



Gem Talk

by Michael S. George

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Rubies: Their Origin, Make Up, Quality and Care



ORIGIN:

Ruby comes from the Latin word "ruber" which means red. It is known in the industry as corundum. Corundum occurs in all colors of the spectrum, but only the red variety is called ruby. Any other color is called sapphire. Ruby color can vary from fire engine red to purplish red. When the color is too pale or pink it is then called a pink sapphire, or if it is too purple, it is called a purple sapphire. Remember, only the red species of corundum is called ruby.

There are many legends about rubies, some of which say the bearer was believed to be blessed with health, wealth, wisdom, and success. It was also known as the "Lord of Gems" since it was thought to guard homes and property

from storms, preserve mental health and control passion. Ruby is the birthstone for those born in July according to an ancient verse, "The gleaming ruby should adorn, all those who in July are born, for thus they'll be exempt and free, from lover's doubts and anxiety.

Rubies are rarer than sapphires and, when over one carat, are expensive. When over 5 carats in size, the rarity and price soar. Some of the largest well-known red stones of the world have been mistakenly called rubies when in fact they are fine quality spinels, such as the "Black Prince's Ruby" in the British Crown Jewels.

Sometimes rubies display a six branch star, known as Ruby Star Sapphire.

QUALITY:

Rubies are found in Asia, Africa, Burma, and Thailand. The finest rubies in the world come from Burma, the ruby capital. It is the intensity of color and the purity of the stones' clarity that give Burmese rubies their great value. Recently, Burma has found a vein of rubies that has the fine color, but not the fine clarity, resulting in a beautiful color ruby that does not cost as much as other Burmese stones. Thailand is also known for their ruby production, however the grade is much lower and the color is more of a purple/pink shade.

In colored gemstones such as rubies, the actual color is much more important than clarity or cut. Even subliminal differences in shade can cause the price to change dramatically. This important fact must be considered when making a fine ruby purchase in order to assure a good value. As important is the agent you are working with, of course; his or her knowledge and integrity impacts the final outcome to such a degree that much care and time should be given to this aspect of the investment on a ruby purchase of a carat or more. It is recommended that you view several to many rubies before buying, allowing yourself the necessary time to experience a variety of colors, shapes, and qualities of rubies from a few different jewelers. Please remember to work with jewelers who have knowledge, value, and product available to you, along with an attitude to allow you to probe them for information with questions that will result in a quality ruby purchase at a reasonable price. Should the jeweler get short with you or be lacking in knowledge or inventory available, it is recommended that you seek out another.

Ruby is the gem of choice for those celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary. In days of old it was used as an engagement ring and today is once again regaining place in the market in bridal sets. They have been used in royal crowns, royal rings and scepters, as well as held in private estates not only for

their beauty, but also for their investment value. The quantity of fine to gem quality rubies in the world is so rare that they are thought by many of the world financial planners to be an excellent hedge against inflation and, being a commodity that is universally recognized, this author agrees that a ruby is of the finest hard assets to acquire for a complete investment portfolio.

There are many simulated and synthetic red stones on the market and, contrary to popular belief, even old rings and brooches of 100 years or more may be simulants. The notion that old gemstones are genuine based upon their age is totally false. Simulated gems have been in existence almost as long as jewelry has been. Today the synthetic market is rivaling the natural gemstone and due to increased scientific knowledge and capabilities, the identification of such synthetics is difficult for even the professionals without special equipment. The difference between simulated and synthetic is one that needs to be expressed here. Simulated is a product made from a totally unrelated substance that appears to look like the natural. An example of this is a cubic zirconia or a rhinestone. The material may be glass or even plastic, but the appearance will be like the natural it is mimicking. A synthetic stone is one that is identical to the natural in chemical composition, but has been manufactured through man's intervention. A classic example of this would be the cultured pearl in comparison to the natural pearl. The natural is much more valuable since it is so rare, yet the cultured is as beautiful, takes less time to create, and is almost impossible to distinguish from the natural without using an X-ray or breaking through the surface to find the starter material.

CARE:

Rubies are the second hardest gemstone known with a MOHS scale rating of 9. This means that only a diamond is harder than a ruby. Keep in mind that this scale is dealing with hardness based upon scratchability and not toughness. Toughness in a gemstone deals with reaction to a blow or impact. Should a ruby be impacted with the proper force or angle, it will break or shatter.

Rubies are quite easily cared for, as are diamonds. To insure lifelong beauty in a ruby, simply clean it with an over-the-counter jewelry cleaner, mild soapy detergent, or my favorite home cleaner, toothpaste. Many laugh or frown when I recommend toothpaste for cleaning jewelry, however it is a mild, non-abrasive cleaner that does give very fine results when used in the following method:

Simply remember that before anything touches anything else it must first be wet. With this in mind, let's proceed to my ritual cleaning technique. First, stop up the sink you will be using and get a soft bristle toothbrush out. Next, fill the

basin with warm to hot water about half way. Taking a small dab of toothpaste between your fingers, wet the jewelry item and the toothpaste separately, then rub the moistened toothpaste all over the jewelry item being cleaned. Areas that are hard to reach or heavily soiled areas may be cleaned using the soft bristle brush, however it is important that you allow the tips of the bristles to do the work. Do not scrub the jewelry with the brush, but lightly work the bristles into the areas that need it gently until the soil is removed or loosened. Now run the jewelry under hot water to remove any remaining toothpaste or dirt that may still be clinging to it. Shake off the excess water and pat dry the jewelry in a clean, soft terry or cotton towel. If all this seems too involved, a professional cleaning job is always available to you by us just for the asking.

Should you have any questions regarding this article or any jewelry needs, please feel free to call Mike George at MSG Jewelers at (314) 353-9488.

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