

Unusual Gemstones

Winds of Change in Jewelry Design?

For many years, most high-end jewelry brands based their creations on the big four—ruby, sapphire, emerald and diamond. The promotion of these gems has been so strong that customers have been conditioned to desire only them. Yet, attitudes are changing, even if a bit quietly. Today, brands—and also independent designers—are slowly freeing themselves from the big four to offer unusual materials to attract customers who are looking for more originality in their jewels and perhaps less investment.

Marie Chabrol reports...

Let's start by asking: What is an unusual gemstone? Probably the best answer is that they are gems quite often valued by connoisseurs and collectors, but are generally not used in jewelry.

This definition might also include antique pieces such as seen in the creations of French jeweler, Auclert, who uses antique gems such as Hellenistic cameos. Its gold and diamond ring featuring an impressive 10th to 15th-century agate game piece from the Middle East is another example of what can be produced with interesting and rare archeological finds.

Should we also include the "ornamental" stones? Yes, definitely. Sometimes referred to as "hardstones," these rocks are endowed with some fascinating and attractive qualities. Without forgetting the more traditionally used malachite, lapis lazuli or turquoise, we are discovering such uncommon gems as variscite, hemimorphite, sugilite, charoite, sphene and K2 marble (azurite in granite), among a variety of others. And, there are many more materials that are perfectly suited for jewelry that they offer a wide range of original possibilities to customers.



Yellow gold necklace with diamonds and amazonite by Sandrine Huet. (Photo: Sandrine Huet)



Gold "Storm" ring in the "Supernature" collection by Solange Agazuri-Partridge features a 33.19-ct rough diamond. (Photo: Solange Agazuri-Partridge)



Canary tourmaline from Zambia. (Photo: Nomad's)



New "Supernature" collection by Solange Agazuri-Partridge. The "Storm" necklace includes gold, diamond and rough labradorite. (Photo: Solange Agazuri-Partridge)



Yellow gold ring featuring turquoise in matrix by Amelie Viaene. (Photo: Amelie Viaene)



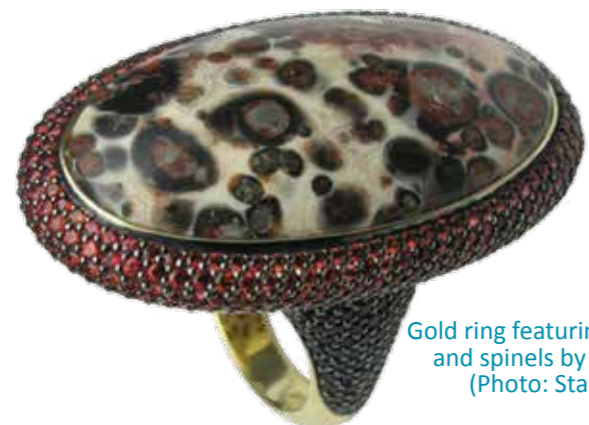
Brooch featuring a 11.78-ct Burmese sphene, 1.52-ctw Mexican water opal, 0.58-ctw tsavorite and 1.28-ctw 3.14-ctw Mexican fire opal by Paula Crevoshay. (Photo: Paula Crevoshay)



White gold, diamond and emerald ring featuring a 2.76-ct kornerupine from Tanzania. (Photo: Nirav Modi)



"Yachting Day" white gold ring featuring an 18.03-ct colorless sapphire with diamond and sapphire accents. (Photo: Chanel Joaillerie)



Gold ring featuring jasper, sapphires and spinels by Stanislav Drokin. (Photo: Stanislav Drokin)



Yellow gold pendant set with diamonds and diopase, signed by Andrew Grima, 1973. (Photo: Bonhams)



White gold ring set with a no-heat natural-color black sapphire within a rim of silver-platinum (an alloy of silver and platinum) by Maison Auclert. (Photo: Maison Auclert)



Earrings featuring 1.92-ctw Siberian chrome diopside, 48.90-ctw Russia uvarovite and 0.49-ctw tsavorite by Crevoshay. (Photo: Paula Crevoshay)



White gold pendant featuring diamonds and a violet fluorite by Sandrine Huet. (Photo: Sandrine Huet)



Macassar ebony bangle with gold and dendritic quartz by Nathalie Bonnemaïlle. (Photo: Nathalie Bonnemaïlle)



Fossil coral and yellow sapphire gold pendant by Muriel Beigbeder. (Photo: Muriel Beigbeder)



White gold ring set with a white chalcedony game pawn, Middle East, 10th-15th century. The prongs are enhanced with diamonds (0.35 ctw). (Photo: Maison Auclet)



Vivid 4-ct kornerupine from Tanzania. (Photo: Nomad's)



Marcasite, opal and diamond gold necklace, signed Andrew Grima, 1999. (Photo: Bonhams)



"Chardonneret" gold brooch featuring cornelian, coral and pietersite by Samuel Huguenin. (Photo: Samuel Huguenin)



Gold ring featuring charoite, amethysts and colored diamonds by Stanislav Drokin. (Photo: Stanislav Drokin)

Over the last few months, I have been surprised by creations from major brands that were certainly not what we would consider *traditional*. For example, Nirav Modi chose a vivid green African kornerupine as the center stone of a diamond ring, while Chanel used white sapphires in a switch from diamonds.

Recently, we discovered the work of a French jeweler, gemologist and designer who has been producing pieces for 25 years for some of the biggest names in the jewelry industry. Sandrine Huet now presents her first eponymous collection, in which she mixes materials such as agate, fluorite, quartz with inclusions and amazonite with gold and diamonds. Spectacular!

For other designers, the attraction for these stones is not that new, whether we are talking about artist-creators such as Paula Crevoshay (USA), Lydia Courteille (France), Stanislav Drokin (Ukraine), or even the late Jean Vendôme, a French designer and pioneer in contemporary jewelry, who made uncommon gems such as rough azurite and hauyne highly fashionable.



Yellow gold "Bousier" ring in azurite, hauyne, andradite and hessonite garnet, with white and brown diamond accents by Lydia Courteille. (Photo: Lydia Courteille)



White gold ring featuring red spinels and an important quartz with dumortierite inclusions by Muriel Beigbeder. (Photo: Muriel Beigbeder)

A second question then arises. Will these unusual stones one day be as important as Mogok rubies, Kashmir sapphires, Colombian emeralds or Golconda diamonds? The answer is not obvious, but we do know that gemstones such as manganotantalite and kornerupine are already worth more than some diamonds, even if far below the prices of red, purple and orange diamonds whose rarity is well established.

When we see demantoid garnet, for example, traditionally seen in 19th century jewels, used in modern creations, I believe that the inherent value of the piece is less important than its intrinsic beauty. It is wonderful to see jewelry designers who dare to innovate with unusual gemstones. | CA