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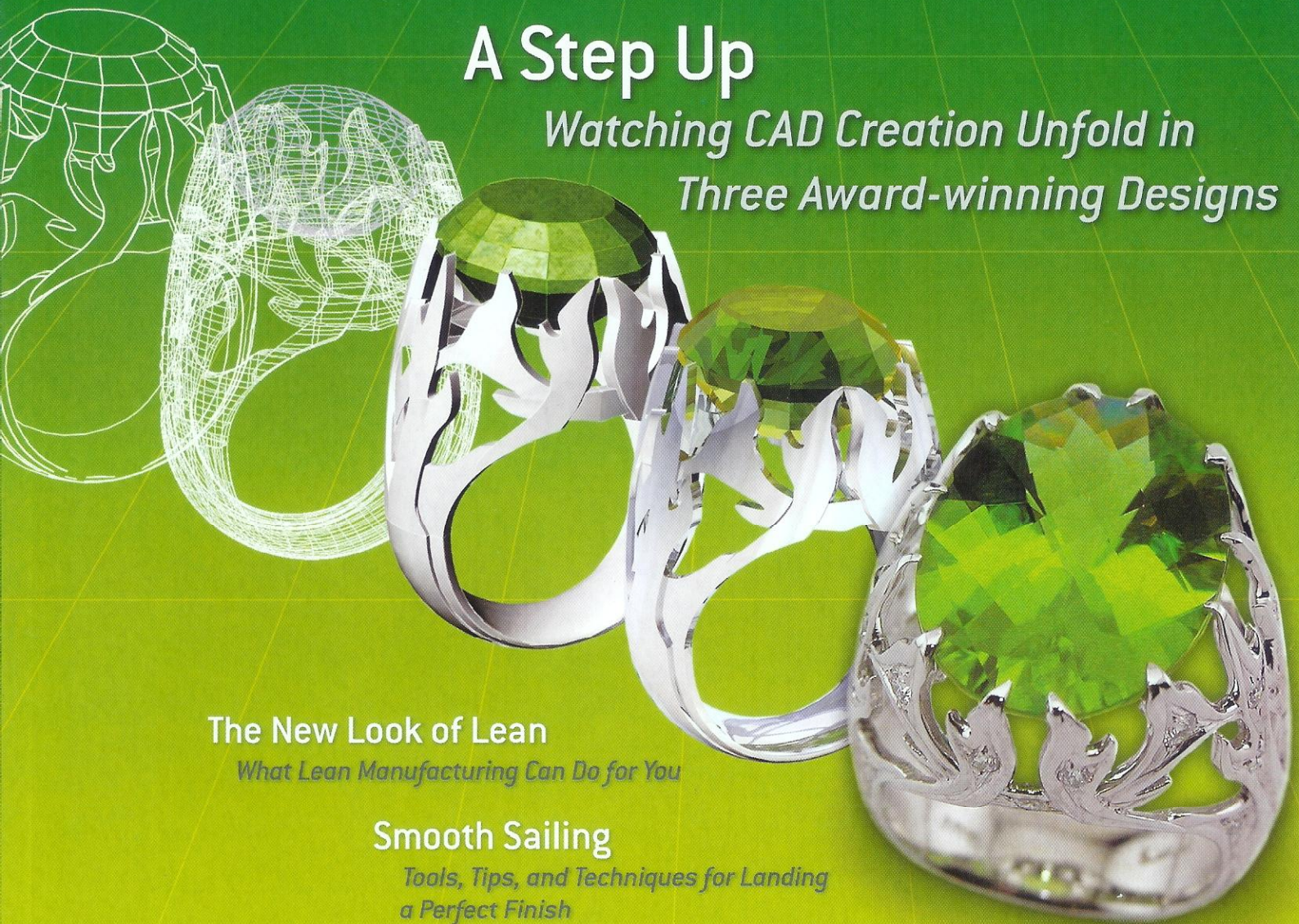

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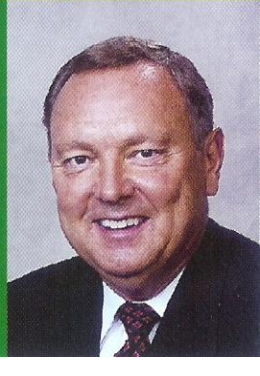

MJSA SINCE 1903

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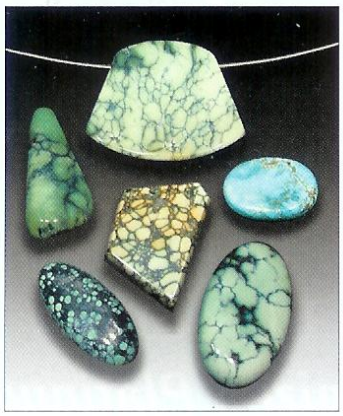
BY DEBORAH A. YONICK *This column tracks news and trends in the gemstone community, including mining and sourcing issues, gemstone and diamond treatments, and color trends for gemstones and gem-set jewelry.*



