSON ANNOUNCED

The Accredited Gemologists Association (AGA) has announced a new accolade in honour of late Scottish gemmologist Alan Hodgkinson FGA (1937–2024). The Alan Hodgkinson Medal is awarded to those individuals who support their peers and serve the gemmological community through their time, mentorship and collaboration. It is these qualities that Mr Hodgkinson was known for during his illustrious career. The AGA will recognise those industry members who “demonstrate exceptional commitment to volunteerism and a consistent willingness to share knowledge, experience and practical insight with others in the field.”

Nominations for the Alan Hodgkinson Medal are open throughout the year. The voting period runs from 5 – 18 June 2026, with the medal presented to the winners on 3 February 2027 at the AGA Gala in Tucson, Arizona. For more information, visit the Accredited Gemologists Association at accreditedgemologists.org/hodgkinson-medal/.

The design of the Alan Hodgkinson Medal, which honours the late Scottish gemmologist (and Gem-A Member). It will be awarded for the first time in February 2027. Photo courtesy of the Accredited Gemologists Association.



Passion Made Tangible: Christopher Dobranski's Peregrine Falcon

The Idar-Oberstein-based gem carver relates the painstaking work that led to his latest stunning creation.

I created the Peregrine Falcon carving after completing my Parliament of Owls series (see Summer 2024 *G&J* pp. 40–43). Although I have carved gem material every day for many years, I am always looking to improve my techniques in carving and finishing. I challenge myself to improve upon what I did in the last carving. Perhaps this is a form of obsessive disorder; perhaps this is just part of being an artist that strives for perfection. I was restless after the Owls series and, taking stock, I considered the very large citrine rough crystal from Minas Gerais, Brazil, which was sitting on my workbench.

I am passionate about carving animals in such a way that they are 'brought to life'. Birds, particularly birds of prey, are among my favourite animals to create. I am from Vancouver Island, on the west coast of Canada. There, I have had many experiences with large raptors, but the one that always fascinated me is the 'fighter jet' of birds: the peregrine falcon. I had the appropriate gemstone to carve; now I needed to sketch a design that captured the subtle movement and form of a falcon sitting on a branch. Once I had the sketch, I could begin the long process of bringing this stone to life.

The process began with roughing out the stone to where the falcon's form was ready for detailing. I wanted to push the stone to its very limits. Within this carving, I wanted to see feathers moving in the wind. I wanted it to be clear that this falcon was surveying the landscape and looking for his next meal. When I started the detailing of the bird, I needed tools that could not be bought. Thus, the next part of the journey was the design and development of specialised diamond-sintering tools I made myself that allowed me to push the stone to where I was satisfied.

As days turned into months, The Falcon became my next obsession. I still only have a rough idea of how long I sat and carved. When I was finished and satisfied with the carving, then came the polishing, which was not a simple task. Many small steps were required until the final polish made the stone glow; the feathers were like fibre optics with the tips on fire.

For the final construction I needed the eyes to look 'alive'; if they are not correct even the best animal carving would look lifeless. I pride myself on the eyes I design for my carvings. For the Falcon, I chose blue Indian sapphire with palladium. The combination gave this falcon a spark of life and intelligence. When it came to work on the 18K gold for the eyes, beak and talons – a choice I made before gold prices skyrocketed – I worked with Volkmar Juchem, one of the best goldsmiths working today (and my best friend). We have developed a process that makes the gold fit precisely and function 'as one' with the gem material that comprises the object. Thus, when you look at the falcon as a whole, you see all the material as one object, rather than a stone with gold attached.

When I finally had a chance to sit and look at the work and see what I created, I literally cried with satisfaction. I have invested roughly 700 hours into the carving and design; the goldwork and finishing added about 300 hours. A year has passed since I finished the Peregrine Falcon, but I am satisfied that to date this is one of my greatest works. ■





To create the Peregrine Falcon, Christopher Dobranski transformed a seven-kilogram citrine crystal from Minas Gerais, Brazil, into a 1,860 gm carving. The eyes, beak and talons use 26.58 grams of 18K gold. The bird's eyes are created from 3.20 ctw Indian sapphire and 0.64 gm of palladium. Photos by Patrick Oscuri.



REFLECTING ON THE 2026



TUCSON GEM SHOWS

Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta reviews the challenges and successes at this year's Gem Showcase.

For decades, the trade has travelled to Tucson, Arizona, in search of recently discovered and newly popular material. There, they learn about the latest trends and meet and exchange information with their colleagues. In that regard, the largest gem and mineral show in the world simply continues to grow, even in the face of industry concerns about tariffs and supply.

The Tucson Gem Showcase does not just influence the outlook of the trade for the coming year; it has a major effect on the city of Tucson and on Pima County. In 2025, the Showcase's total economic impact on the area was \$229.5 million (~£174.1 million). More than 6,700 exhibitors and 47,000 buyers came to Tucson during the shows. A survey conducted by the Seidman Research Institute of Arizona State University, with almost 1,200 respondents, indicated that 91% of exhibitors and 81% of buyers planned to return for the 2026 Gem Showcase.

While final numbers have not been officially announced, early estimates indicate that this year's Showcase featured more than

3,300 registered vendors at over fifty shows. This year, exhibitors and attendees alike felt that there was less foot traffic at the shows, perhaps as a result of tariffs the United States has implemented, as well as other economic and sociopolitical situations. There was also an adjustment to the schedules of the AGTA and GJX shows, which are major draws for the Showcase. Both shows have, in the past, started on Tuesday and run through the following Sunday; however, this year both shows opened on Monday, 2 February, with AGTA closing on Friday, 6 February and GJX shutting down on Saturday, 7 February.

Sammatha Maclachlan FGA DGA FIRV MJVA has visited Tucson on several occasions, and returned to the city in 2026. She observed, "The 2026 Tucson Gem Showcase was another enjoyable and rewarding experience. While attendance felt strong overall, it seemed slightly lighter than in some past years. Even so, there was still plenty of energy across the shows and many opportunities to discover interesting material." Her thoughts were echoed by other people at the Showcase. However, it is important to note that the shows have become about more than buying and selling, as pointed out by Wim Vertriest FGA, a field



Top: Exhibitors found that show attendees were seeking out gem materials in unusual cuts. Columbia Gem House saw great interest in their new star cuts, shown here applied to Montana sapphires. Photo courtesy of Columbia Gem House.

Left: Colour captivated visitors to the Tucson Gem Showcase this year, with a wide range of materials in bold shades and shapes receiving a warm reception. This 18K yellow-gold ring from Omi Gems brings together an 8.48 ct opal with 1.50 tcw trapezoid tsavorite garnets, 0.58 tcw round tsavorites and 0.22 tcw round haüynes. It received the AGTA Spectrum Best in Color award. Photo courtesy of Omi Gems.



The Solaris Sunset pendant from Mary van der Aa Iconic Jewels, in collaboration with Tucson Todd's Gems, took the Platinum Honors – Men's Wear award at the AGTA Spectrum Awards. The pendant comprises a 15.07 ct Portuguese-cut pyrope-spessartine garnet suspended from a platinum diamond-cut cable chain. Photo courtesy of Mary van der Aa Iconic Jewels.

tariffs and world economies and lack of foreign buyers who said they were not coming before the show even started – I was even more reserved.” These expectations led him to put his best foot forward and hope for success, and his efforts were rewarded. “I put the best organised, best-quality displays possible, and targeted the buyers for each of the locations to match them and product. Surprisingly, it worked. We had record or near-record shows at each of our locations, so I was very satisfied, and I also was able to make plenty of good purchases for both rough stones and for cut stones for which I cannot find rough.”

ATTENDEES

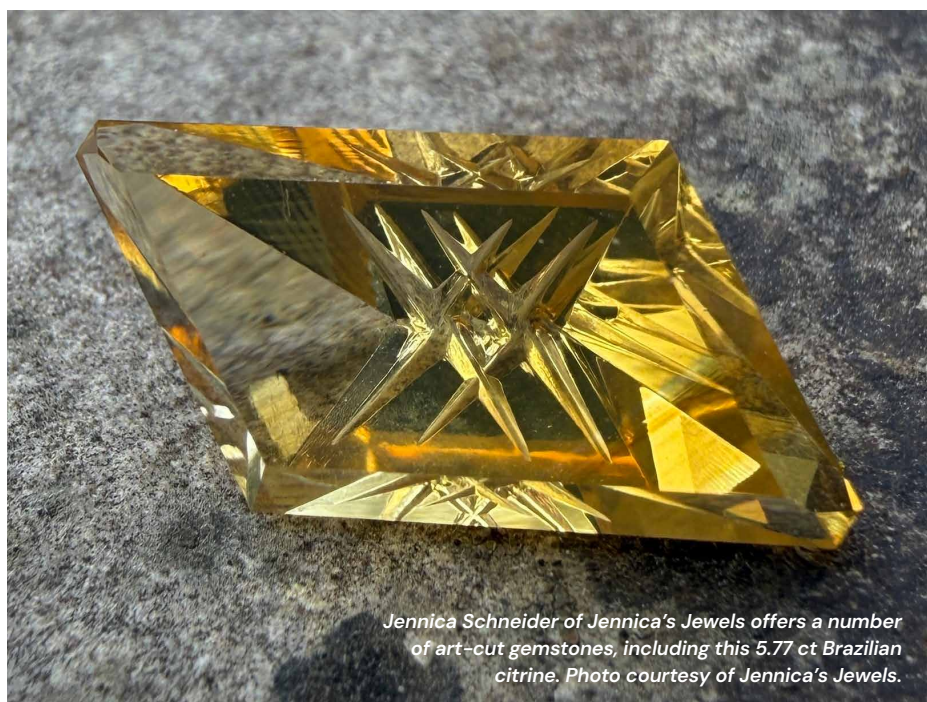
A number of our respondents indicated that younger attendees, particularly young designers, were a notable presence at this year's shows. This is not surprising in an industry that has become the province of millennials and members of Generation Z, who now make up roughly

68% of jewellery customers. For this demographic, gemstone and jewellery purchases are not saved for wedding, anniversary and birthday gifts; rather, they buy for themselves, to fulfil their own wishes and express their individuality. While they tend to make fewer purchases, the purchases they do make are more selective, of higher quality and are emotionally driven. They are also inclined to buy pieces for everyday wear. →

Even in the face of pricing difficulties and complicated geopolitical situations, show visitors were looking for gemstones, jewellery and pieces that spoke to, and for, them.

gemmologist based at GIA's Bangkok location. “The state of the world brought a lot of confusion, limiting attendance and goods from smaller international suppliers, especially from Brazil and South Asia. Even so, trade shows are less about trading and more about showing. There may be fewer sales, but there is greater emphasis on developing connections, which could result in future business. As well, people are looking for education, both technological – such as treatment detection – and trade-related topics, such as trends, pricing and supply-chain issues.”

However, a lighter presence did not necessarily translate to lower sales across the board. Even in the face of pricing difficulties and complicated geopolitical situations, show visitors were looking for gemstones, jewellery and pieces that spoke to, and for, them. According to Mary van der Aa (Mary van der Aa Iconic Jewels), people were “definitely looking for showstoppers this year, big and flashy!” Members of the industry who attended the shows came with questions, but ready to buy. This was the experience of Dudley Blauwet, whose eponymous company had booths at several shows around the city. “I always go in with low expectations, and this year – with



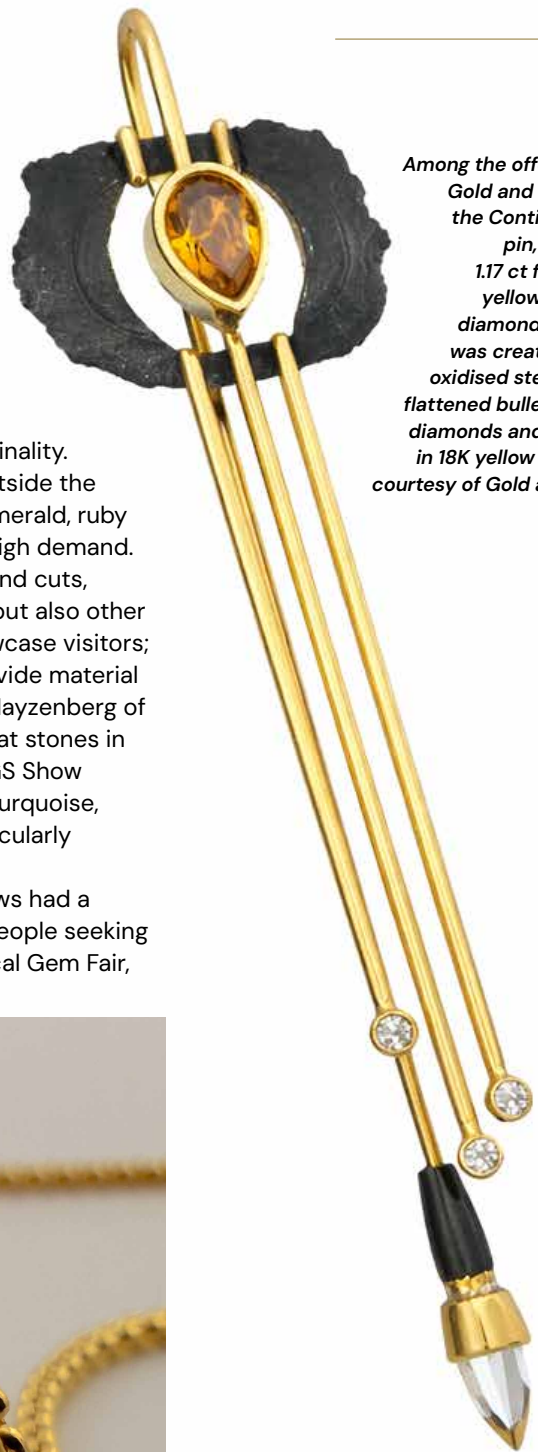
Jennica Schneider of Jennica's Jewels offers a number of art-cut gemstones, including this 5.77 ct Brazilian citrine. Photo courtesy of Jennica's Jewels.

This profile largely fits the attendees our respondents noticed. Designer Dallas Prince (Dallas Prince Designs) noted that “The new crowds are younger, and they want to be catered to. We were very fortunate to have quite a few of them at our booth this year. It was exciting; hopefully, that side of the business will continue.” Dudley Blauwet also noticed younger attendees; additionally, “there was a lack of European, Canadian and Chinese buyers, but more from Taiwan and Hong Kong and Singapore. We saw fewer mom-and-pop storefronts, but plenty of independent jewellers doing their own designs.” Finally, of this group of attendees, Dave Bindra (B&B Fine Gems) remarked that “Buyers are more and more educated every year. There is an incredible group of young and new designers in the marketplace that come, laser focused, on their own needs and the needs of their clients.”

GEM VARIETIES, COLOURS AND CUTS

As in previous years, and in keeping with jewellery trends around the world, shoppers in Tucson were looking for unique pieces in order to demonstrate their originality. We learned that gems outside the traditional Big Three — emerald, ruby and sapphire — were in high demand. Further, striking colours and cuts, applied to the Big Three but also other material, captivated Showcase visitors; vendors were able to provide material that fit the bill. Jackline Mayzenberg of JOGS Events reported that stones in great demand at the JOGS Show included ruby, sapphire, turquoise, opal, green garnets (particularly tsavorite) and spinel.

Exhibitors at other shows had a similar experience with people seeking colour. Based at the Ethical Gem Fair,



Among the offerings from Gold and Smoke was the Continuum stick pin, featuring a 1.17 ct fancy-deep yellowish-orange diamond. The jewel was created from an oxidised sterling-silver flattened bullet, and uses diamonds and quartz set in 18K yellow gold. Photo courtesy of Gold and Smoke.



This one-of-a-kind pendant, created by Jennica Schneider, uses a 27.74 ct Bolivian ametrine. Photo courtesy of Jennica's Jewels.

Monica Stephenson of ANZA Gems found that people were drawn to their assortment of natural-colour, no-heat sapphires from Umba, Tanzania. “These sapphires come out of the ground in a spectrum of beautiful colours with some interesting inclusions. We did well with the larger one-of-a-kind sapphires, as well as round and emerald-cut material. Designers were delighted to find traceable sources of accent gems in an ombré of colors.”

While show attendees seemed to be seeking a wide range of colours,



The floor of the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show (TGMS), now in its seventy-first year. TGMS was held at the Tucson Convention Center from 12–15 February 2026. Photo courtesy of the Tucson Gem & Mineral Society.

another unifying theme seemed to be unconventional gems. As Sammantha Maclachlan put it, “It’s always exciting to encounter new or unusual material, and Tucson continues to be one of the best places to see such diversity in gems and minerals.” Mary van der Aa certainly found this to be the case. “We had a couple of Rogerley fluorite pieces; we also had some pieces this year with gems like hollandite, gem silica and dumortierite. People loved the unusual stones, as always. Helen Serras-Herman MFA FGA, who had booths at the AGTA and Tucson Gem & Mineral (TGMS) shows, premiered a collection of Peruvian blue opal. While she has worked with the material for years — her late husband, Andrew Herman, was one of the first dealers to sell blue opal from Peru in the early 1990s — it has been some time since she offered the material at the shows.

