

TEXAS

the publication of the
Texas Jewelers Association

Summer 2006

Jeweler

A CASE FOR
BRIOLETTES



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WITH **DAVID GELLER**

A Case for Briolettes

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WITH ALL THE HUBRIS SURROUNDING briolette cut stones of late, one might mistakenly think they've just been invented. Actually, they have an ancient and colorful pedigree in the history of cut gems.

First of all, how do you pronounce the word briolette? If you listen to many people who like—and sell the cut, you hear bree-oh-**lay**. Think Frito-Lay. It's not meant to be pronounced like that for heaven's sake. Remember high school French? The French language is much more exacting with its pronunciation rules than English. Any word ending in “ette” *must* be pronounced as “et”. I et a biscuit. Say bree-oh-let; say that ‘t’.

Both French and English dictionaries date this French noun to 1865, defining the

or hexagonal facet briolettes, which are rarer, are a variation. It could be said that they are in the family of rose cuts—like a hybrid of a bead cut and a pear cut.

Years ago, I got my first up-close-and-personal encounter with the briolette cut in New York. I wasn't even in the jewelry industry in those days. While wasting a bit of time on Madison Ave and 53rd Street, early for an appointment, I wandered into an antiques store. The friendly Middle Eastern proprietor struck up a conversation



Some historians believe the briolette cut owes its' origin to the Middle East. Numerous ancient briolettes are amongst the prestigious Crown Jewels of Iran.

There is also evidence of briolettes having been used since Roman times, most likely evolving into their faceted form from rounded or tube shaped beads.

The legendary ‘Briolette of India’ is a 90.38 carat diamond. If the fables surrounding it are true, this may be the oldest diamond on record, predating the Koh-I-Noor Diamond. Eleanor of Aquitaine, the 12th century Queen of France and later England, brought the stone to England. Then stories say her son, Richard the Lionhearted, carried it on the Third Crusade.

It disappeared for four centuries, only to re-surface in 1950. Famed New York jeweler Harry Winston bought it from an Indian Maharajah. It was subsequently sold and then re-purchased by Mr. Winston, 10 years later.

The briolette next appeared in the 16th century when Henry II of France gave one to his blonde mistress, Diane de Poitiers. When I'm hot on the trail of discovering the provenance of an ancient jewel, I resort to researching ancient royal portraits. Museums and rare libraries are some of the places that provide me with a jewels roadmap through history. I found this famous briolette was indeed painted into a portrait of her while at Fontainebleau.

By the 17th century, the French gem trader Tavernier was writing about this exotic cut. From his epic travels to India, he returned to Europe with many briolette cut gems. Tavernier observed Mogul emperors and sultans who sewed briolettes into their turbans and clothing. He adopted this elaborate style of dress for himself.

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word as “an oval or pear-shaped gemstone cut in triangular facets.” It also requires the pronunciation of the final ‘t’.

The most notable difference between briolette and all other cuts of gemstones is the fact that it is faceted to be seen and worn in any direction. There is no front and back to the cut.

Classic briolettes are teardrop-shaped and composed of triangular facets. Rectangular

with me about jewelry.

Although he knew I was not going to buy, he graciously began to show me things he thought would appeal to me. From a drawer in the back of this cluttered narrow shop, he carefully brought out the most exquisite five tiered collar style neckpiece of briolette cut rubies. I was hooked. Today I am still fascinated by the workmanship and fantasy of this cutting style.

Portraits of him reveal a portly and proud man arrayed in Eastern dress complete with a tall gem studded turban. Many magnificent ruby, sapphire, diamond and emerald briolettes can be traced back to this time and culture.

This fanciful style of cutting had many other devotees as well. Louis IV, Marie Antoinette, Henry Philip Hope, former owner of the Hope diamond, and English royalty all owned beautiful gems cut *en briolette*.

Earrings or necklaces fashioned in briolette gemstones were very popular at the French courts during the time of Napoleon. Napoleon presented a fabulous diamond necklace to Empress Marie Louise containing 10 diamond briolettes, each weighing more than 4 carats. See it on display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC.

By the 19th century, as diamond cutting techniques evolved, many historic traditions fell victim to progress. Gem cutters abandoned such historic cuts, turning to versions of the modern table crown and pavilion cuts we now have

today. Traditional historic cut gemstones like the briolette disappeared as they were recut to the new standards. This ancient art form lay dormant for many years.

It wasn't until the Victorian and Art Deco periods that briolettes enjoyed a resurgence in popularity. This trend then faded with the Depression and later post-war years of the 20th century. Briolettes were thought to be a wasteful use of gem rough.

If you've been to any jewelry shows of late, or grabbed a trade magazine recently, you're aware of a huge turnaround in thinking. With a renewed appreciation for history and classic design, briolette popularity is enjoying center stage once again. Besides being the subject of numerous articles in trade journals, briolettes are being incorporated into the jewelry of many top designers. Their appeal is proving to be timeless.

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I was astounded at the amount of briolettes at every end of the spectrum at this year's Tucson show. It appeared in everything from diamonds to quartz, loose goods to elaborately crafted one-of-a-kind creations. If you haven't folded the briolette into your lineup, now is as good a time as ever. Your customers will thank you, as they become walking advertisements for your style savvy selection.



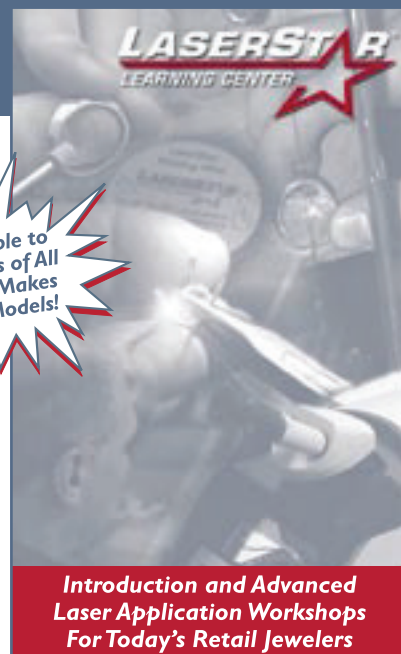
Diana Jarrett (www.dianajarrett.com) is a frequent lecturer on gem and jewelry subjects throughout the U.S. Most recently, she earned the coveted designation of Registered Master Valuer after successfully completing

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