Mother Lode of Variscite and Turquoise Unearthed in Nevada

High Desert Gems and Minerals in Reno, Nevada, and Out of Our Mines in Arcata, California, will unveil the fruits of their recent joint-venture at the Tucson gem shows this month. Last June, the two mining companies partnered to uncover a mother lode of turquoise, variscite, and other turquoise mineral cousins in the Candelaria Hills of Mineral County, Nevada.

Known as being quite collectible, the multi-hued turquoise and its relatives from the Prince Mine were generally available only from "old stashes" and collections. Over the years, the deposit was worked by recreational miners and locals who just skimmed the surface of its potential, digging three feet deep for material. Using comprehensive research of similar mineral deposits, economic geologist Christopher Rose of High Desert Gems and Minerals and graduate gemologist Richard Shull of Out of Our Mines partnered to uncover an exceptional deposit of high-grade spider-web gems, the lion's share of which is variscite.

Rose describes variscite as a rare member of the turquoise family not previously available in large quantities. A hydrous aluminum phosphate, variscite lacks the copper found in turquoise, yielding colors from green to bluish green. It boasts interesting spider-web patterns, and because it's made up of silica, variscite is harder and takes a better polish. Unlike turquoise, which is often plasticized, variscite is untreated.

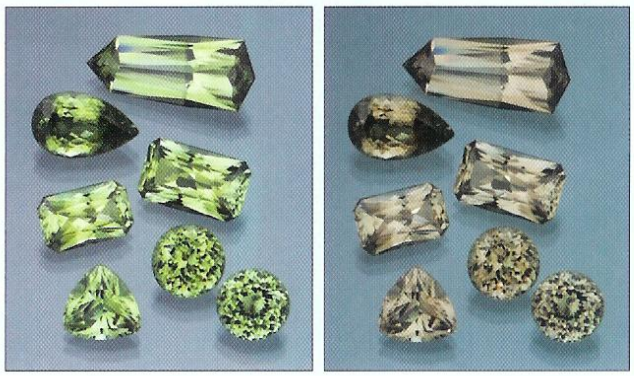
Once permits were obtained and federal reclamation bonds paid, the team used modern techniques to "surgically remove" the gems, digging 65 feet deep. Several pieces weighing more than 100 pounds were recovered. Rose envisions a steady supply of variscite for decades from this deposit and another one they own five miles away that has yet to be worked.

Cut material ranges in price from 50 cents to $10 a gram. Rough is available for $100 to $500 a pound. Specimens, rough, cabochons, and beads will debut at the Pueblo Gem and Mineral Show, AGTA GemFair, and the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show.

New Turkish Gem Zultanite Hits the Market

A unique species of color-change diaspore trademarked Zultanite is now available in limited quantites from the only known source in a remote, mountainous region in Anatolia, Turkey. Gem-quality crystals were first discovered there in the early 1980s, but were never mined commercially until Zultanite Gems LLC, a Turkish mining company serving the U.S. market from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, recently obtained the deposit. The company will officially launch the gem at MJSA Expo New York, March 12-14.

Reportedly eye-clean with minor inclusions under 10x magnification, Zultanite possesses phenomenal gem properties such as color change and cat's eye tendencies. It is unlike the dark, well-developed crystals of diaspore found in the emery deposits of the Urals and in Chester, Massachusetts, explains Murat Akgun, partner in Zultanite Gems.



There are many subtle nuances in color under different lighting conditions. At its best, Zultanite transforms from a kiwi green to a rhodolite purplish-pink. The same stone can also show a khaki-green to brownish-pink, or pinkish-champagne to ginger color change, depending on the light source.

Akgun reports that Zultanite is as hard as amethyst, as brilliant as sapphire, and as entertaining as alexandrite—registering 6.5 to 7 on the Mohs scale, 1.702 to 1.75 in refractive index, and 3.39 in specific gravity. The typical size range available from Zultanite Gems is 3 carats to 5 carats, with some exceptional pieces reaching 14 carats. Crystals are primarily fashioned in long, tapered rectangular cuts to best capture the color change. Wholesale prices range from $100 to $1,000 per carat, reaching $5,000 per carat for stones over 10 carats. ◆

TOP: PHOTO COURTESY OF OUT OF OUR MINES. BOTTOM: PHOTO COURTESY OF ZULTANITE GEMS.