Jen Cervelli of Omi Privé recalled that visitors to the company’s AGTA show booths were drawn to Paraíba

“Buyers are more and more educated every year. There is an incredible group of young and new designers in the marketplace that come, laser focused, on their own needs and the needs of their clients.”

tourmalines, especially those of Brazilian origin. She also saw strong sales for alexandrite and fine garnets, specifying that prospective customers were seeking demantoid and tsavorite garnets. The last of these is one of the gems used in their AGTA Spectrum award-winning ring, which also uses Australian black opal and haüyne. Dave Bindra mentioned that his company, B&B Fine Gems brought an ‘exceptional collection’ of spinels to the AGTA show, where they sold quite well. Monica Stephenson was surprised by the attention given to the zircons that ANZA Gems had on display. In her words, “customers could not get enough” and she wished that there had been more of these gemstones in her show inventory.

While she spoke to show visitors who were looking for California tourmaline and Montana sapphire, Karin Jacobson also found that people were receptive to other, unexpected materials that



These cufflinks by Dallas Price comprise two specialty-cut freeform boulder-opal slices weighing 26.20 tcw, accented by 7.96 tcw square-cut colour-change garnets (7.96 tcw) set in high-polish 14K yellow gold (left). The back of of the cufflinks (right) are set with 0.72 tcw round white diamonds. Photo courtesy of Dallas Prince Designs.

they found at her booth. "I do work quite a lot with non-traditional gemstones. This year, the standouts were Montana agate and Idaho jasper in larger geometric cabochons. They differ from each other, but both have a kind of painterly landscape that is very beautiful and striking." She added that people are surprised and pleased to learn about gemstones produced from the United States. Independent gemstone artist Jennica Schneider (Jennica's Jewels) reiterated this sentiment. "People really appreciate American-mined minerals. I cut a lot of sunstone, and those seemed



These Tanzanian sapphires, produced by primarily women miners working with Moyo Gems, were cut by women artisanal faceters in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Top (from left): 0.85 ct reddish hexagon, 0.95 ct blue trillion cut, 1.03 ct green oval. Bottom (from left): 1.29 ct orange oval, 1.75 ct purple kite cut, 1.59 ct pink round. Photo courtesy of ANZA Gems.



These hand-fabricated, one-of-a-kind earrings from Karin Jacobson feature elongated Willow Creek jaspers from Idaho (U.S.), each with its own unique pattern of gunmetal and milky warm greys. A rim of sterling silver is set around the outer edges, while the back designs and prongs are made from ethically sourced Fairmined 14K yellow gold. Two marquise-cut gemstones accent each jasper: a 0.22 ct iolite and a 0.11 ct amethyst, both set in 14K yellow gold. The earrings hang from 14K yellow-gold French wires. Photo courtesy of Karin Jacobson.

to be the most popular amongst what I had. Although I did gather that next year, I should bring more fantasy-cut sapphires, and those would certainly do well."

Natasha Braunwart, brand & corporate social responsibility manager of Columbia Gem House, found that "minty greens – and greens as a whole – are still highly requested" by customers of the Washington state-based company. The company's Winza sapphire line, which is ethically sourced from Tanzania, also attracted a great deal of attention, as did tourmalines and Montana sapphires. Further, their new faceted star shapes were a huge hit, along with other "creative and unusual cuts, like our hand-carved intaglios." Monica Stephenson and Dudley Blauwart also saw interested in greens. The former told us that in particular, "minty to tsavorite green was HOT!" For the latter, mint-green

tourmalines "from large volumes of rough purchased before the Taliban takeover," as well as 'mint' peridot from Pakistan and teal sapphires were among the many gemstones that sold well.

Ms Braunwart was one of many people who saw requests for cuts outside the standard round brilliant. Dave Bindra noted that "Ovals were very hot, along with anything elongated." A number of exhibitors noted that cushion cuts were popular, inspired by the old-mine-cut diamond in American pop star Taylor Swift's engagement ring from American football player Travis Kelce. Both Dudley Blauwet and Dallas Prince indicated that heart cuts were popular with their clientele; reflecting this interest, a rainbow moonstone pendant by Omi Privé took Honorable Mention in the Bridal Wear category at the AGTA Spectrum Awards. Additionally, according to Dudley Blauwet, there was demand for "rounds as always,

A number of our respondents indicated that younger attendees, particularly young designers, were a notable presence at the shows.



Left: Karin Jacobson expanded her Confetti collection prior to exhibiting at the Melee Show. This 14K rose-gold, hand-fabricated pendant from that collection uses 0.70 tww round Malaya garnets and 0.11 tww round recycled diamonds. It is shown here on a 16–18” adjustable oxidised sterling-silver cable chain. Photo courtesy of Karin Jacobson.

Right: The Inferno ring by Dallas Prince, which features a fully hand-engraved shank, is composed of a 6.35 ct centre oval mandarin spessartine garnet and 2.03 tww round white diamonds (2.03 cts) set in 14K yellow gold (14.10 cts). Photo courtesy of Dallas Prince Designs.



gems from Moyo Gems, which are sourced from majority women miners in East Africa and cut by a small group of artisanal faceters in Chiang Mai, Thailand. We brought lots of this new calibrated material.”

Jennica Schneider was a first-time exhibitor, based at the Pueblo Show. Her focus is on fantasy cuts, which received a fair amount of attention during the

showcase. She related, “I did have a number of visitors at my booth that were ready to try something ‘different’. They had a portion of their budget set aside for unique gemstones that will turn heads, including fantasy cuts and cutting styles that otherwise push beyond the traditional.”

fancy cuts like elongated hexes, or portrait cuts, geometric cuts. We had requests requiring custom cuts to exact specifications.”

Monica Stephenson also noticed that potential customers were focusing on gem cuts. ANZA Gems, which prides itself on its innovative faceting, is well positioned to deal with this demand. “Our clients really reacted to our new gems and collections. I would say that there was a split between very interesting geometric cuts like variations of kites and shields, and more rounded, voluptuous cuts like cushions, pears and eggs. We also expanded our selection of one-of-a-kind gems faceted by women artisanal faceters in the United States: Beth Stier, Jenna Sloane, Nadine Marshall, Megan Szczecko and Michelle Mai. We love to centre women in every area of our supply chain, so we featured this in our emails to clients and social media.” In addition to expanding their faceting pool in the U.S., ANZA Gems continues to reach out to other communities. “We have continued to grow our Chiang Mai collection of calibrated and melee



ANZA Gems found that their sapphires, in a variety of colours and cuts, were popular among shoppers at the Ethical Gem Fair, as were green gemstones. Clockwise from top: 1.62 ct teal-green sapphire, 1.89 ct aquamarine, 3.83 ct blue sapphire, 1.08 ct peridot and 2.61 blue sapphire. Photo courtesy of ANZA Gems.



This necklace, with matching sterling-silver earrings, was on display at Helen Serras-Herman's AGTA booth. They were part of a collection using materials that fall in the range of Cloud Dancer, the current Pantone Color of the Year. The pendant uses 170.0 taw carved and drilled agate from Roosevelt Dam, Arizona, a cubic zirconia micropavé bead and sterling silver. The detachable four-strand necklace is made with frosted white chalcedony beads, 5-6 mm natural-colour oval pearls and a 20" sterling-silver chain. Photo © Helen Serras-Herman.

JEWELLERY AND JEWELLERY DESIGN

While seeking gemstones with unique attributes, attendees also sought to express their personalities through jewellery design. Items that are considered original or used unconventional materials garnered attention and sales. In keeping with worldwide trends, jewellery that incorporated mixed metals into their composition was quite popular this year.

Silver was a big seller in Tucson this year – both on its own and in

mixed-metal combinations – perhaps in response to the high cost of gold (silver and platinum also had price surges in early 2026, but these price increases may have happened too late to affect the inventory brought to Tucson). Jackline Mayzenberg of the JOGS Show remarked that “silver and fashion jewellery saw particularly strong demand, while gold jewellery moved at a slower pace.” Mary van der Aa noted that she had created a new silver line, Portal, in keeping with public interest and demand; this line almost completely sold out. Karin Jacobson reported that she sold both everyday pieces and statement jewels featuring mixed metals. “My stacking Hook bracelets in oxidised sterling silver, with bright-coloured gemstones set in 18K gold, did especially well. I also had strong sales of my Confetti necklaces – 18K gold settings with diamonds and coloured stones paired with oxidised sterling-silver

chains, which give the pieces a slightly edgier feel while also keeping the price point accessible.”

Designer Kelly Selcer is co-owner of Gold & Smoke. The company's Tucson base was the Out of the Jewelry Box (OJB) Experience, of which Ms Selcer is a co-founder. Gold and Smoke creates wearable, everyday pieces for men and women out of flattened bullets cast in precious metals. “Our work can be considered somewhat edgy, reflecting a bold and distinctive aesthetic. We mold and cast flattened bullets in either 18K gold or sterling silver, often setting it with a gemstone. The bullet becomes a symbol of resilience, a reflection of transformation.” These qualities echoed with Gold and Smoke's clientele.

Columbia Gem House has exhibited at the AGTA show for over 50 years, and at the Ethical Gem Fair for the past →

Silver was a big seller in Tucson this year – both on its own and in mixed-metal combinations.



Spinel in different colours were big sellers for B&B Fine Gems. The left photo shows a 5.62 ct cushion-cut spinel, while on the right is a 1.20 ct cobalt spinel from Vietnam. Photos courtesy of B&B Fine Gems.



This eight-strand necklace from Helen Serras-Herman FGA incorporates Peruvian blue opal beads, sunstone beads, freshwater cultured pearls, natural-colour peach keshi pearls and 14K yellow-gold beads. The necklace uses a detachable 80.00 ct Peruvian blue opal pendant, with a large 14K yellow-gold multi-strand clasp. The 14K gold earrings were made to accompany the necklace. Photo © Helen Serras-Herman.

six years. While they usually sell loose gems at their AGTA booth, they changed their game plan this year, according to Natasha Braunwart. "We did actually also have a finished-jewellery booth in the Grand Ballroom at AGTA. We typically only show a small portion of our finished jewellery collection in our main booth in the Gem Hall, but with new introductions and a wider range to offer as supplemental goods, we decided to give it additional attention this year. We were seeing the most interest in items that would hold up to everyday wear, and they were mostly mixed metals with the exception of stud earrings, which were all 14K gold." With regard to design, clients also sought unique jewels from Columbia Gem House. "We saw the most interest in pieces that were unique dainty designs and/or utilised some of our creative cutting – one example being our hand-carved Zodiac intaglio collection." These qualities echoed with this year's attendees.

Though Jennica Schneider of Jennica's Jewels is known for her faceting work, she also had a selection of jewellery at her booth. "I brought a suite of pendants. I wanted to make pieces that were ready to wear, and needed only a chain to be worn. So I drilled a hole into each stone. By following the original shape of the raw stones, I then created one-of-a-kind designs. Each pendant got a



Gemstones in heart cuts were popular this year in Tucson. This platinum pendant from Niveet Nagpal of Omi Gems comprises a 9.20 ct heart-shaped rainbow moonstone and a 1.01 ct tourmaline accented by 0.79 tww tourmalines and 0.49 tww diamonds. It earned an Honorable Mention in the Bridal Wear category at the AGTA Spectrum Awards. Photo courtesy of Omi Gems.

different carving in the back, so they are all unique. I am certain that these particular designs have never been done before." This fits exactly into the aesthetic that trend-watching jewellery aficionados are seeking out.

Helen Serras-Herman, a noted gem artist, found she was able to tap into the trends that were top-of-mind in Tucson. She stated that she has worked with mixed metals for years – using silver, gold and copper in her work – and this year was no exception. In addition to such offerings this year, she curated new assemblages for her booths. At TGMS, she debuted her Red, White and Blue collection, to coordinate with the show's theme of "Red, White & Blue – Celebrate the Spirit of Minerals!" Her booth at AGTA shone a spotlight on gemstones whose colour range aligns with Cloud Dancer, the 2026 Pantone Color of the Year. "Critics argued that white is not a colour at all, and should not have been chosen," she explained. "But this soothing, neutral colour may be the perfect starting point for lapidaries and jewellery artists; a blank canvas where white gem materials awaken and counterbalance other choices, creating both harmony and contrast. The white spectrum includes materials that are colourless, alabaster, eggshell, oyster, linen or dove white." With this in mind, she chose to highlight jewellery that used less-common materials to show that using this palette was not only achievable, but desirable.



Orange-to-red gemstones, such as the ones shown here, were in demand for ANZA Gems at their Ethical Gem Fair booth. From left: 3.75 ct orange zircon, 4.36 ct rhodolite garnet, 4.73 ct rhodolite garnet, 3.77 ct spessartine garnet, 10.59 ct rhodolite garnet, 3.21 ct rhodolite garnet and 5.92 ct rhodolite garnet. Photo courtesy of ANZA Gems.



This 18K yellow-gold signet ring from Gold and Smoke uses a 0.24 ct white diamond centre stone set in an oxidised sterling-silver flattened bullet. Photo courtesy of Gold and Smoke.

Some vendors found sales slower than in previous years. Others considered the difficulties of the 2026 economic landscape to be challenges, ones they were able to meet.

"I showcased jewellery with white drusy quartz from Arizona, moonstone, Roosevelt Dam agate, alabaster onyx, white precious opal, white coral and pearls." The unusual materials showcased by Ms Serras-Herman and others, along with original designs and unique combinations, were received with great appreciation by Tucson show clientele.

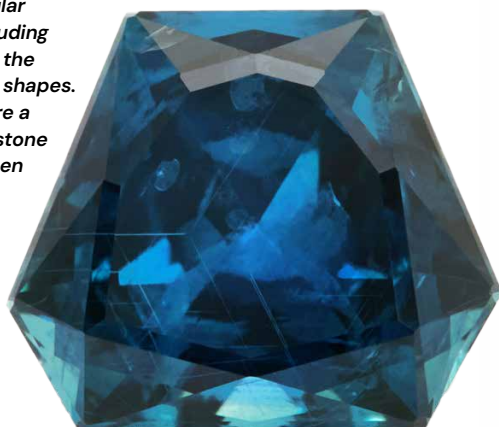
Some vendors at the Tucson Gem Showcase found sales slower than in previous years. Others considered the difficulties of the 2026 economic

landscape to be challenges; ultimately, they were challenges these sellers were able to meet. For example, Helen Serras-Herman stated that, while she knew that many of her colleagues had a comparatively difficult year, "This year, both my AGTA and TGMS sales were my best for these shows." In a similar vein, Monica Stephenson said that this was the "best Tucson yet!" for ANZA Gems at the Ethical Gem Fair.

Overall, the tone for the rest of 2026 post-Tucson was cautiously optimistic. Kelly Selcer of Gold and Smoke pointed out that "It's a bit of a volatile time

in general, and the jewellery industry has to pivot with the times. It is more important than ever to understand what's happening in the world and to stay on top of what is changing and be a part of the change. Remaining hopeful and positive and believing in what you do is paramount. There are incredibly talented, smart, innovative people in this business. I believe in them and continue to feel positive." This is largely in keeping with what we heard about the Tucson Gem Showcase, from the perspective of both vendors and visitors. ■

Montana sapphires remained popular among a number of exhibitors, including Columbia Gem House, who offered the material in a variety of colours and shapes. Among their offerings this year were a 4.08 ct teal modified-triangle gemstone (left) and a 2.76 ct bicolour specimen in a fancy-kite cut (right). Photos courtesy of Columbia Gem House.



Will 2026 Bring a Diamond Rebound?

Russell Shor forecasts the year ahead for the global diamond market.

The worldwide diamond industry continues to adjust to changing market conditions by reducing output and stockpiling supplies of natural rough. This is occurring at a time when economic and political uncertainties are affecting the jewellery industry as a whole. At the same time, competition from lab-grown diamonds continues to impact prices and demand.

As with 2024, last year proved extremely challenging for the natural diamond market. In 2025, De Beers reported a loss of \$511 million (£386 million) as the company off-loaded 'low-demand' rough material at reduced prices. In general, prices for rough diamonds fell seven percent; this was after declines of more than twenty percent the previous year.

