



COLORED GEMSTONE

A STONE *of* MANY BLUES

Aquamarine, a beloved member of the beryl family of minerals, has been the eye-catching centerpiece in jewelry for ages.

BY DIANA JARRETT

Blue is a universally favored color for both men and women, and the variety of blues found in aquamarine often become in themselves the designer's muse. Incidentally, this perennial darling is also the March birthstone.

What is not so well known, however, is that aquamarine can also be semi-opaque or possess particular

inclusions, resulting in asterism or the cat's-eye effect. Another impressive natural occurrence is the rare appearance of bicolor aquamarine, which develops together in the rough with yellow beryl. Pegmatite veins in Tajikistan occasionally produce this attractive aquamarine-yellow beryl variation.

Above: Rough aquamarine necklace in 18-karat yellow gold with sapphire and chocolate diamond accents is part of a set that also includes a ring and earrings. Courtesy Robert Wander for Winc Creations.



COLOR OF THE SEA

Aquamarine is a self-descriptive name literally meaning “sea water” in Latin. And since the blue hues found in seas across the globe differ so much in color, this name fits the stone perfectly. Owing to countless, subtle nuances, this gem appears in light values of greenish-Blue, and Blue-Green, all the way down to intensely saturated straight Blue, which is often the most desirable. The number of atoms and density of iron present at the molecular level determine the various shades of color.

The chemical makeup for aquamarine is $Al_2Be_3Si_6O_{18}$. It is an aluminum beryllium silicate and, like other members of the beryl group, it is doubly refractive. The pleochroism observed through a dichroscope reveals two distinct colors, and is more noticeable in lighter-toned specimens.

Commercially, Brazil is a major producer of aquamarine. However, the gemstones also are mined in Mozambique, Madagascar, Nigeria, Zambia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Superb Brazilian material coming from the famed Santa Maria de Itabira mine has become synonymous with top-grade aquamarine for its transparency and its intense

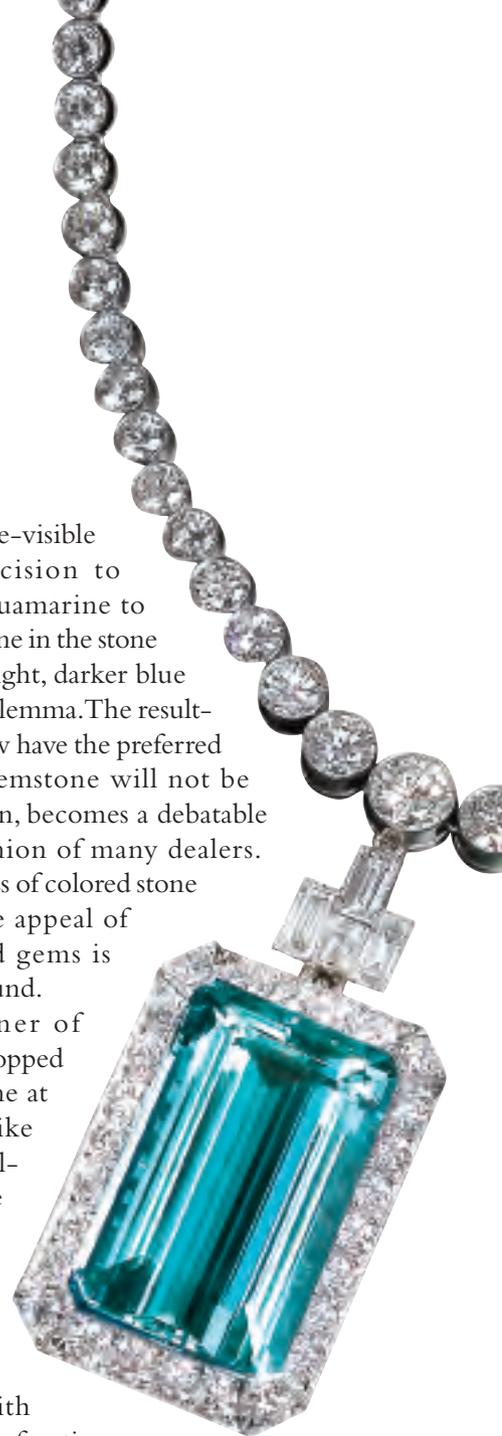
blue color. Now other regions are piggy-backing on that celebrated name to draw attention to the similarity in color and clarity of their gems to the celebrated Brazilian goods. In Africa, for example, in Mozambique, the name “Santa Maria Africana” is being attached to aquamarine that has the sought-after traits of transparency and rich coloration.

