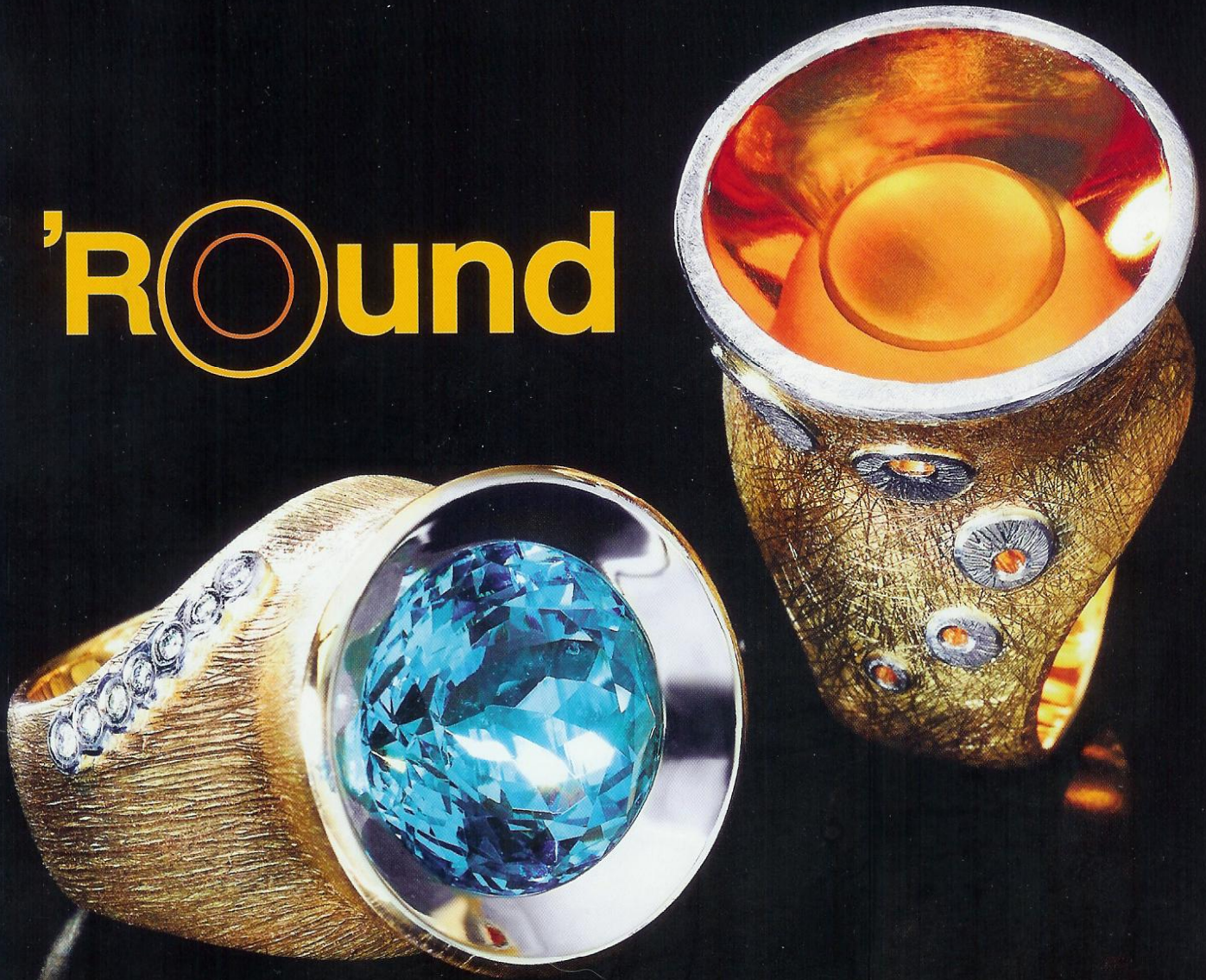


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nigeria: gem buyers wanted



**Rubellite
tourmaline
from Nigeria.
Gem cour-
tesy of Bear
Essentials;
photo by
Robert Weldon.**

The government of Nigeria has announced a plan to revamp its mining industry, making it easier for outside buyers and investors to come into the country.