This year is likely to bring a formal end to De Beers as a 140-year-old South African mining company that held control over producers' outputs for decades; instead, it will be owned by the producers it once ruled. According to an article in the *Financial Times*, a consortium of African nations – led by Botswana and including Angola and Namibia – together with private equity groups have the inside track on this ownership. De Beers is currently 85% owned by Anglo American, a mining company based in South Africa, which has been trying to sell its stake for nearly two years. Anglo American's valuation has continually dropped as diamond prices eroded. Since the announcement that Anglo American would sell the firm two years ago,

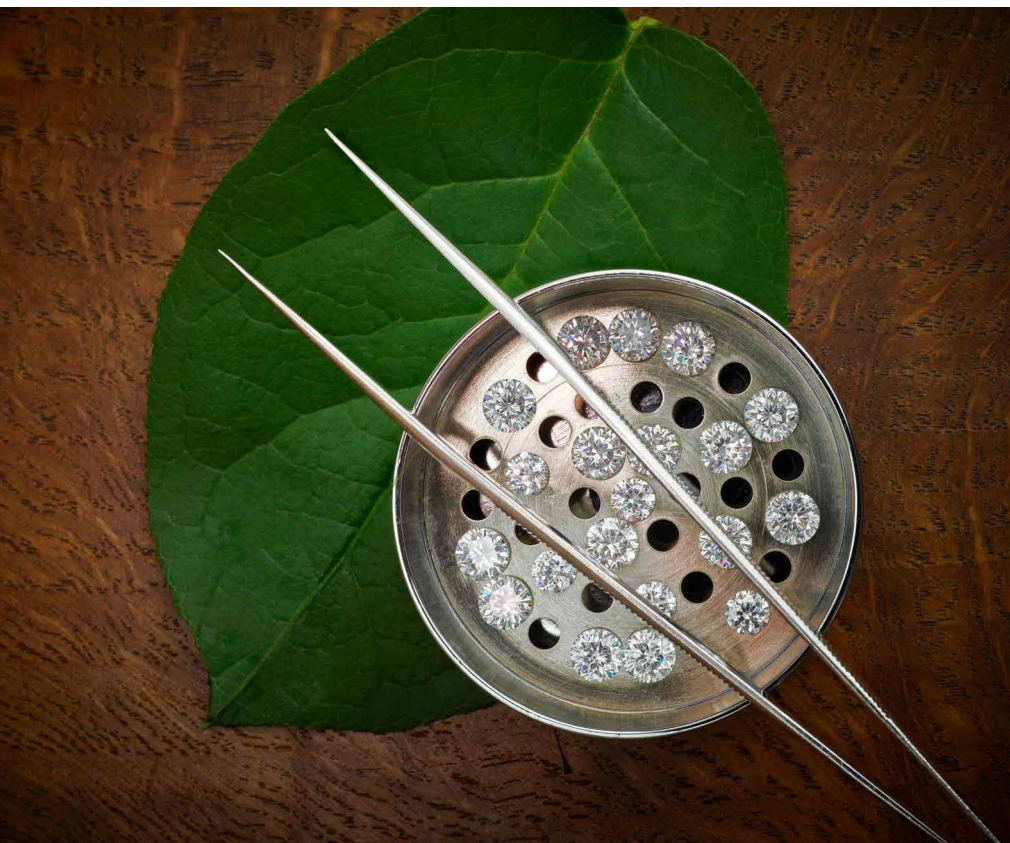
the value of the company has fallen to \$2.3 billion (~£1.7 billion), less than half of its original listed worth.

Elsewhere, according to an official announcement, the government of Botswana has a stockpile of unsold rough diamonds that has topped twelve million carats, which is twice its legal limit. At the same time, the Okavango Diamond Company – which is wholly owned by the government of Botswana – will begin direct contract sales this year to augment its diamond auctions. Okavango sells up to 25% of the output of Debswana, the jointly owned De Beers–Botswana diamond operation, and will increase its share in coming months to help draw down the stockpile.

Alrosa, Russia's diamond mining and marketing agency, trimmed its production by ten percent to 29.7 million carats. The company suspended operations at a number of alluvial sites, including the Zapolyarny and Magnitny open pits in Verkhne Munskeye. Alrosa also faced continuing price pressure because of ongoing sanctions by the United States (U.S.) and the European Union (EU) arising from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. However, the company stayed profitable on paper because the company sold its 41% stake in Angola's Catoca mine for the equivalent of \$424 million (~£325 million) last year.

Prices for natural diamonds continued to slide through 2025 as slow demand and high inventories worldwide conspired to depress the market. Demand was also impacted by the threat of U.S. tariffs, which exacerbated the situation by raising dealers' costs. However, given the already-slow demand,

Lab-grown diamonds continue to take a significant market share away from their natural counterparts. Photo by Mark Johnson/iStock.





Chow Tai Fook's location on Queen's Road in Hong Kong. The company saw a 17.5% drop in revenue in 2025, though the company's operating profit held firm. Photo by ShingWong/Wikimedia Commons.

the ability for dealers to fully pass these costs along to consumers was limited. Indian dealers were particularly hard hit, as the aforementioned tariffs reached 50% in August. Press reports from India noted that polished diamond exports fell by 16.75% to \$14 billion (~ £10.5 billion) last year, with direct exports to the United States halved from \$10 billion to \$4.8 billion. More than 100,000 workers lost their jobs, mainly in the smaller contract shops which do prep work for the largest manufacturing operations. Demand and prices for larger polished diamonds over two carats were less affected, registering only slight declines as wealthier consumers continued buying luxury goods.

In the U.S. Signet Group – parent to Kay Jewelers, Zale Corp. and Jared – reported that high gold prices contributed to a three-percent rise in same-store sales for the third quarter of their fiscal year 2026; this

period ended in September 2025. The company was expecting full-year sales to show totals that were roughly even with the previous year's results. Signet estimated that its full-year sales will fall between \$6.6 billion and \$6.8 billion (~£4.9–5.1 billion).

In Greater China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Chow Tai Fook (CTF), which has a commanding retail market share, saw a 17.5% drop in revenue to HK\$89.23 billion (~£8.6 billion). The

company's operating profit held firm, however. China is beset by lingering effects from a crash of the real-estate market and a sharp slowdown in economic growth.

The only jewellery sector that saw growth at the end of 2025 was the top-end market, with the major luxury houses performing well. Richemont, the Swiss-based parent of Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels and Buccellati saw jewellery sales rise fourteen percent across the globe, →

This year is likely to bring a formal end to De Beers as a 140-year-old South African mining company that held control over producers' outputs for decades



The Venetia Mine in South Africa will likely be sold this year by De Beers after two loss-making years. Photo courtesy of De Beers.

even registering double-digit growth in the United States, which imposed a 39% tariff on most of its products.

LVMH, the French-based luxury house which owns Tiffany & Co., Bulgari and Chaumet, saw a slight decline for the year as it retools Tiffany's products, reducing the lines of silver jewellery.

One aspect of the trade remained encouraging: large diamonds, particularly fancy-coloured material. Sotheby's reported that its 2025 sales

of high-end jewellery rose 18% from the previous year, to \$317.7 million (~£239.8 million). One 10.10 ct fancy-vivid-blue diamond, known as the Mediterranean Blue, sold for CHF 17.9 million (~£15.8 million) in Geneva in May. The Desert Rose, a 31.68 ct pear-shaped fancy-vivid-orangy-pink diamond, was sold at auction at Sotheby's Abu Dhabi location in December 2025 for \$8.8 million (~£6.6 million). Christie's reported a 17% increase in luxury sales, including

jewellery and rare watches. In May, Christie's Geneva auction house sold a 6.24 ct fancy-deep-blue diamond – set in a platinum ring alongside round rubies and baguette-cut diamonds by Boucheron – for CHF 10.64 million (~£10.06 million), well above its pre-sale estimate of CHF 4.5–6.5 million. In November, the Geneva house sold the 9.61 ct fancy-vivid-blue Mellon Blue diamond for CHF 20,525,000 (~£19.4 million).

Competition from lab-grown diamonds is fierce, particularly in the United States, as the U.S. is the largest retail market for this material. A survey for *The Knot*, a wedding information site, reported that 61% of all engagement rings sales last year used synthetic diamonds – a category once believed to be 'untouchable'.



Large diamonds, particularly fancy-coloured gems, were one area of the diamond trade that flourished in 2025. Sotheby's auctioned the 31.68 carat Desert Rose (left), a pear-shaped fancy-vivid-orangy-pink diamond, in December 2025 for roughly £6.6 million. Christie's sold the Mellon Blue, a 9.61 ct fancy-vivid-blue modified pear brilliant-cut diamond, for approximately £19.4 million. Photos courtesy of Sotheby's (left) and Christie's (right).

U.S. retail jewellers report that lab-grown diamonds are now affecting demand at nearly all market levels except the very top end. However, intense competition continues to drive down prices. Per-carat prices are now under \$100 for carat-sized samples and under \$150 per carat for three-carat material. A number of producers, especially those in the U.S., are shifting their production away from

Rough diamond prices continue to decline as demand stagnates, rendering mining unprofitable for De Beers and other producers. Photo by Russell Shor.



U.S. retail jewellers report that lab-grown diamonds are now affecting demand at nearly all market levels.

the jewellery market, instead gearing towards the technical and industrial fields. Much of the jewellery production is now moving to lower-wage facilities in India and China.

The outlook for the remainder of 2026 remains cloudy, at best. U.S. President Donald Trump removed tariffs on Indian-manufactured diamonds shortly before the Supreme Court struck the tariffs down as outside his authority to impose. President Trump, however, has said he plans to impose new tariffs under a different provision of the law.

Overall, the American economy has held up, though tariff-field inflation of staple products continues to erode the disposable incomes of middle-class consumers, while workers from Generation Z are finding good-paying jobs more difficult to secure.

In response to this opaque outlook, retailers are remaining cautious. With gold prices so volatile, many are reluctant to commit large amounts of cash, knowing the price may fall quickly or the economy suddenly turn southward. All of these uncertainties contribute to a very murky outlook for all levels of the diamond industry. ■

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CONSIDERING JIS MIAMI 2026

Olga Gonzalez FGA DGA explores the show that has become the gateway to the jewellery trade for Latin America and the Caribbean.

In today's jewellery market, global supply chains are constantly shifting and regional demand plays an increasingly defining role. In this setting, the March 2026 edition of JIS Spring in Miami Beach, Florida, reinforced one clear reality: The future of jewellery has a clear path through Miami.

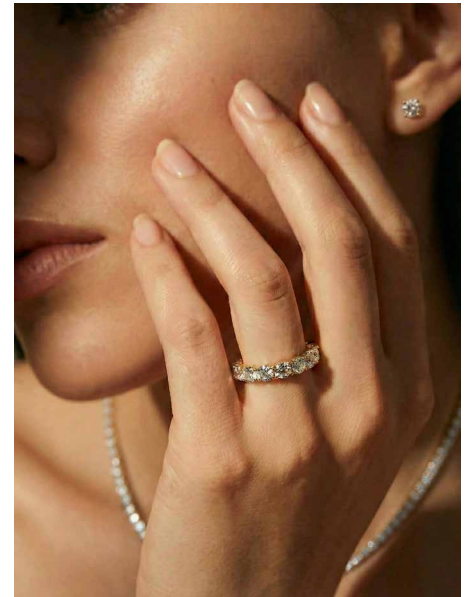
Held 8–10 March at the Miami Beach Convention Center, JIS Spring has evolved into far more than a seasonal buying event. It has become a strategic commercial bridge connecting the United States with Latin America and the Caribbean, bringing together retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers in a setting designed for real-time business and cross-border exchange. With strong attendance from across Central and South America, the Caribbean and key U.S. markets, this year's show underscored Miami's growing importance as a hemispheric trade hub. For many attendees, particularly those from Latin America, JIS is not simply convenient; it is essential.

Unlike traditional sourcing trips to Europe or Asia, Miami offers proximity, cultural alignment and efficiency to its

attendees. Buyers can travel easily, conduct business in a bilingual environment and access a wide range of inventory tailored to their markets. This dynamic has positioned JIS Miami as one of the most effective gateways for jewellery commerce across the Americas.

A FIRST-QUARTER MARKETPLACE BUILT FOR ACTION

The timing of JIS Spring is one of its strongest advantages. Positioned at the start of the year, the show allows retailers to restock after the holiday season and align their inventory with upcoming demand across spring and summer in addition to tourism-driven markets. For retailers in Latin America and the Caribbean, this timing is particularly critical. Many operate in economies influenced by seasonal travel patterns, currency fluctuations and shifting consumer confidence. Having access to immediate inventory and flexible purchasing options allows them to respond quickly and strategically, and the show's format supports this need directly. Exhibitors



Fine-jewellery brand CRISLU creates pieces styled in a refined, everyday luxury setting, featuring timeless silhouettes crafted in .925 sterling silver, finished in platinum and accented with flawless handset cubic zirconia. The Brilliant Eternity band uses 2.00 tcw of the material, while the accompanying necklace is composed of 18.74 tcw cubic zirconia. Photo courtesy of CRISLU Jewelry.

offer both cash-and-carry merchandise and order-writing models, allowing buyers the option of securing product on the spot or planning ahead based on market conditions. "JIS Spring continues to deliver exactly what the industry needs at this time of year," said Sara McDonough, event director of JIS Events. "It's an efficient, high-impact opportunity where real buying happens."

This efficiency is not just a convenience. It is a competitive advantage in a market where speed-to-shelf can determine success. Miami's role in the jewellery trade extends beyond logistics: it is a city deeply connected to Latin American and Caribbean culture, finance and retail. That cultural fluency matters: buyers from these regions consistently point to Miami as a place where business feels intuitive. Language barriers are reduced, product assortments reflect regional tastes and relationships can be built more naturally. At JIS Spring 2026, this translated into strong engagement across the show floor. Retailers arrived with clear sourcing strategies shaped by local consumer preferences, from fashion-driven silver jewellery to accessible fine jewellery and bridal pieces.



Jennifer Kord showing off this necklace by David Kord, composed of 88.42 carats of oval Ethiopian opals, 8.28 tcw round diamonds and 18K white gold.

“At the start of the year, we’re seeing strong, intentional buying, with retailers really focused on pieces that feel distinct and wearable for their customers,” said Cori Miller, founder and designer of fine jewellery brand Corielle. “JIS Miami plays such an important role because it brings together a global mix of buyers in one place, and you can immediately see what is resonating across different markets.” Her observation highlights a key advantage of the show. JIS Miami is not just a place to buy; it is a place to read the market in real time across multiple regions.

Efficiency as a Strategic Advantage.

One of the defining characteristics of JIS Miami is its efficiency. The show is designed to allow buyers to move quickly, meet suppliers and make decisions without unnecessary friction. This is particularly important for international attendees who are balancing travel time with business priorities. The ability to complete meaningful transactions within a focused timeframe makes JIS an essential stop in the annual buying cycle. Beyond the show floor, events such as the Sail and Socialize cocktail welcome reception provide opportunities for relationship building, reinforcing the connections that drive long-term business success.



The show's Sail and Socialize cocktail hour welcome reception, held at the Miami Convention Center.

A BAROMETER FOR THE JEWELLERY TRADE IN THE AMERICAS

The Impact of Latin-American Demand on Product Trends.

One of the most significant influences on the show floor this year was the strength of demand coming from Latin American and Caribbean buyers. Nearly half of attendees identified silver and fashion jewellery as key sourcing priorities. These categories align closely with consumer behaviour across many markets in the region, where versatility, price accessibility and trend responsiveness drive purchasing decisions.

Retailers serving tourism-heavy destinations also emphasised the importance of inventory that can appeal to international travellers. This includes lightweight, wearable pieces that are easy to purchase as gifts or souvenirs, as well as designs that reflect global fashion trends. At the same time, fine jewellery continues to play a critical role, particularly in markets where such pieces are tied to milestones, status and long-term value.

“We are seeing strong momentum at the start of the year, particularly from retailers investing in proven core assortments and brands that

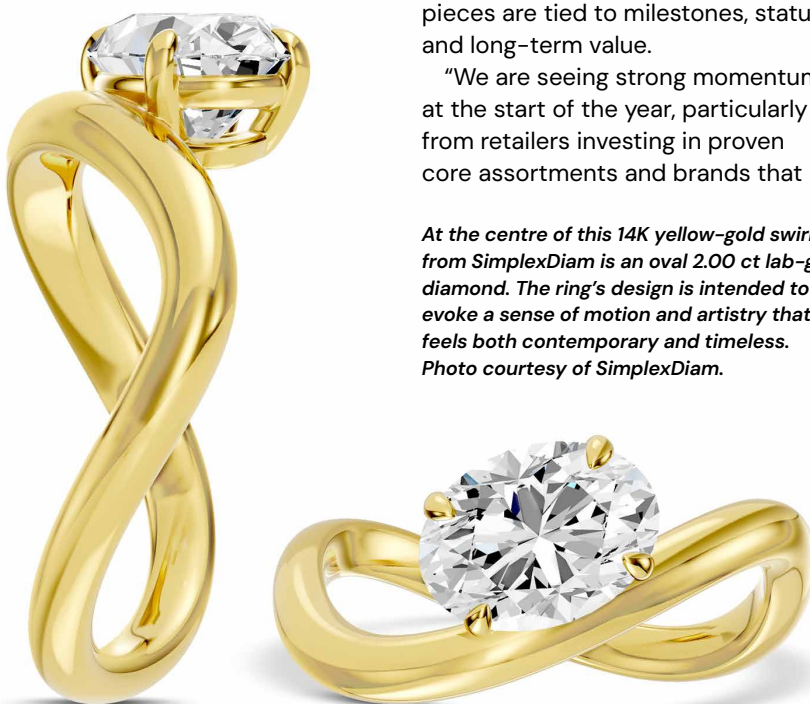
At the centre of this 14K yellow-gold swirl ring from SimplexDiam is an oval 2.00 ct lab-grown diamond. The ring's design is intended to evoke a sense of motion and artistry that feels both contemporary and timeless. Photo courtesy of SimplexDiam.

can deliver consistent availability and margin,” said Bryan Crisfield, CEO of Crislu. “The Southeast market continues to show healthy growth, driven by both domestic and international demand. JIS Miami plays a pivotal role as a global jewellery gateway, connecting world-class sourcing with one of the most dynamic retail regions in the U.S.” Mr Crisfield’s perspective reflects the

Miami’s role in the jewellery trade extends beyond logistics: It is a city deeply connected to Latin American and Caribbean culture, finance and retail.

intersection of regional demand and broader market stability. Retailers are balancing the need for trend-driven product with dependable inventory that supports consistent sales.