TREATMENT

To the delight of jewelry lovers, much of today’s gem-quality rough is

relatively free from eye-visible inclusions. The decision to heat-treat natural aquamarine to eliminate a greenish tone in the stone and to produce a straight, darker blue definitely presents a dilemma. The resulting gemstone may now have the preferred blue tint, but that gemstone will not be “natural.” That, in turn, becomes a debatable trade-off in the opinion of many dealers. As consumer awareness of colored stone treatment grows, the appeal of verifiably untreated gems is certainly gaining ground.

Marty Dike, owner of Forever Gemstones, shopped for quality aquamarine at GemFair™ 2008. Like other discerning dealers, Dike prefers the Sierra Santa Maria Mines material from Brazil. He located unheated, full-bodied, dark “electric” blue aquamarine with superb German caliber faceting, wholesaling at \$200 and up per carat. However, similar stones that looked fine under the show floor lighting revealed a decidedly grayish cast to their body color when inspected in the more unfor-giving daylight. Furthermore, louping these stones exposed inclusions that made their \$100-plus per carat wholesale price more understandable.



This page, top left: 13.60-carat cabochon cut Brazilian aquamarine pendant set in 18-karat yellow gold. Courtesy Thomas Turner Jewelry; left: 30-carat emerald cut aquamarine ring in 18-karat white gold. Photo courtesy Nadine Krakov Collection; above: 21.73-carat emerald cut aquamarine necklace on a string of diamonds. Photo courtesy S.H. Silver Company. Opposite page: Aquamarine earrings in 18-karat yellow gold, accented with chocolate diamonds, are from the Angkor Collection and are part of a set that also includes a necklace. Courtesy Robert Wander for Winc Creations.



DESIGNER ATTRACTION

The attraction to top-notch aquamarine is not a new preoccupation. For years, venerable jewelry houses bearing iconic family names, including

Bulgari, Cartier and

Tiffany, have used exceptional

specimens of aquamarine to create lush one-of-a-kind jewelry around that gemstone. The Nadine Krakov Collection offers rare estate jewelry and valuable antiquities from around the world. Owner Nadine Krakov carefully selects unique pieces for a loyal following who are willing to wait for the best to become available. When asked about the appeal of aquamarine to her clientele, Krakov reflects, "They love the color of the stone because they find it reminds them of the ocean, very serene and peaceful. Aquamarine is classy." For Krakov, the most important characteristic in any of her aquamarine jewelry is excellent transparency and a rich blue-green color.

Honolulu resident and designer Robert Wander frequently chooses aquamarine for his original jewelry suites. They're a perfect fit for his brand, which often showcases colorful gem varieties in their original crystal rough shape. The effect is so dramatic that these pieces are collectively named the Crystal Candy Collection; the look of the rough gemstones could double as crystallized rock sugar. Wander's successful use of aquamarine rough in its original hexagonal form for men's cufflinks garnered much attention, and won him an Honorable Mention—Men's Wear recognition at the 2008 AGTA Spectrum Awards™. Wander was observed carrying a fistful of similarly shaped

aquamarine rough on the AGTA GemFair trading floor, making one wonder just what ingenious designs he has earmarked for that particular parcel.

Wander is candid about his attraction to aquamarine rough crystals. "I used the rough cut aqua initially because it was more interesting. We notice in Hawaii that aquamarine does sell a little better than other colored stones, due to the blueness of the ocean all around us." The

designer has begun introducing very fine, spear-shaped beryl into his latest work, naming this new collection Stiletto. According to Wander, "The stone and its cut and clarity are what inspire me, not necessarily my surroundings."

Award-winning designer Thomas Turner artfully intertwines unexpected elements into his unique collection. "Well-known faceted gems that are also found to be opaque lend themselves to cabochon cuts. I love working with them, especially aquamarines. I frequently hear 'That's an aquamarine?'" when surprised customers

encounter aquamarine cabochons in my jewelry. My aqua comes from Brazil, but also from Mozambique — and it is chosen for its deep color." Turner also sees a paradigm shift stirring. "The price of deep-toned varieties and, in fact, all aquamarine is rising as the public becomes more aware of what this

stone can be, in its many forms and colors." In the past, Turner felt that the

majority of consumers regarded aquamarine as "light and glassy." That mind-set is being reevaluated by designers, who now have access to high-quality rough available from new finds in existing mines. ♦