Under the Minerals and Mining Law of 2006, which at press time was scheduled to take effect in the first quarter of 2006, the government of Nigeria has relinquished control of almost all of the country's mineral deposits. Foreign companies will be allowed to retain 100 percent ownership of any mining operations they set up.

The new law will also establish a national mining cadastre. In addition to working with local miners to help increase production — providing education and support at the mines — the cadastre will issue mining licenses, with the goal of turning applications around in one month or less.

To encourage visiting buyers as well as miners, the tax on gemstone exports has been lowered from 7 percent to 3 percent.

One of the biggest concerns gem dealers have expressed about buying in Nigeria is safety. As recently as January 2006, the U.S. State Department issued a travel advisory warning of violent crime throughout the country, particularly in and around Lagos, with sectarian violence in the northwestern states of Kano, Kaduna, and Plateau.

To help address this issue, the government plans to establish a gemstone bourse in the capital, Abuja. Adeniran Ajibade of the Ministry of Solid Materials Development compares it to traveling to Colombia, another country with a history of violence against travelers. "Anybody who goes to Colombia has to go to a safe town," Ajibade says. "Abuja is a very safe place."

The bourse, envisioned as a "one-stop shop" for gemstone buying, will not be completed by the end of the year, Ajibade adds. In the meantime, the government will sponsor Nigerian gemstone dealers' travel to trade shows around the world, to build interest in Nigerian gemstones and encourage buyers to come to the source.

Also in the works are a national gemological institute and a cutting school, to train Nigerians in these value-added industries. The first step, however, will be a study of the gemstone industry in Nigeria — what types of gemstones are coming out, who is doing the mining, and how the gemstones are bought and sold on the international marketplace.

The impetus for the changes to the mining law was a debt forgiveness on the part of industrialized nations that allowed Nigeria to pay off its remaining debt to the World Bank. The government now has money available to put into developing its natural re-

SUNSTONE BACK IN THE LIGHT

Oregon sunstone from the Ponderosa Mine in Plush, Oregon, is once again hitting the market after a long hiatus.

The mine was purchased by Desert Sun Mining & Gem Company two years ago from the widow of the former owner. "Since then, we've been digging, trying to get enough out of the ground to get it cut so we could show people," says Bruce Moore, executive vice president of Desert Sun. "We have enough now to go commercial."

Oregon sunstone is best known for its "schiller," where copper platelet inclusions create a shimmering, adularescent effect inside the gem. The sunstone mined at Ponderosa ranges from red to light yellow to blue-green, with about 15 percent of the stones showing strong schiller. The size generally ranges from 3 mm to 8 mm rounds in calibrated cuts, with individual stones going higher.

The Ponderosa property extends over approximately 60 acres, although currently Desert Sun is only mining in one location. Moore says that in the summer they plan to set up a mechanized operation capable of producing 200,000 carats of cut material per season — potentially more, if a volume supplier shows an interest.

Desert Sun launched their production at the 2006 Tucson gem and jewelry shows. "We have a lot of people asking what it is. The biggest problem, as with any 'new' stone, is that people don't know it," says Moore, adding that up until now, most Oregon sunstone has only been mined in very small quantities. "Now you'll see a lot more."

sources, including gemstones.

"The geology of Nigeria and that of Brazil are very similar," Ajibade points out. "We believe, with the knowledge of geology that we have, that two-thirds of the country is pervaded by pegmatites." Pegmatites are veins of rock that have the potential to hold gemstones.

"We want to ensure the development of Nigerian resources will be to the benefit of Nigerians — and also make a profit for the investor," Ajibade concludes. "Nigeria is a very vibrant society, and once we get started, we will beat everybody."

Diaspore Relaunched as Zultanite™

Diaspore, a color-change gemstone that comes almost exclusively from Turkey, has

been reintroduced to the gem world as Zultanite™.