Bridal Trends That Reflect Global and Regional Shifts. Bridal jewellery remains a cornerstone of the industry. At JIS Miami, it is clear that this category is evolving under the influence of global and regional preferences. Customisation continues to rise, with couples seeking pieces that reflect personal identity rather than tradition alone. This trend



This model is wearing a stack of bracelets from Corielle's Jade Links collection, all of which use 14K gold. From top: The Waverly Jade herringbone bracelet comprises 3.09 tcw baguette-cut diamonds and white gold; the Frankie Jade (East-West) in yellow gold uses 4.90 ct baguette-cut diamonds. The Fiona Jade bracelet (North-South) is made up of 5.96 tcw baguette-cut diamonds mounted in white gold; next to it sits the yellow-gold version. The white-gold version of the Frankie Jade bracelet (East-West) also uses 4.90 tcw baguette-cut diamonds, while the Fiona Jade Sleek (North-South) version, in yellow gold, is mounted with 3.45 tcw baguette-cut diamonds. The bottom bracelet, the Waverly Jade herringbone, uses 2.23 tcw baguette-cut diamonds and white gold. Photo courtesy of Corielle.



is visible across Latin American markets, where cultural diversity and individual expression are shaping new bridal norms.

"Bridal jewellery buying is becoming more personalised, with couples prioritising designs that reflect their individuality rather than traditional styles," said Rohan Tak, CEO of Golden Stone. "We are seeing a strong shift toward unique centre stones, with more clients choosing natural-colour stones like emeralds and sapphires, alongside clean, modern designs."

Nearly half of attendees identified silver and fashion jewellery as key sourcing priorities.

The growing demand for coloured gemstones also reflects regional influences, as emeralds, sapphires and other material holds cultural and historical significance across Latin America. Cuts are also becoming more individualised. "Custom continues to grow, especially with elongated, fancy shapes in both natural and lab-grown," added Yogesh K. Madhvani, CEO of SimplexDiam Inc. Oval, pear, emerald and other gemstone cuts are gaining popularity, offering a modern alternative to traditional round diamonds and aligning with the desire for individuality.

Retail Evolution Across The Americas.

JIS Spring 2026 also highlighted how jewellery retail is changing across the Americas. The introduction of the Accessories and Gifts Pavilion reflects a growing trend among retailers to diversify their offerings. By incorporating lifestyle products and giftable items, jewellers are able to increase transaction value and attract a broader customer base. This strategy is particularly relevant in the Latin American and Caribbean markets, where consumers often shop across categories and value variety within a single retail experience. The Brands Pavilion further reinforced the importance of identity-driven jewellery. Featuring both emerging



A striking balance of modern elegance and timeless luxury, the Rock Ring from SimplexDiam is crafted in luminous 18K white gold, set with 0.28 tcw brilliant diamonds. Photo courtesy of SimplexDiam.



This statement ring, designed and manufactured by Golden Stone, has a refined geometric silhouette that suits modern bridal elegance. At its centre is a 7.78 ct emerald-cut emerald surrounded by 2.45 tcw baguette-cut diamonds, all mounted in 18K yellow gold. Photo courtesy of Golden Stone USA.

and established brands, the pavilion emphasised collections that offer strong narratives and recognisable design languages. For retailers, this shift is critical. Consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that tell a story and offer a sense of connection beyond the product itself.

Insight and Education in a Global Context. In addition to sourcing, the show introduced 'On Trend with JIS', a series of live discussions focused on the issues shaping the industry. Topics included metal pricing, bridal trends and consumer behaviour, with sessions offered in both English and Spanish. This bilingual approach reflects the reality of the show's audience and reinforces its position as a truly international platform. For buyers and exhibitors alike, these conversations provide valuable context, helping them navigate an industry that is becoming more interconnected and more complex.

"Participating in JIS was a great opportunity both personally and professionally," noted Leslie Valdez, marketing associate at Ocean Jewelry. "Being part of the bilingual programming, not only as a panellist but also attending other sessions, allowed me to gain valuable insights from different perspectives within the

industry and connect with a diverse audience. The show itself was very dynamic and well-attended, with strong engagement and a wide variety of visitors. We saw great interest in Ocean's collections, further building our presence in the market, and had the opportunity to strengthen relationships with existing clients while also connecting with new and exciting accounts."

JIS Spring 2026 offers a clear view into the direction of the jewellery industry across the Americas. As cross-border trade is expanding, Latin American and Caribbean markets are playing an increasingly influential role. Consumers are seeking both accessibility and individuality, while retailers are adapting by diversifying their offerings and prioritising flexibility.

At the centre of these shifts is Miami, which is uniquely positioned to connect markets, facilitate commerce and reflect the evolving dynamics of global jewellery trade. As the industry looks ahead to the next buying cycle, the importance of this gateway will only continue to grow. The next JIS Fall show, to be held 16–19 October 2026, will build on this momentum as retailers prepare for the holiday season. But if the Spring edition of the show demonstrated anything,



Influencer Hannah Estelle wearing a necklace from Hari Jewels, with a ~43.00 ct aquamarine and roughly 20.00 tcw diamonds set in 18K white gold.

it is that the jewellery industry is becoming more regional, more responsive and more interconnected, with the city of Miami becoming a key player in that connection. ■

All photos are courtesy of JIS Events unless otherwise specified.



The women behind the scenes of the 2026 JIS Spring Show, taken on International Women's Day.

A MODERN HISTORY OF THE BIRMINGHAM JEWELLERY QUARTER PART II

In the conclusion of our two-part series, Craig O'Donnell FGA considers the Jewellery Quarter from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day.

There are two undisputed landmarks in the Jewellery Quarter. The first, an unnatural-looking small boulder known as the 'Warstone', has been close to its location since ancient times. It is a felsite boulder, a glacial erratic – a rock transported by glaciers – deposited in the Ice Age and first recorded in 1390. The Warstone is illustrated in *Bisset's Magnificent Guide for the Town of Birmingham* (1808) in its position outside the Warstone Brewery of Alexander Forrest & Sons. Its present location is at the entrance to Warstone Cemetery on Warstone Lane. The other landmark is the Chamberlain Clock,

which stands on the roundabout at the junction of Warstone Lane, Vyse Street and Frederick Street. The clock commemorates Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914), the monocle-wearing member of Parliament for Hockley who also served as mayor of Birmingham. He lived in Frederick Street and was instrumental in getting rid of plate duties and tariff reform for exports, as well as improving conditions in the Jewellery Quarter. The clock was unveiled in 1904.

Other historical figures have also left their mark, literally, on the Jewellery Quarter. Whilst walking through the streets, it is always worthwhile to look

up at the facades of the buildings, some of which reveal the names of previous occupiers of the current buildings carved in stone. Sometimes the present occupier is the same, as in the case of Fattorini's and Deakin and Francis. In other cases, the occupier has changed several times since the demise of the original occupants, who obviously thought they were going to be there for the long haul (for example, the beautiful façade of Manton's in Legge Lane). One intriguing instance was the case of the Ahronsberg Brothers. Their factory remains on Ludgate Hill; the pinnacle states 'Ahronsberg Bros. Goldsmiths & Jewellers' whilst the signs around the entrances of the building state 'Albury Brothers'. This indicates an interesting point in our social history, as in 1917 all seven of the Ahronsberg brothers changed their surnames to Albury, feeling that Ahronsberg was too Germanic. This was the same year as the House of Windsor changed their family name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.



The history of the Jewellery Quarter can often be found literally engraved on its buildings. In some cases, the identifying information is of a past occupant, as in the case of the Manton Building on Legge Lane (left, by Roy Hodges). In other instances, the historical occupant is still in residence, as with Deakin and Francis on Regent Place (right, by Philip Halling). Photos courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Also around this time, much of the workforce of the Jewellery Quarter ended up serving in the trenches of World War I. The war had an adverse impact on the Quarter's activities; less than half the amount of silver was hallmarked in 1915–1918 than in the preceding years. The types of items sent for hallmarking had also changed, with sweetheart brooches and patriotic items taking the place of tea sets. There was also a marked lack of competition from German-produced goods from sellers who were now deemed to be 'enemy companies'; this meant diversification for many jewellery firms. There is a moving memorial plaque in the Federation House – the headquarters of the National

lists 170 manufacturing jewellers, 38 wholesale jewellers, 26 precious-stone dealers, 31 precious-stone setters, 58 working jewellers and 102 manufacturing silversmiths. These were in addition to the die sinkers, stampers, electroplated manufacturers, box manufacturers and allied trades also found in the city.

There was also disquiet in the Jewellery School, which had still been run along the edicts of the Arts and Crafts movement, but more educators were suggesting that a 'design for industry' direction should be taken. Silver educators such as Bernard Cuzner had running battles with A.E. Harvey, an advocate for mass production and design.

To counter these efforts, the Vittoria Street School headmaster William T. Blackband, in association with the National Jewellers Association, designed a new piece of jewellery. The Materna Ring consisted of a central, circular ring with hooped shoulders and was designed to be gifted after childbirth. The design was obtainable by paying a fee to the NJA. In the first few months, seventeen jewellery firms signed up for the design, including A.W. Crosbee and Sons, Deakin and Francis and Alabaster and Wilson (Nott, 1987). Unfortunately, its release in 1939 coincided with the start of World War II, and much of the Jewellery Quarter production was concentrated on the war effort.

Much of the workforce of the Jewellery Quarter ended up serving in the trenches of World War I.

Association of Jewellers (NAJ) – made by A.E. Jones in 1919. The plaque lists the members of the Birmingham Jewellery Association who were killed in action. It reads like a roster of the Birmingham trade of the early 1900s, including names such as Alabaster, Elkington, Tonks, Pepper, Vaughton and Haseler.

The 1920s and 1930s were an era of depression for the Quarter. The German jewellery trade, centred on Pforzheim, was undercutting Birmingham-produced goods. Portugal and Czechoslovakia were now players in the costume-jewellery world market. As a result, the Quarter was lacking in investment and running down into slum conditions. It still mainly consisted of small workshops with under nine employees, but was estimated to employ over 20,000 people in the jewellery, silver and allied trades. *Kelly's Directory of Birmingham* (1938)



The Chamberlain Clock in the Jewellery Quarter. The clock honours Joseph Chamberlain, former mayor of Birmingham, who was instrumental in getting rid of plate duties and tariff reform for exports. He also helped to improve conditions in the Quarter. Photo by Maire/Wikimedia Commons.

In 1946, after the end of WWII, the Birmingham Jewellers & Silversmiths Association published *Arms and the Jeweller*; this illustrated the contributions of jewellery and silver manufacturers (mainly based in the Jewellery Quarter). Contributions included Elkington and Co. producing over 1.5 million Sten and Bren gun magazines, 1.1 million rifle butt plates, 48,000 spitfire ribs and 12,824 Torus flamethrowers. Suckling Ltd of Albion Street produced over five million bomb fuses, while both Adie Brothers and Barker Brothers worked on top-secret radar equipment. This publication was partly intended to indicate that these firms were still in existence and had returned to postwar silver and jewellery production. Unfortunately, after WWII, silver and jewellery items were viewed as luxuries. These products were hit with massive purchase-tax increases to manufacturers, which rose to 100% in 1943 and were assessed at 50% in 1947 and threatened to cripple the industry. These taxes led many firms to go out of business. Gold was also 'rationed' due to a Board of Trade rule that was implemented in 1942 (and continued through 1952) whereby the traditional 18- and 22-karat gold used for wedding rings was reduced to 9 karats, and wedding rings had to weigh



Three 9K gold brooches made by Alabaster and Wilson are dated 1988, 1975 and 1980. Photo and brooches courtesy of the author.

The historical significance of the Jewellery Quarter, and the potential for its impact on tourism to the city, was recognised by various parties in the later part of the twentieth century.

less than 2 pennyweights (dwt) or 3.1 grams. Rationing of gold ran throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and many jewellers relied on buying secondhand pieces and remodelling earlier jewels for material. At the same time, they became adept at refining sovereigns down to the required qualities of alloy.

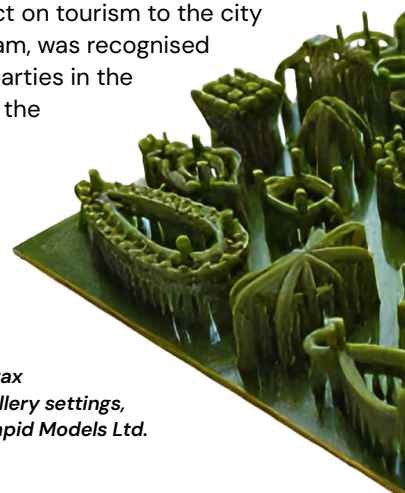
Also in 1946, His Majesty's Stationary Office issued a report that addressed the state of the nation's jewellery and silverware industries, with several suggestions for the redevelopment of the Birmingham Jewellery Quarter. The main suggestion was to demolish much of the existing Quarter and replace the buildings with so-called 'flatted factories' along similar lines as those found in Pforzheim, Germany. These multi-storey buildings, which were built to house and share amenities among industrial businesses such as light manufacturing and assembly concerns, were designed to maximise space in urban areas. The suggestion was overwhelmingly disliked, as the inhabitants of the Quarter thought

their rents would increase and that there would be a time-lag between the demolition of their existing workshops and the opening of their new spaces. Their worries were underlined by the fact that the only aspect of this idea that came to fruition was the completion of the Hockley Centre (later known as 'The Big Peg') which did not open until 1971 — after manufacturing activity had diminished in the 1960s.

The historical significance of the Jewellery Quarter, and the potential for its impact on tourism to the city of Birmingham, was recognised by various parties in the later part of the



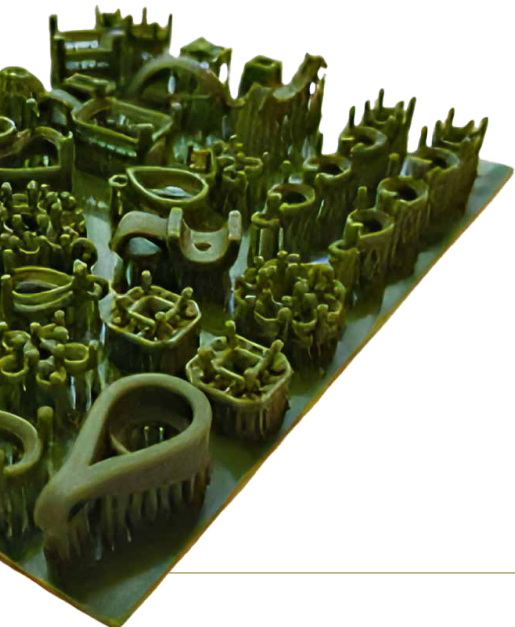
This rose bowl with repoussé decoration, by A. Edward Jones, is hallmarked 1913-14 and attributed to Spencer Pumfrey. A. Edward Jones began operations in 1903 and lasted until the early 2000s, training up many of the Jewellery Quarter's silversmiths during that time. Photo courtesy of the Birmingham Assay Office.



A CAD/CAM wax model of jewellery settings, courtesy of Rapid Models Ltd.

twentieth century. Birmingham City Council took up the mantle of conserving and restoring the Quarter's appearance and aspects. As a result, various regeneration and promotional schemes have existed to preserve its unique character. There are two separate paths for tourists to follow through the area. Both the Charm Bracelet and the Findings pavement trail tell stories of the Quarter by clues inset into the pavements. The latter option was designed by Laura Potter, a graduate of Birmingham's School of Jewellery.

The English Heritage Trust has also played a role in preserving the culture of the Quarter. Jewellers Smith and Pepper closed their doors in 1981. Upon vacating their factory, it was discovered that due to a lack of modern innovations it was the embodiment of an early twentieth-century jewellery workshop. The building was purchased by the Council and renovated, becoming the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter in 1992. A similar scheme has been carried out with J.W. Evans Silversmiths and Newman Brothers Coffin Works on the outskirts of the Quarter. Developments for the future have an eye to the past as well. Restrictions have been applied to the heights of buildings in the area; this discourages developers from building high-rise apartments and thus making the Quarter a dormer town for the City Centre (which is less than two miles away). The area has worked to keep a balance between the new and the old with Georgian and Victorian dwellings converted to workshops and small factories alongside renovations and newly built apartments.



The Gem-A Midlands Branch Chairman's badge of office (Birmingham, 1958–59). Created from hallmarked sterling silver (gilt), the badge has a maker's mark for Deakin and Francis. Photo courtesy of the Gem-A Midlands branch.

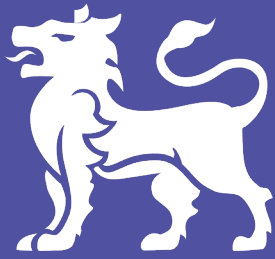


The hard work of maintaining the traditional culture of the Quarter was recognised by the World Crafts Council in June 2025, when Birmingham was granted World Craft City Status, a distinction granted to only eight other European cities. The Council – a UNESCO-affiliated organisation – awards this independently verified and peer-reviewed designation to places that demonstrate exceptional craft heritage, a strong maker community and a clear commitment to developing craft into the future. Upon announcing the honour, WCC president Saad Al-Qaddumi stated, "This title celebrates the city's rich heritage, skilled artisans, creative designers, proud makers and innovative contributions to the jewellery industry. It is a reflection of Birmingham's continued leadership in heritage craftsmanship and its role in shaping the future of the jewellery

trade and creative economy across the UK and globally."

Since the eighteenth century, Birmingham has been the centre of the UK's metalsmithing and jewellery industry. Even today, the Jewellery Quarter is still roughly 800 jewellery-related businesses in this one-square-mile area, employing about 4,600 people. With the demise of the larger manufacturers, though, there has been a notable return to specialisation, where smaller firms such as Rapid Models focus on one aspect of jewellery manufacture, in the same manner as Charles Freeth solely focussed on gun furniture 250 years ago. This evolution proves that while Birmingham's long and storied history in relation to the jewellery trade cannot be overstated, the city, and the one-square-mile that the Quarter occupies, still has a major role to play in the years to come. ■

GEMMOLOGY AND JEWELLERY STUDIES AT



BIRMINGHAM CITY University

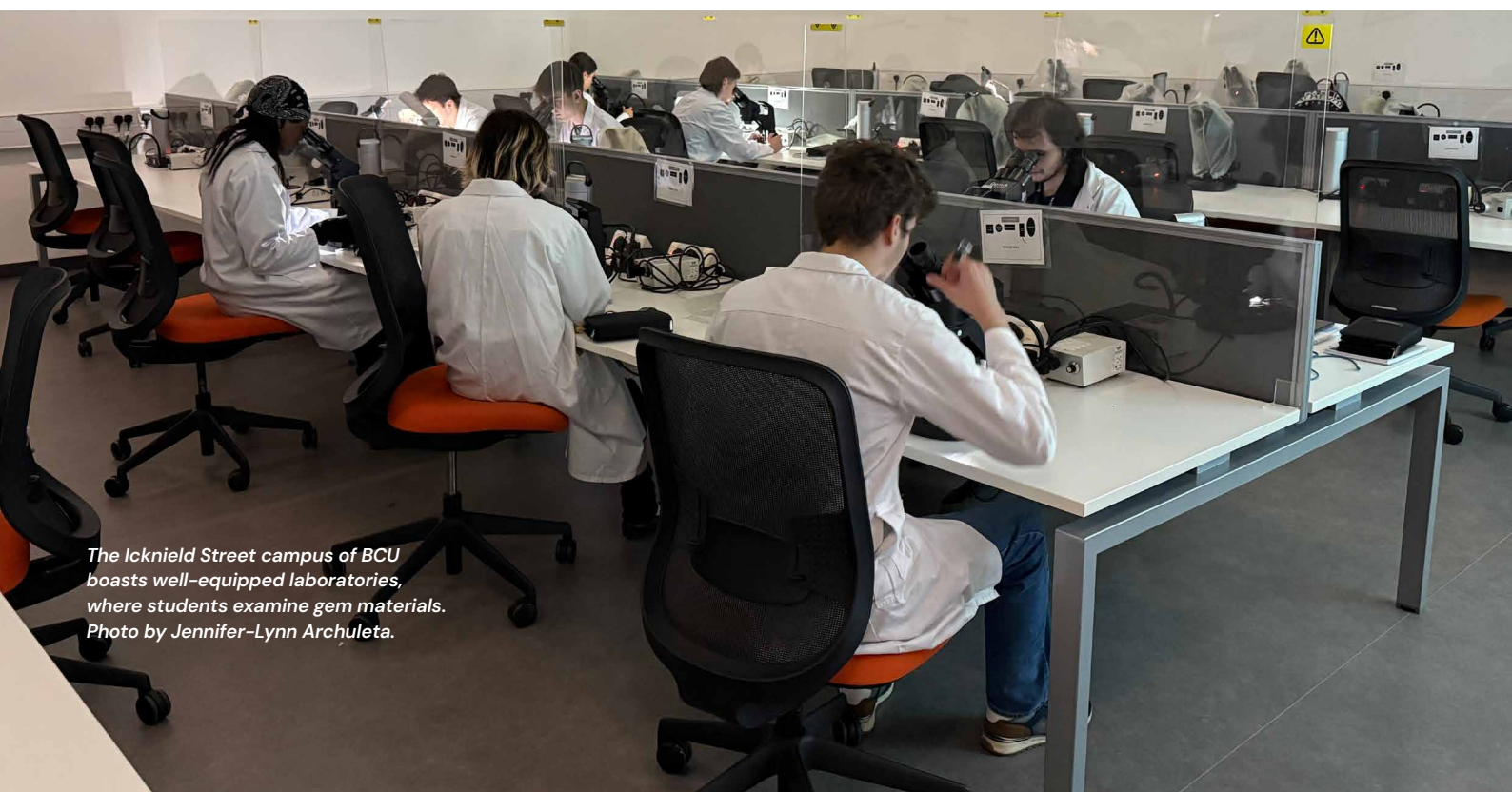
During a visit to the school's Icknield Street campus, Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta learns about the world-renowned, groundbreaking course and how it intersects with the work of the Association.

Birmingham is not just the centre of the United Kingdom's jewellery industry; it is also home to the UK's only full-time higher-education programme and the largest of its kind in Europe. Birmingham City University's School of Jewellery launched their BSc (Hons) programme in Gemmology and Jewellery Studies in 2016. First funded by the industry as a school for jewellers and silversmiths in the 1850s, the school now boasts a master's degree in the subject – an additional year of study – for those who wish to continue their education beyond the bachelor's level. In the autumn of 2025, I spent a day at the Icknield Street campus of BCU (which

also houses the Birmingham Assay Office) to speak to faculty members and current students. My time spent with them gave me an enhanced understanding of all that BCU has to offer these students, as well as past and present Students of Gem-A.

The relationship between the Association and BCU has existed for nearly 100 years, when they first developed a working partnership in 1929. The Icknield Street location is not just the BCU campus for Gemmology students; it is also an Accredited Teaching Centre (ATC) for Gem-A, with BSc- and MSc-level classes taught during the day and Foundation, Gemmology and Diamond Diploma

coursework delivered in the evening. The relationship between the two organisations does not stop there. Gem-A Alumni who are members in good standing of the Association may be accepted to the third year of the university's BSc programme. The third year builds upon the students' knowledge of jewellery valuation and appraisal information. During this time, they learn to perform advanced scientific testing of gem materials as well as the spectroscopy of diamonds. The year commences with a final research project, with the topic chosen by the student, which demonstrates fluency in analytical techniques. Students can be creative about how they use the



The Icknield Street campus of BCU boasts well-equipped laboratories, where students examine gem materials. Photo by Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta.

science, so long as they analyse the materials correctly. The agreement between Gem-A and BCU is reciprocal; that is, those BCU students who successfully complete their BScs can enrol at Gem-A to take the Gemmology exam, with access to Course Notes.

The typical candidate for the BSc in Gemmology and Jewellery Studies enters BCU at eighteen years old, having completed their secondary education. However, admittance is also open to mature students (21+) with relevant experience in the trade, as there may be life experience that can be counted towards the diploma. On average, twenty students are accepted to the course each year, after a face-to-face interview with a member of the department staff (an online interview may be arranged in the event that

Current students act as the department's unofficial representatives and greatest assets.

travelling to Birmingham for the interview is not an option). According to associate professor Miranda Wells BA FGA DGA FHEA, a former student herself, the 'interview' is really just a friendly, but extensive, chat. "It is important that students understand what they are undertaking. We ask them, 'Why gemmology?' and 'What career are you looking at?'" This communication allows the department to retain most students who enrol; further, the staff is helpful in placing these prospective students if the curriculum is not quite right for them.

Once enrolled, students have a robust support system in place, as one would expect from a programme with high retention and an employability rate of 98%. In addition to a student union, a well-stocked library and extensive community events, students



Students of the Gemmology and Jewellery Studies programme at BCU hone many trade-related skills, including microscopic techniques. Photo by Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta.

are assigned to a personal tutor, who works with them throughout their academic careers. They not only assist with educational issues – helping with the development of a scientific routine and the interaction with other departments – but with the day-to-day events of their lives. This advisement creates a solid relationship between faculty member and student that lasts throughout the three years of enrolment. Further, every cohort has student representatives that voices the opinions of their classmates. Organised by the student union, each candidate puts themselves forward for their courses, with students agreeing on their representation. These delegates meet with lead representatives, who bring their perspectives to the faculty and staff. Their recommendations have affected positive changes at BCU, such as the creation of a mentoring system between postgraduate students and industry members.

These industry members are pivotal to the aforementioned employability rate. Job placement is, in fact, a major part of the BCU programme. According to senior lecturer Michelle McCormick BSc (Hons) FGA DGA FHEA, the staff sees the topic as "the kind of degree that guarantees you a job," and they do all that they can to reinforce that impression. All tutors have experience in the trade, and they foster skillsets that make a career in this field achievable.

Michelle McCormick recounted one of the opportunities BCU is proud to offer their students, one that helps their students to obtain employment. "In 2022 I asked Marie Garnett, NAJ's Head of Education at the National Association of

Jewellers (NAJ) if BCU students could have a pathway to the Institute of Registered Valuers (IRV) knowing that my valuation science module encompasses content on NAJ's Foundations of Appraisal Practice (FoAP) course. Marie and I mapped the course and together agreed on the BCU pathway route. This is a unique selling proposition for our course, and a fantastic employability route for our students. Our course works closely with industry connections, and we have a fantastic partnership with Fellows Auctioneers. I take our students there to work with their jewellery; their human resources team assists with interview advice for our students. This interviewing opportunity has resulted in employment offers for students, who are able to work part-time around their studies."

These professional collaborations also have other benefits. Ms McCormick explained that Fellows Auctioneers awards a prize for Best in Valuation Module each year at the School of Jewellery's industry prize-giving graduate show. She noted that "The Scottish Gemmological Association (SGA) also gives an annual prize, which allows the highest-scoring final-year student to attend their yearly conference. Our students also have opportunities to meet a variety of industry experts from guest lecturers to attending conferences run by Gem-A, SGA and NAJ." This exposure to people working in the field is invaluable.

Students write their dissertations in their third year (level 6); this is the same year that Gem-A Alumni who maintain their membership are admitted to BCU at the BSc level. The first semester of the third year

is instructor-led, while the second semester is dedicated to the project. Students have twelve weeks to complete the project – the topic of which is self-chosen – and are encouraged to come on-site at least once a week for community and counsellor support. Senior lecturer Sherril Dixon MSc FGA DGA GG MIRV acts as facilitator, making sure students have what they need. She noted that students can be creative about how they use the science in their final projects, but they must still analyse the materials correctly and effectively.

Since 2021, BCU has offered a master's degree in Gemmology, for those students who wish to further their working knowledge of the subject. In order to get the students' momentum, Sherril Dixon teaches the third-year students that the MSc can be the deciding factor when seeking out a career as a gemmologist. In order to instil that desire to be a scientist, faculty point out that the passion to experiment and subsequent results are respected within the field. This information, explained Ms Dixon, helps to inspire them to go that bit further for postgraduate work. Prospective graduate students are usually expected to have a minimum of a 2:2 honours degree (or its equivalent) in gemmology, mineralogy, geology or another related subject. However, as with the BSc course, applicants with



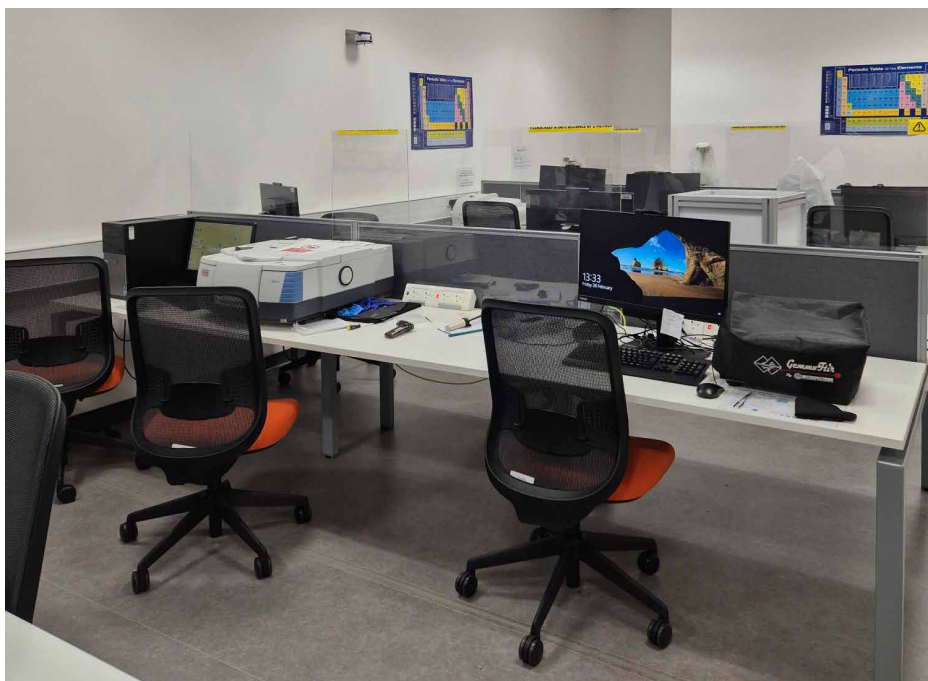
Gemmology and Jewellery Studies department members (from left) Sherril Dixon, Michelle McCormick and Miranda Wells at the graduation ceremony for the 2024/25 cohort. Photo courtesy of BCU.

significant experience in the field may find that their proficiency can gain their admittance as well.

Candidates for the MSc learn analytical practices in greater depth, while also receiving instruction in advanced crystallography, responsible and ethical developments and research methodology. The curriculum allows for a great deal of cross-collaboration with other universities; for instance, students are able to work with advanced instrumentation in other laboratories. These opportunities in outside labs – which BCU finds have a great deal of potential for expansion – allow masters-level students to broaden their gemmological education

outside the university's walls, while also making contacts that can be useful in their future careers. As with the bachelor's-level project, the MSc dissertation topic is chosen by the individual, with the understanding that it must be relevant to the course and to the larger field, as well as the student's future academic or professional development.

Since its start in the nineteenth century, the programme has undergone many sea changes, but perhaps none as impactful as the adjustments that needed to be made during the COVID-19 pandemic. "It may have been the hardest we ever had to work, in a really tight timescale," reflected Ms Wells. Lockdown required that all resources for the curriculum be placed online in a very short time (though e-learning platform Moodle was already used extensively). Lectures were uploaded to Microsoft Teams, with more theoretical knowledge than had been in place before, and diamonds had to be photographed for proper identification. Staff was also concerned with the social consequences of lockdown, particularly the mental health of their students. Activities for engagement were posted in online forums, with students meeting for coffee hours and even trivia quizzes. However, the students proved up to the challenge



Advanced testing equipment in the research laboratory includes ultraviolet visible (UV-Vis), Raman and Fourier-transform infrared (FTIR) spectrometers, which are used by second- and third-year students. Photo by Sherril Dixon.

of COVID-era learning. "They were the most incredible cohort; they were so supportive of each other," recalled Ms Wells. Since the scaleback of the pandemic, the in-person structure of the BCU curriculum has gradually returned to as it was pre-2020, with no blended delivery. Students and lecturers alike "really appreciated being able to do the practical work again," noted Ms Wells. There have been drawbacks to the post-pandemic return to in-person learning; however, students have adjusted. WhatsApp groups, which started in earnest during the pandemic, continue to be a method of communication and peer support.

There is a growing awareness of BCU's programme, and what it offers students, among young people seeking out a future career path. Faculty members are aware that younger people in secondary education settings may not realise that gemmology is an option they may pursue. Miranda Wells, who spent fourteen years in the trade, noted that she "never really knew gemmology was a thing" until she was already employed as a jewellery professional. To this end, the department does outreach to secondary schools, employing second- and third-year students to act as paid ambassadors. These ambassadors interface with youth (ages 12+) at Open Days and during visits to BCU. Interested students may apply for an ambassador position via the school's website.