Known as a collector's gem, diaspore made a brief splash on the market in 1994, when a company called Eur-Asia Ltd. announced they had discovered a sizable, commercially-viable deposit in Mugla, Turkey. While some rough and cut gemstones made it to market, Eur-Asia Ltd. dropped out of sight shortly thereafter.

Enter Murat Akgun of Zultanite Gems L.L.C. A jeweler from Istanbul, he became acquainted with the deposit through one of the former partners in Eur-Asia. After several years and some intensive research, Akgun found an investor willing to back a venture into diaspore and, in 2005, acquired the rights to mine the deposit.

The first cut stones from the new mining effort were on display at the 2006 Tucson gem

and mineral shows. Akgun has been working with established lapidaries such as Rudi and Ralph Wobito, Christopher Wolfsburg, and Stephen Kotlowski, in part because diaspore can be so difficult to cut. In addition to a perfect cleavage, which makes the gem likely to split or crack under pressure, it must also be oriented correctly to bring out the color change.

Diaspore is unique in its variety of color changes. The best stones go from bright green in direct sunlight to rhodolite pink in incandescent light, but the same stone can also turn yellow, yellow-brown, or pink-brown, depending on the lighting conditions. A typical size range is three to five carats, which Akgun is selling for \$300-\$500 per carat. Some stones have been found up to 14 carats, which are priced individually.

Aside from cutting, the biggest challenge in production so far is the mine itself. Located in a remote area at an altitude of more than 4,000 feet, the mine is miles from the nearest village, with no running water or electricity. The main gallery of the mine collapsed years ago and needs to be cleared out before large-scale mining can begin.

Added to that is the problem of theft. The mine is well known in the area, and some locals have been sneaking in at night to steal crystals to sell. "There is diaspore in the market which is low quality, which I hope will disappear within a year," Akgun says. "We have to fight all of these people for a while, until we establish a presence."

Despite the difficulties, Akgun adds that he has been pleased with the response to

the gem so far. He has been selling individual stones to designers and retail jewelers, and has even had some inquiries from volume manufacturers. "Low-end, commercial-quality goods in the future may be possible," once the mine is fully operational, he concludes.

Tanzanite Foundation Births Campaign

The Tanzanite Foundation has announced a new, global marketing campaign intended to position tanzanite as "the" birthstone.

With the slogan "Be Born to Tanzanite," the campaign's centerpiece is a tradition from the Maasai people, who live in the area around Merelani, Tanzania, the world's only known source of tanzanite. Among the Maasai, a woman who has given birth wears blue beads and fabric to give the child a long and healthy life. The campaign promotes tanzanite as a gift to be given to a mother to celebrate the birth of a child.

The campaign will initially focus on the retail jewelry trade in the United States, Europe, and South Africa, with plans to move into Asia and India toward the end of 2006. In addition to advertising, the Tanzanite Foundation will work with jewelry designers who are close to the fashion world to place tanzanite at prominent events.

In support of the campaign, in January the Tanzanite Foundation opened an office in New York City,



The Tanzanite Foundation has launched an advertising campaign to position tanzanite as "the" birthstone. ABOVE: An ad from the campaign. LEFT: Tanzanite ring by Stephen Webster. Images courtesy the Tanzanite Foundation.



Diaspore, now being marketed as Zultanite™, changes color from green (top) to pink (above), with some shades in between. Photo by Jeff Scovil, courtesy Zultanite Gems L.L.C.

near the diamond district.

The Tanzanite Foundation is a non-profit organization whose goal is to promote sales of tanzanite through marketing to retail jewelers and directly to the consumer. The organization was created by TanzaniteOne, the mining company that controls one of the four mining areas, or "blocks," in Merelani. The Tanzanite Foundation operates as a separate entity, although it is largely funded by TanzaniteOne and the company's sightholder clients. Part of the Tanzanite Foundation's general promotional work centers around the Mark of Rarity™, a symbol used to denote tanzanite that has been ethically sourced, which can only be used by members of the Tanzanite Foundation. The organization has also developed a set of quality grading and certification standards that it is making available to retailers, along with training and educational materials, to support point-of-purchase sales. ○