While roughly five students are employed as ambassadors at any one time, current students act as the department's unofficial representatives and greatest assets. When asked about

their experiences at BCU, each spoke of their experiences in glowing terms, in terms of education, community and support from faculty. Second-year student Tom Phillips originally planned to study geology, an interest he developed alongside the collection of stones that he assembled from childhood. While applying to university he was intrigued by the BCU programme. "I found out about the course and I thought, 'that's for me'. It is all quite practical, which is good for me; I prefer to have a hands-on approach." After graduation, Mr Phillips is interested in a career in the gemstone trade or in mining. Field gemmology in particular fascinates him. His time at BCU has given him a particular affinity for opal.

Gem-A graduate and mature student Sanya Ward earned her Gemmology and Diamond diplomas in 1994 and 2017, respectively. She has worked in the retail side of the industry since 1998; currently, she is on sabbatical from Jeremy France Jewellers in Winchester in order to finish the BSc. A fascination with the scientific aspect of gemstones – "something I have always loved" – and a desire for a degree led her to BCU. "I'm in a position now, no longer having children at home, where I can dedicate myself to the third year of this programme. It has been a fabulous experience." International students Aung Naing Htwe (Naing) and Zin Linn Htet (Monisha), previous Gem-A students from Myanmar, each spoke with feeling about the support they have received from BCU community members as new arrivals in the UK. Zin Linn Htet discussed how senior lecturer

Gem-A Alumni who are members in good standing of the Association may be accepted to the third year of the university's BSc programme

Michelle McCormick has helped her in all aspects of her life in Birmingham, from her academics to language barriers and even places that support her vegetarian diet. She intends to complete a master's diploma in geology, with assistance from Ms McCormick, after some time working in the industry. Aung Naing Htwe explained that the BCU has "given me a different perspective from what I learned in Myanmar. I love the experience I have had in Birmingham." His time at BCU has inspired him to open his own gem laboratory once his education is complete.

The ways that Birmingham City University has taught and encouraged students who are part of its Gemmology programme are manifold. In its 100+ year history, the school has educated members of the field and continues to evolve, helping gemmological students to understand the practical applications of the BSc (Hons) coursework and inspiring them to choose lifelong, satisfying careers. The possibilities are particularly exciting for those Gem-A Alumni who wish to build on their post-nominals and develop skills that will create the next generation of professional gemmologists. ■

Second-year student Tom Phillips (left) originally considered a degree in geology, but came to BCU after learning about the Gemmology and Jewellery Studies BSc (Hons) programme. Sanya Ward (right) was accepted as a third-year student based on her Gem-A Gemmology and Diamond Diplomas. Photos by Jennifer-Lynn Archuleta.





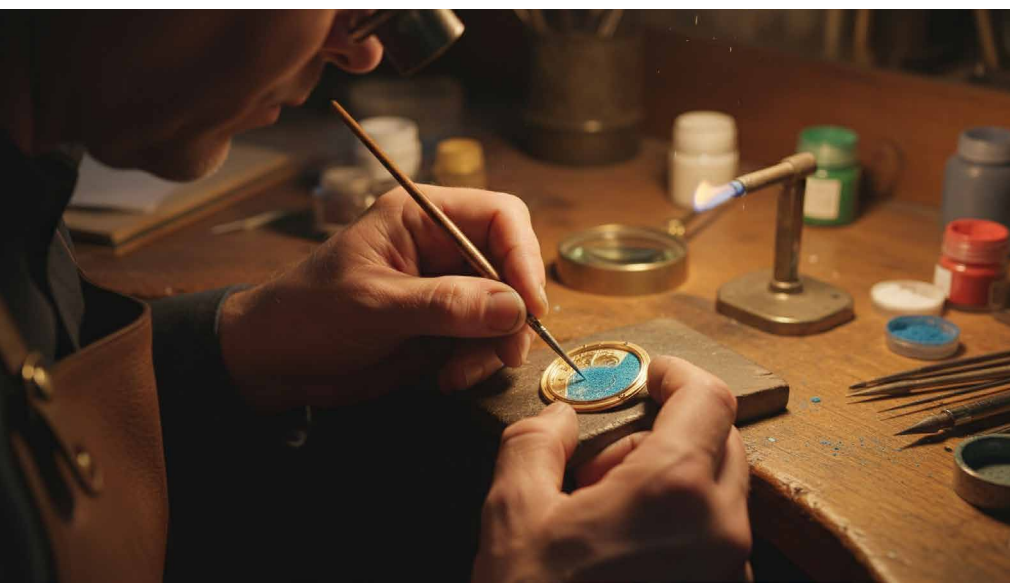
MEET HERITAGE CRAFTS

Britni LeCroy examines the association that is working to sustain the UK's endangered trades.

When archaeologists uncover antiquities, it is assumed that the objects will eventually land in a museum where they will be studied, catalogued, preserved and displayed for admiration. These materials are finite and contain information that can help scholars understand history just a bit better. But what about the ancient, artisanal skills used to make those objects? What becomes of the skill possessed by the historical ceramicist to make that clay pot, or the glassblowing skills executed by the historical glassmith to craft those glass beads? More

often than not, appreciation is given solely to the finished product, without acknowledgement for the knowledge used in its creation. This is where Heritage Crafts enters the picture. The only UK-based UNESCO-accredited nongovernmental organisation (NGO) working primarily in the domain of traditional craftsmanship, Heritage Crafts is focused on preserving and sustaining the skills of these ancient trades. "In a way, we're like a companion to museums," said Mary Lewis, the company's head of craft sustainability. "We work to recognise the people practicing traditional crafts and preserve that knowledge."

Founded in 2010 at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Heritage Crafts (known as The Heritage Crafts Association since 2021) works to keep a census list that it regularly updates. In addition to maintaining a directory of makers based in the United Kingdom, the organisation is dedicated to keeping track of those crafts that are endangered, or even extinct, within the UK. These include a wide range of skills such as arrowsmithing, ballet pointe-shoe making and leather tanning. The complete list encompasses hundreds of crafts, with several related to the gem and jewellery trade, such as diamond cutting, watchmaking, watch-dial enamelling, hand engraving, crystal



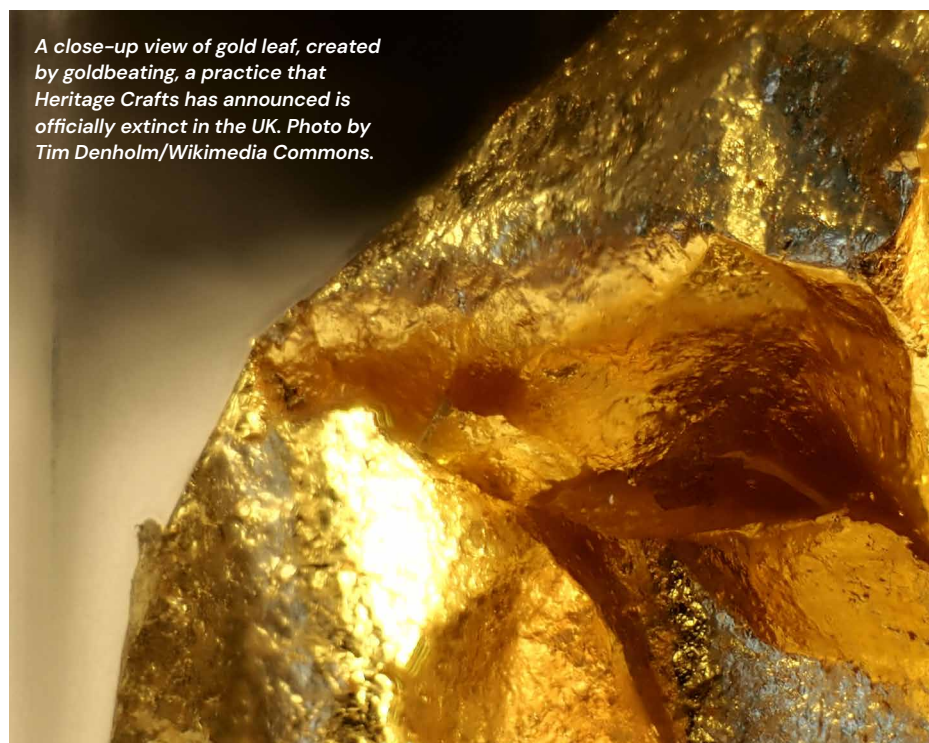
Top: Diamond cutting, which began in the present-day United Kingdom during the fourteenth century, is now a critically endangered craft centred around Hatton Garden and Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. Photo by Irina/Adobe Stock.

Left: Watch-dial enamelling, or the creation of watch dials using vitreous enamel on a metal base, is a critically endangered craft in the United Kingdom, according to Heritage Crafts. Photo by Vyacheslav Kravchenko/Adobe Stock.

cut-glass making and metalsmithing. The census is updated regularly, with the most 'at-risk' trades entering The Red List. First published in 2017 with funding from non-profit organisation The Pilgrim Trust, The Red List was the first report to rank traditional crafts by the likelihood they would survive to the next generation based on intangible cultural heritage safeguarding principles. The list attracts extensive media coverage in the UK and abroad, shining a light on heritage craft practices under threat from a number of identifiable issues.

Perhaps their greatest effort towards safeguarding these skills is by directly connecting craftspeople with employment opportunities. The Heritage Crafts website lists job openings located throughout the UK, with an emphasis on entry-level positions. And while the mention of artificial intelligence (AI) within employment spheres often elicits a reaction wedged somewhere between mild concern and imminent fear, the handicraft-trade domains are perhaps insulated and positively highlighted by this technology. This is because blue-collar trades, which require complex skills that involve working with one's hands, are not at the top of AI's priority list. The skills are so niche and specific that executing them through current AI-related tools is neither cost effective nor viable. It is this quality Heritage Crafts is relying on to trigger a resurgence in endangered trades and a rise in practitioners. And as all major societal and economic actions rooted in the past have taught us, an artistic reaction to these from the public is almost sure to follow.

Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, art movements like Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Art Nouveau came to fruition. These styles embraced nature, the abstract, curved lines and botany; this last was especially seen as a symbolic rejection of the increasingly mechanical and dehumanising civilisation around the artists. The Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century specifically sought to emphasise the importance of craftsmanship and beauty integrated into designs rather than full utilitarian function. Once again, in the technocratic twenty-first



century, we can observe this very same attitude among creators. Sites that sell handmade crafts, including Etsy, are more popular than ever. Crocheting and knitting are no longer considered hobbies for grandmothers — classes and local meetups for these are now heavily occupied by millennials and members of Generation Z.

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Among these cohorts, objects that are handmade and hobbies that tap into the human experience rather than into technology are expected to explode in demand.

This ethos is already reflected in the jewellery that has risen in popularity over the past few years. Artisanal pieces made by hand, wedding rings featuring coloured gemstones and precious materials other than diamond and gems that were previously relegated to 'B' status — such as 'salt-and-pepper' diamonds and rutiled quartz — have achieved visibility and acceptance among jewellery consumers. Younger generations now crave material goods that feel unique and one-of-a-kind, not mass produced. Taylor Swift exemplified this notion all too well with her engagement ring from American football player Travis Kelce, which features an antique old-mine-cut diamond set in a hand-engraved yellow-gold band. What does the person who can have anything — who can afford anything — wear to feel special? They wear something original. But the skills needed to create such objects, those of the bench jeweller, are also critically at risk.

For several years, bench jewellers have been dwindling in numbers worldwide (for more on this topic,

JEWELLERY-RELATED CRAFTS ON THE RED LIST

Since 2017, Heritage Crafts has published The Red List, which identifies traditional crafts that are in danger of being lost to upcoming generations. In the years since its first publication, The Red List has attracted extensive media coverage both domestically and internationally. Below is information related to crafts on the list that related to the gem and jewellery trade.

Crafts and Status in the UK	Definition as per Heritage Crafts	Origin in the UK (time period)	Current Number of Full-Time Professionals	Current Number of Part-Time Professionals	Current Number of Professional Trainees	Issues Affecting Viability
EXTINCT						
Goldbeating	The process of hammering gold into extremely thin sheets ('gold leaf').	Had 'a significant presence' starting in the 17th century	0	0	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of labour is significantly less expensive overseas. • Competition from less-expensive imported gold leaf • Market demand for gold leaf has declined • Recruitment of apprentices for the long-learning process has been unsuccessful
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED						
Diamond cutting	The cutting and polishing of diamonds.	14th century	6 – 10	0	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to necessary equipment and raw materials • Competition from overseas markets • Few options for formal training • High costs of set-up and workshop rents • Skills shortages at higher levels of cutting
Engine-turned engraving	The mechanical engraving of an intricate and repetitive pattern onto an underlying surface, usually a precious metal, using an engine-turning machine (references guilloche on metal). Engine turning can be used on its own or underneath translucent enamels.	18th century	6 – 10	0	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult, unforgiving method of work • Few apprentices/trainees entering the craft • Few craftspeople practicing at a professional level who are able and willing to transfer knowledge • Little public awareness of the engine-turning engraving • Shortage of available equipment • Time consuming and expensive for consumers
<i>Pietra Dura</i> (<i>Pietre Dure</i>)	A decorative technique involving the inlay of precisely cut, polished and fitted stones – including gem materials such as lapis, blue john, malachite and various jaspers – into a surface to create intricate designs to produce detailed and durable artworks.	18th century	1	1- 5	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to specialised equipment and space • Aging workforce • Global/geopolitical issues • Market issues for high-end, luxury objects • Supply of raw materials, allied materials and tools • Training and recruitment issues
Watch-dial enamelling	Making watch dials using vitreous enamel on a metal base.	Mid-18th century	5-10	5-10 fine art and jewellery enamellers who occasionally work on watch dials	1	The watchmaking industry would traditionally source enamelling from local sources; the watchmaking industry in the UK is tiny, so there are a limited number of watchmakers to service.
Watchmaking	The making of watches and chronometers.	16th century	11-20	N/A	6-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of setting up a workshop/ obtaining correct tools • Competition from larger international watchmaking companies • Lack of funding, opportunities and general public awareness for watchmaking and chronometer-making apprenticeships past a technician level • More specialists with the required skills retiring than there are entering the trade • Shortage of allied craft businesses for watchmaking in the United Kingdom • Training and recruitment issues within the UK post-Brexit

Crafts and Status in the UK	Definition as per Heritage Crafts	Origin in the UK (time period)	Current Number of Full-Time Professionals	Current Number of Part-Time Professionals	Current Number of Professional Trainees	Issues Affecting Viability
ENDANGERED						
Hand engraving	The embellishment of metal, precious stones and semi-precious stones using traditional hand tools.	14th century	21-50	11-20	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging professional population • Global and geopolitical issues • Lack of master engravers; lack of apprentices • Lack of available tools for engraving • Lack of support for craftspeople starting out in business
Silversmithing-allied Trades ¹	The various specialised crafts and skills that support or complement the work of a silversmith. These can include, but are not limited to, chasing and repoussé, casting (including lost-wax casting), buffing, wire drawing, polishing and plating.	Bronze Age (ca. 2100–750 BCE in the UK)	Buffing/Sanding: ~ 6–10 Hand chasing and repoussé specialists: ~ 4–8 Plating: Often congruent with polishing and buffing Polishing: ~ 6–10 Wire Drawing: ~ 1–5	Unknown	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost challenges, including costs of training, tools and equipment and competitive wages; expense of safely disposing of waste materials; rising energy costs • Market-related issues, such as fluctuating demand for handcrafted silver articles; overseas competition; shrinking retail opportunities; an uncertain work pipeline • Skills-related issues may involve fewer skilled technicians to teach relevant skills; lack of visible skilled workers; and reliance on outworkers and subcontractors who do not pass along skills • Supply-chain issues encompass the availability, cost and consistency of high-quality materials; declining number of major commissions; and import tariffs affecting the cost of both raw materials and finished products • Training issues include a retiring workforce; limited ability to provide long-term, in-depth training of new craftspeople; and retention of trainees

¹ As of April 2026, the silversmithing sector is currently undertaking additional research into these areas, with some changes to this data expected in the near future.

see Summer 2025 *G&J*, pp. 12–23 and 52). The shortage of younger generations entering the trade is due to the historically low pay, a reduction in apprenticeships and formal education and an overall lack of awareness of career opportunities. This last is largely driven by secondary schools and colleges recommending university education to students, with little consideration for the trades. But

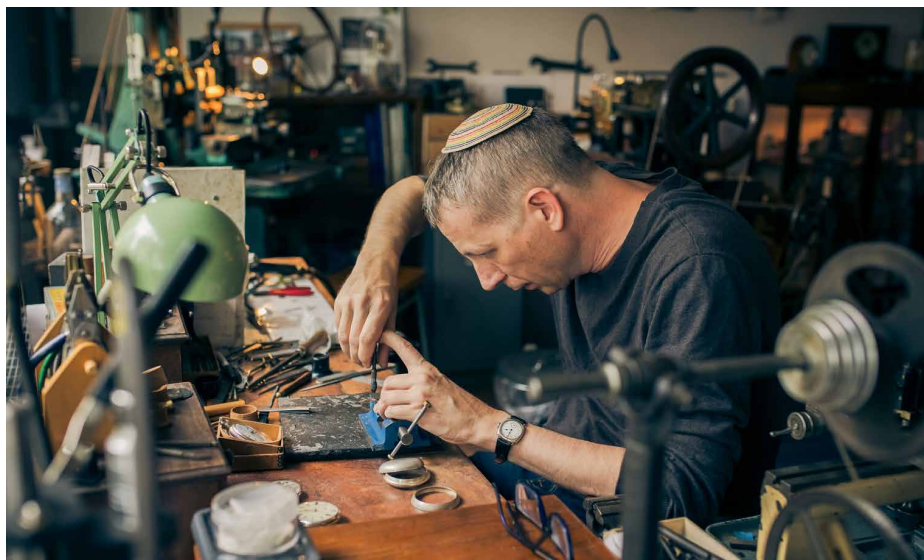
while the rising cost of university has resulted in a newfound rise in technical education and employment, artistic trades and crafts are still waiting for their moment.

Heritage Crafts has something up its sleeve for this too — every year the charity grants up to fifty scholarships of £4,000 to help early career makers in developing their crafts. Entry-level

craftsmen are the first piece of the puzzle. “Right now there are more people at lower levels and not at the top of their crafts,” explained Mary Lewis. “This is important because you need people to become masters, so the crafts can trickle down. These scholarships are also important because they are not for those just looking for a hobby. Essentially, they are for those who can ensure the longer-term viability or survival of heritage craft skills.” The sustainability of these skills is increasingly important in a world where originality is ever more in demand. On the topic, Mary Lewis summarised her words into one final, persuasive thought: “We forget that heritage is not the objects found in museums, heritage is in us.” ■

For more information, visit *Heritage Crafts* at heritagecrafts.org.uk.

Seth Kennedy, an antiquarian horologist and mechanic based in London and Hertfordshire, is one of the few engine-turning engravers left in the UK. Photo courtesy of Paul Read Photography.



FOCUSSING ON JOHN KOIVULA

In *G&J's* newest feature, the esteemed analytical microscopist gives our readers a peek into his life outside the lab.

In February 2026, Gem-A's Chair of Examiners Lily Faber FGA DGA came up with an exciting new feature for *Gems&Jewellery*. The gemmological community spans the globe, and we often only encounter each other in professional settings. What if we ran a regular feature in which we were able to get to know our members on a more personal level? Each issue could spotlight a colleague discussing not only meaningful aspects of their careers, but insights into their personalities. We quickly worked to assemble a question bank from which questionnaires could be randomly generated for our participants.

We are so excited to have the distinguished analytical microscopist John I. Koivula FGA as our first respondent. Mr Koivula, who joined the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) in 1976, has spent more than sixty years studying and photographing the microworld of gemstones and has published numerous articles and notes on inclusions in gemstones and related topics. He is a contributor to several books, including the American Geological Institute's *Glossary of Geology*; Robert Webster's *Gems; Geologica*, a book on crustal landforms; and GIA's *Diamond Dictionary*. Mr. Koivula is co-author, along with Dr

Eduard Gübelin FGA, of the *Photoatlas of Inclusions in Gemstones, Volumes 1, 2 and 3*; he is also the author of *The MicroWorld of Diamonds*. Mr Koivula holds university degrees in both geology and chemistry, as well as his GG and CG credentials from GIA and the American Gem Society (AGS), respectively. He was awarded fellowship in the Royal Microscopical Society (FRMS) and is an honorary life member of both Gem-A and the Finnish Gemmological Society. Mr Koivula was named as one of the sixty-four most influential people of the twentieth century in the jewellery industry by *JCK Magazine*. He is the recipient of GIA's Richard T. Liddicoat Award for Distinguished Achievement, the Robert M. Shipley and Richard T. Liddicoat Awards from AGS, the Scholarship Foundation Award from the American Federation of Mineralogical Societies and the Antonio C. Bonanno Award for Excellence in Gemology by the Accredited Gemologists Association (AGA). In 2019, a new mineral, johnkoivulite, a member of the beryl group, was named in his honour.

We are grateful to Mr Koivula for taking the time to answer our questions, and look forward to getting to know other colleagues in the future.

1. Describe your career in five words.

Seeking answers to gemmological questions.

2. Name three people in the industry (alive or dead) you would like to have dinner with, and why.

Alan Jobbins FGA, Richard Liddicoat and Eduard Gübelin would be my choices for those that have died, and Richard Hughes FGA, Thomas Moses and Nathan Renfro would be among the living. With either group, the discussions around the dinner table would be lively and highly educational.

3. Which time period do you wish you could experience, and why?

The Jurassic time period would be my choice, for a chance to personally see fossils in their living form.

4. What do you love to do that is unrelated to gemstones?

I love to be around, take care of and play with rabbits (bunnies). I could do that all day long.

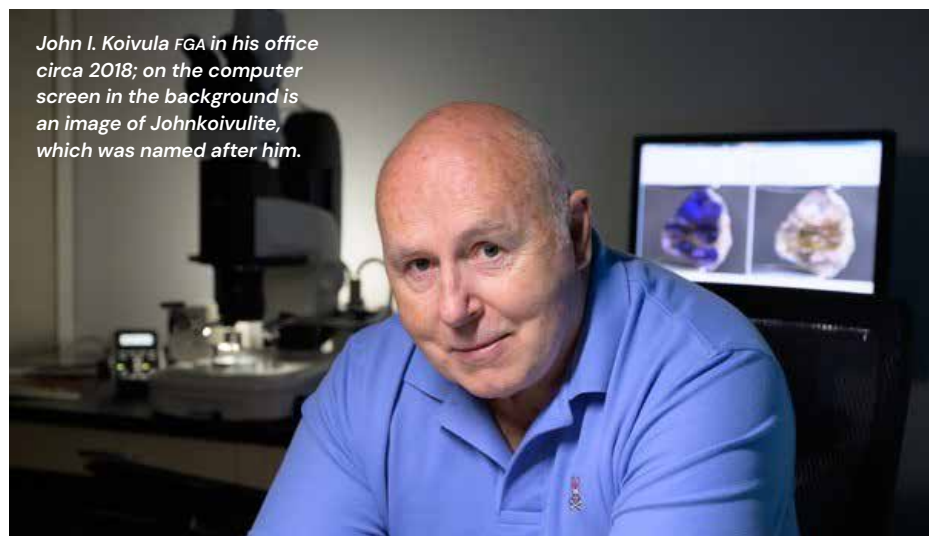
5. What career would you have chosen if you had not become a gemmologist, and why?

I probably would have become a paediatrician. I think helping children and their families would be a rewarding career that would be very satisfying overall.

6. What career would you have avoided at all costs?

Being a politician would probably be my last choice. Most of them are dishonest, and you can't believe anything many of them say.

7. What was the most outrageously incorrect gem identification you've ever come across?



John I. Koivula FGA in his office circa 2018; on the computer screen in the background is an image of Johnkoivulite, which was named after him.

I can think of two, and I can't really decide which is more outrageous. One was a round-brilliant-cut colourless synthetic rutile specimen that was set in an engagement ring. It had been misidentified as a diamond even though the dispersion and birefringence were 'off the charts'. The second one was a flame-fusion synthetic ruby, weighing around four carats. It was misidentified as a natural Burmese ruby even though it had a large larval gas bubble in it that was eye-visible right under the table facet. It was also full of obvious curved striae. The bubble had been misidentified, at some point in time, as a calcite crystal by a jeweller; this led to the Burmese misidentification.

8. What is the one gemmological instrument that you cannot work without? Be as specific as you like.

The one gemmological instrument that I can't get along without has to be a well-equipped gemmological microscope, complete with bright and darkfield illumination, as well as polarised light, shadow-contrast illumination and ultraviolet lighting. A camera attachment would also be required for taking many educational and illustrative photomicrographs.

9. Describe your idea of the perfect meal.

To me, the perfect meal is broiled Maryland soft-shell crabs, together with an ice-cold beer and topped off with a chocolate mousse dessert.

10. What is one thing about you that would surprise your gemmological colleagues?

I think a surprising fact about me is that I was the science and technical advisor for the *MacGyver* TV series; I even wrote the script for one of the episodes.

11. If you could only work with one gemstone for the rest of your career, which would it be, and why?

My first choice for a gemstone to exclusively work with for the rest of my career would be quartz, because quartz occurs in most geological environments and contains the most interesting and beautiful solid and fluid inclusions.

12. If you could sum up your personal philosophy of life in one sentence, what would it be?

Find something you love to do; that way you will never work a day in your life.

13. If you could only watch one movie for the rest of your life, which movie would you choose?

My choice for the one movie I could watch for the rest of my life would be the 1948 classic *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, with Humphrey Bogart, Walter Huston and Tim Holt.

14. Is there a gemstone that you have not worked with but would love to see/handle in person? If so, which one is it (this can be a variety of gemstone or a famous gem)?

I have worked with virtually every variety of gemstone throughout my career, so here I would pick a famous diamond to handle in person, the 530.4 carat Cullinan I.

15. What musical artist do you never get tired of? What about this artist grabs your fancy?

I never get tired of music by AC/DC. Their rock and roll tunes liven up any situation, and they are never dull or boring.

16. Where would you have chosen to live, if your career had not brought you to your current location?

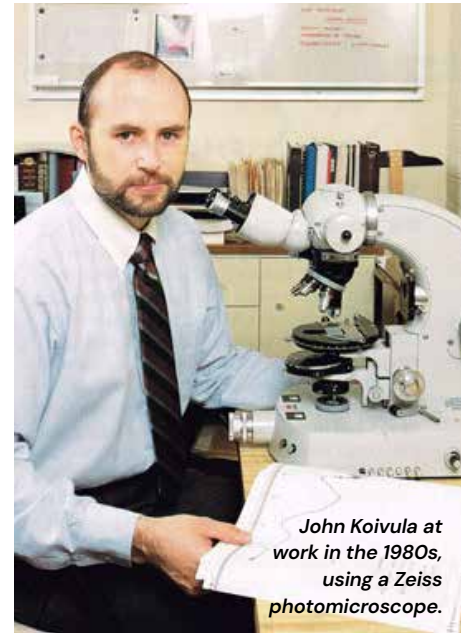
Regardless of my career choice, I would still have selected North County, San Diego, California, as my home base. It has beautiful weather throughout the year, and is generally a fun place to live (with the exception of the occasional earthquake or fire).

17. What country is at the top of your vacation list? Have you visited this country, or is it a goal to visit?

The country at the top of my vacation list is New Zealand. My wife, Kristi, and I have not yet visited there, but it is on our 'bucket list'.

18. What is your favourite bit of gemmological lore?

The discovery of the rare gem material magnesiothaaffeite using only a refractometer.



John Koivula at work in the 1980s, using a Zeiss photomicroscope.

19. What is your personal definition of happiness?

My personal definition of happiness is spending quality time with the people that I care most about. That and discovering an interesting new inclusion.

20. What do you see as the greatest accomplishment of your gemmological career?

I consider my greatest gemmological accomplishment to be the various books and articles that I have written over the years, which help add to the gemmological literature. If, through these writings, I have sparked an interest in someone to study inclusions in gems and minerals, then I have done a good job.

21. To what do you credit your success in the gemmological field?

As a child, I was fortunate to discover that I liked inclusions in gem materials. This discovery led to the career that I now have. Essentially, I have made a career out of doing my hobby.

22. What advice would you give to anyone starting out in the gemmology industry?

Get as much education as you can to build a strong foundation for your career in gemmology. Along the way, discover something about gemmology that you find interesting, and specialise in that area. ■

SOLANGE

JEWELLERY FOR CHROMANTICS

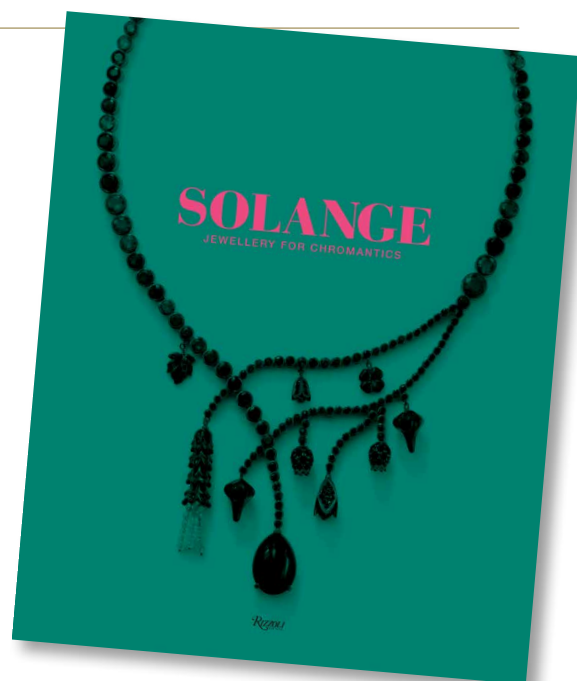
Reviewed by Susi Smither BSc FGA JDT

Collectors lucky enough to own a piece by Solange Azagury-Partridge will be familiar with her inimitable style. This is made possible through her aptitude for visual storytelling, woven together with a bold use of gemstones and love for colour. For those not so familiar with her work, *Solange: Jewellery for Chromantics* is a deep dive into everything that makes this internationally renowned brand so distinctive from other, more traditional jewellery houses. This sumptuous 272-page tome gives insight into why celebrities such as Sarah Jessica Parker, Beyoncé and Julianne Moore covet her creations so much.

"She has always designed to please herself and does not compromise or soften an idea to garner more general favour," explained Clare Phillips, curator in the Department of Decorative Art and Sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum, who authored the foreword. Her introduction explores what makes Ms Azagury-Partridge's style so avant-garde.

"The neutral or unobtrusive has never appealed to her, or in her words, 'I don't think jewellery should be polite.'"

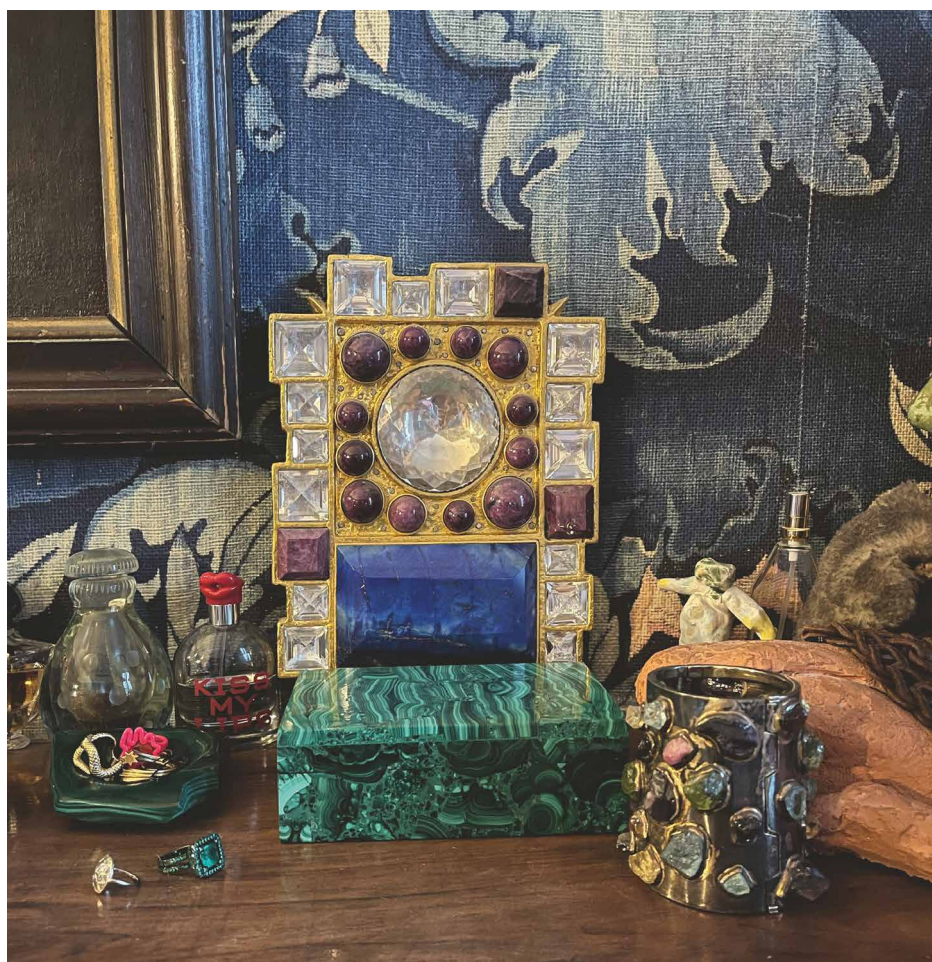
Solange Azagury-Partridge became a jeweller quite unintentionally in 1987. Through the process of designing her own engagement ring, she "came across this boulder of a diamond,



By Solange Azagury-Partridge and Ruth Peltason, hardcover, 272 pp., illus., publ. by Rizzoli International Publications, New York, NY; 2024, £73.00.

an octahedron, uncut and definitely not glamorous by the conventional standards of diamond engagement rings." She set the diamond 'slightly askew' into a smooth gold bombe-style ring. This design caught the eye of friends, then the friends of friends, and then celebrities. By 1995 she was 'a retail force', opening her first shop on Westbourne Grove, London. Ms Phillips further noted that "The directness of their connection with either museum visitor or wearer is instant – they have a larger-than-life immediacy, a naivety and charm and a wonderful sense of fun."

If you flip for a moment to the end of the book, on page 265, we have the full chronology of Solange's life, from her birth in 1961 to the present day. From creative director for Boucheron to designing a range of costume jewellery for high-street fashion store H&M, the span of Ms Azagury-Partridge's career is impressive. The timeline includes a dizzying list of accomplishments, from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris acquiring nine pieces of jewellery for their permanent collection (2004) to



The Light of the Lord wall plaque (measuring 40 by 30 cm) uses bronze, round-faceted and square-faceted rock crystal, cabochon and square-faceted ruby hardstone and lapis lazuli.

creating a hardstone AK-47 that was auctioned by the charity Peace One Day (2021). The last of these, a one-off object entitled Petrified AK-47, is a decommissioned gun covered in brass, malachite, lapis lazuli, carnelian, sardonyx, amethyst and ruby. Its intention is to cause those who admire it to think deeper about making this weapon 'beautiful to behold'.

The tone is set for the book with an essay by Ruth Peltason, jewellery historian and author of books such as *Elizabeth Taylor: My Love Affair with Jewelry*. She prepares the reader for what she describes as a "romp with riddles, a jaunt with jewels of the keenest reckoning. A high-wire act combining daring with imagination and skill. The result is bejewelled balance." As a trained linguist, Ms Azagury-Partridge wrote that she "considers

The readers get a sense of the pleasure Solange would have derived when creating this book by bringing all these career-spanning pieces together under one chapter title.

words to be exacting and open to interpretation, steady workhorses of communication and means of enticement." There are definitions of words scattered throughout the book, such as 'synaesthesia', 'fecund', 'courage', 'numerology' and 'seeker'. These definitions help the reader to understand how words can plant the seeds of a design inside Ms Azagury-Partridge's head, developing into



Sarah Jessica Parker on location for 'Sex And The City 2' wearing Solange Azagury-Partridge's *Random* necklace. The necklace comprises blackened white gold; princess-cut colourless diamonds; black diamonds; amethysts; emeralds; and blue, pink, yellow and orange fancy sapphires. Photo by James Devaney/WireImage/Getty Images.

jewellery with such depth and meaning. Further, we are merrily led through stunning close-up photography of her work. The book is a visual adventure that also includes images of her inspiration such as a film poster for *Barbarella*, the cartoon character Bugs Bunny, a close-up of the slit-flap departures board in a train station and of astrological, anatomical and architectural cues.

Rather than presenting her work in chronological order or arranging by collection, each of the seven chapters leads with a collective title and a brief introduction from Solange Azagury-Partridge that gives insight into what sparks her imagination for the pieces that follow. The readers gets a sense of the pleasure she would have derived when creating this book by bringing all these career-spanning pieces together



The Stoned necklace is the signature jewel from the collection of the same name. The name is a deliberate riff on the many meanings associated with the word, from being high to pitted fruit stones to being bejewelled. The necklace comprises gold, amethysts, aquamarines, citrines, emeralds, fire opals, moonstones, onyx, peridots, rubies, sapphires, tourmalines and plique-à-jour enamel. Photo © Edward Edwards.

under one chapter title. They sit so well together, not only explaining what makes the designer tick, but helping those of us in the trade to appreciate her key design cornerstones — the making of a brand which will last.

We open with Viridian, which she calls her 'default colour', noting that, "These days I have to restrain my inclination to use green in every design." Sugarloaf and cabochon emeralds, such as those in the Viridian ring and Green Vibrations cuff, as well as the large faceted emerald of the Rock ring, are all encased within blackened gold. This last material adds a depth to the energy of the jewel. We are treated to the bold malachite Ball Crusher paperweight. Her penchant for detailed objects includes her Garden of Eden Objet, with a ruby hardstone apple perched under a Tree of Life upon a layered base of blue dolerite, grey chalcedony, moss agate and malachite. Green *plique-à-jour* is used for replication, from faceted green gemstones to delicate blades of grass, all to lifelike and playful effect. The hero piece of this chapter — also showcased on the cover of the book in an x-ray-style photo — is Chlorophyll,

which combines all the elements together in one opulent necklace. In the words of Solange Azagury-Partridge, "Emeralds compromise the asymmetry, their presence an homage to chlorophyll's life force."

The Chromantic chapter needs little introduction, but in opening the chapter, the designer stated, "Colour speaks of confidence and joy and is a celebration of life in all its facets." We are treated to some of her signature riots of colour, such as her Random necklace, which was worn by Sarah Jessica Parker in her role as Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City 2*. The necklace, which uses colourless diamonds, black diamonds, emeralds, amethysts and fancy-colour sapphires "recreates the sensation of closing your eyes in a moving car when the dappled sunlight shines through your lids. The square-cut diamonds and stones form an overall pixilated entity of colour." There are gemstones galore throughout the book, but they all seem to come

"We all feel passion, pleasure, anger and lust. Putting on a piece of jewellery with any one of these things woven into it is like wearing a private part of your soul."

together in the Stoned necklace, which features gold pitted fruit stones, amethysts, aquamarines, citrines, emeralds, fire opals, moonstones, onyx, peridots, rubies, sapphires, tourmalines and plique-à-jour enamel 'gems'. The Uncut

The Solar gold-link chain is one of Ms Azagury-Partridge's signature pieces. The figure-eight loops around the gold balls suggest the orbit of the planets of our Solar System around the Sun.

Photo © James Pretty.



Gem cuff within the same chapter, one of the first pieces she ever designed, shows the continuity of her love affair with coloured gemstones. In the bracelet, hunks of amethyst, aquamarines, citrines, garnets, emeralds and peridots in their natural form are roughly set in gilded silver.

In the third chapter, Celestial, Ms Azagury-Partridge wrote, "The contemplation of the celestial is endlessly fascinating. It makes us feel infinitesimally small and is completely incomprehensible, which is always a spur to my creativity." The chapter shows pieces with diamonds in different geometric cuts: the solid-gold Solar necklace and the Goldstar bangle with luxuriously sweeping solid-star forms. The Elemental chapter displays pieces where she "uses gemstones, the earthly minerals and precious products of the natural world, as well as gold, silver and platinum – the central elements of the periodic table – to create ephemeral phenomena is a challenge I enjoy." The Storm necklace, centred around a large rough labradorite, is one such jewel.

As she opens the Devotional chapter, Ms Azagury-Partridge considered that "Scientific, spiritual and religious texts all have the capacity to spark ideas in me. The more obtuse and difficult to grasp, the more likely I am to feel inspired... Transferring the weight of these precious ideas and stories using the medium of precious stones and metals is my way of honouring their value and importance within our collective conscience." Pieces found in this chapter include the Light of the Lord ring, as well as the plaque of the same name, and the Crescent & Stars earrings, which are modelled on the floor plan of the Grand Mosque of Paris. The Kinetic chapter is based on the designer's idea that "I've always thought of jewellery as playthings for grown-up children. Setting a gemstone on a pedestal with

In the Viridian ring, different chromatic expressions for green have been transmuted into soundwaves, giving birth to this uniquely jagged pattern. The blackened white-gold columns of pavé-set emeralds cradle the vibrant sugarloaf cabochon emerald in the centre of the ring. Photo © James Pretty.



In the Secret Diamond ring, an enamel dome swivels open to reveal a diamond, which can be shown at the wearer's discretion. This design is not only playful; it is practical, offering an option to conceal the diamond when safety is a priority. The ring uses gold, round-brilliant-cut diamonds and yellow enamel. Photo © Edward Edwards.



its look-but-don't-touch imperative can make jewellery seem so serious. Where's the fun?" Included in this chapter are the diamond Round Spinner ring, the Days of the Week signet rings, and the Secret Diamond ring. This latter jewel allows the gemstone to be hidden beneath an enamel dome.

As a jeweller, I know that we are entrusted with such poignant moments in people's lives. Solange Azagury-Partridge is aware of this responsibility as well. "We all feel passion, pleasure, anger and lust. Putting on a piece of jewellery with any one of these things woven into it is like wearing a private part of your soul. A sincere expression of empowered vulnerability that turns that ephemeral feeling into a permanent symbolic reminder and



The Uncut Gems cuff was one of the first pieces Solange Azagury-Partridge ever designed. Her intention was to share the beauty of natural, 'straight-from-the-earth' coloured gemstones. The bracelet uses silver gilt, rubber-set rough amethysts, aquamarines, citrines, garnets, emeralds and peridots. Photo © James Pretty.

connection." So starts the Emotional chapter, packed full of personal pieces such as Family, recreating a family scene reminiscent of a child's painting out of mother-of-pearl, malachite, tiger's eye, star-cut diamond, triangular-cut ruby, baguette-cut emerald and princess-cut sapphires.

The book covers more than just straightforward jewellery. A pinnacle of both object and jewellery is the Secret Garden Objet. Described as a 'bejewelled toy', the box can be deconstructed and worn. In her words, it is "A *jardin d'hiver* with an opal, diamond and onyx floor that can be worn as a necklace. Green plique-à-jour walls that can be removed and worn as two cuffs. Statuary, a discarded pair of mules and a bench suspended from a chain can be worn as a necklace." All of this is seated on a rose-quartz-and-adventurine carved base. The piece is so delicate and whimsical, but each wearable section is a feat of design and craftsmanship.

Hotlips is Solange Azagury-Partridge's standout commercial

success, found at retail outlets around the world. Thus, it is no wonder that this single design has a dedicated double fold-out towards the end of the book. The rings are 'an ode to those letter-writing days' when she would sign off her letters with a lipstick kiss. The enamel finish has innumerable

There are definitions of words scattered throughout the book; these help the reader to understand how words can plant the seeds of a design inside Ms Azagury-Partridge's head, developing into jewellery with such depth and meaning.

colour combinations and has been on display in the permanent collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum since 2008; sales of the pieces are still going strong today.

Solange: Jewellery for Chromantics is a wonderful book. It celebrates a designer who has been at the top of



The model shown here is wearing the Witchy ring (baguette- and triangular-cut diamonds set in 18K white gold) alongside the Classic Red Hotlips ring (100% recycled sterling silver and enamel).



Modelled after the floor plan of the Grand Mosque of Paris, the Crescent & Star earrings are composed of white gold and blackened white gold, round-brilliant-cut emeralds, baguette-cut emeralds, round-brilliant-cut diamonds, princess-cut diamonds, crescent-cut diamonds, star-cut diamonds and green ceramic.

her game since the start of her career, creating a style that is unique and instantly recognisable. This book is for designers and gemmologists alike who are keen on colour. My only wish is that we were given at least a bit of a glimpse at the making and workshop side of the master craftsmanship which is involved at every step to make such exceptional pieces. However, when you're at the top of your game, perhaps an air of secrecy is to be expected and respected. ■

All photographs courtesy of Solange Azagury-Partridge unless otherwise stated.



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On Cutting

with Todd Wacks

The brilliant lapidary behind Tucson Todd's Gems shares his thoughts about his work process.

My approach to lapidary is to cut for beauty above all other factors. Of course, I am not completely wasteful on yield when cutting rare gemstones, but my major concern when cutting is to make every stone the most beautiful that it can be. Sometimes that means your stones will be slightly smaller face-up than is generally considered ideal, but you absolutely make up for the loss of face-up diameter with how beautiful the material looks.

A gigantic passion for natural gemstones, which I have, leads to a greater respect for the stones I am able to work with. I have so much respect for what I feel is Mother Nature's 'perfect recipe' that you will never catch me changing a euhedral crystal into a cut gemstone.

In my opinion, gemstones in their natural crystal form are so beautiful; it is wild to think the cuts a lapidary can make on a gemstone are more beautiful than the faces and etchings Mother Nature has already created. When you have the ultimate respect for these crystals – some of which have been in the ground for millions of years – and you are able to get your hands on cuttable pieces of rough, it only makes sense to cut for beauty. All too often, gemstones that are commercially cut have windows or improper or asymmetrical proportions; the cuts may be too shallow or create angles that are too steep. This comes from cutting for weight retention and will lead to poor light performance. While the finished products may look bigger than if

they were cut without windows, they are nowhere near as beautiful. This is where the 'on-the-fly' cutting process comes in extremely handy.

Adhering to a strict list of cutting angles used on the pavilion and crown, while adjusting slightly between gem varieties for different refractive indices, results in gemstones that seem more like disco balls of light. Rather than adapting a piece of rough to an existing diagram, on-the-fly cutting allows you to create the best girdle shape for each piece of rough. This enables the lapidary to create one-of-a-kind cuts and patterns that set their work apart. Combining all this work with a very high degree of polish, while creating extremely flat facets that have absolutely no rounded edges, are all very important factors of a beautiful cut that dances with the light. Cutting with these standards guarantees that my weight retentions are not as good as they could be, but that is not the most important factor to my work and process. Even so, I still average over forty percent weight retention. I feel this combination of standards is the best way for me to approach the work I want to produce. ■



These gemstones cut by Todd Wacks are shown in daylight (left) and incandescent light (right). Clockwise from top: a 12.83 ct colour-change garnet sourced from Mahenge, Tanzania; a 3.97 ct chrome tourmaline from Landani, Tanzania; a 5.80 ct pink spinel, also mined from Mahenge; a 2.63 ct demantoid garnet from Namibia's Green Dragon mine; a red spinel, weighing 2.70 ct, from Myanmar (Burma); and a 5.08 ct colour-change garnet from Bekily, Madagascar. Photos by Robert Weldon; gemstones courtesy of Tucson Todd's Gems.



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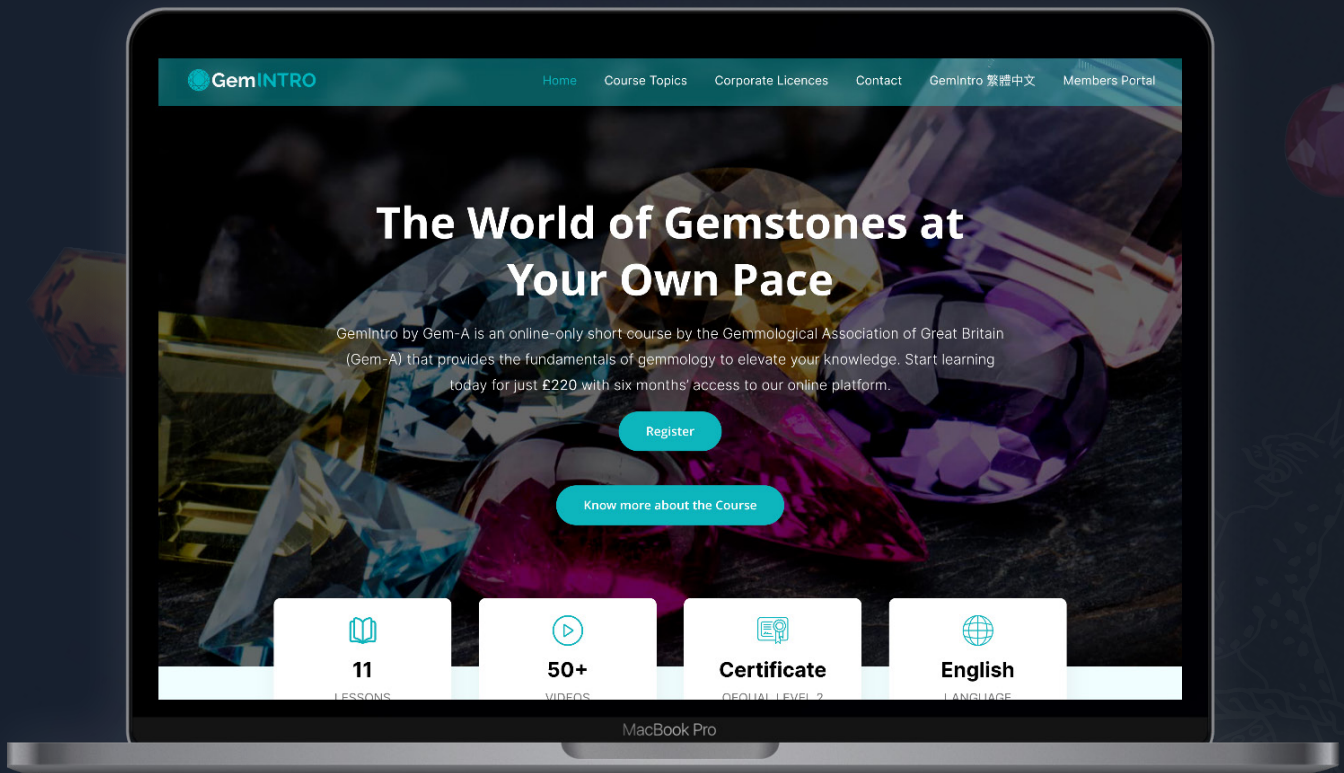
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