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THE STONES OF SPRING & SUMMER

BY SYLVIE BIGAR



APRIL: DIAMOND

Say the word "Diamond" and the eyes start to shine. The birthstone of April has been prized for centuries and was even considered a religious icon in ancient India. And, its name comes from the Greek word *adamas*, meaning invincible.

Recently, the popularity of diamonds has surged as the polishing and cutting methods have improved. Diamonds represent everlasting love, and a woman's engagement ring reflects the bond that unites the couple; in ancient Egypt, diamond rings were worn on the fourth finger of the left hand since it was believed that the "vein of love" ran directly from the hand to the heart.

Diamonds are made of carbon and are judged and valued according to carat, clarity, color and cut. It is the hardest surface known to man and is used in many industrial products. But, as Marilyn Monroe sang in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*: "Diamonds are a girl's best friend."

MAY: EMERALD

Emerald, a gem fit for a queen. Cleopatra loved her emeralds, Queen Elizabeth treasures her emerald diadem, and Richard Burton gave Elizabeth Taylor an emerald and diamond brooch as an engagement present. Even the Egyptian pharaohs 3,000 years ago prized the emerald, for it was considered holy, and mummies were often buried wearing emeralds to ensure rebirth or eternal youth. But, in truth, you do not need to be a royal or a movie star to enjoy this green marvel.

Interestingly, the fragile emerald is one of the most difficult stones to cut because it often has inclusions, or imperfections. To counter this, master cutters invented the famous "emerald cut," a rectangular or square cut with beveled corners.

The most beautiful emeralds come from Colombia but emeralds can also be found in Africa, Brazil, Afghanistan and Madagascar; it is the intensity of green that makes the stone's value soar. In 2001, one of the world's largest gems, called the Mogul Emerald and weighing 217.8 carats, sold for 2.2 million dollars.

JUNE: ALEXANDRITE AND MOONSTONE

The Alexandrite was discovered in Russia during the 19th Century and was named after Czar Alexander II. Because it features both red and green, the same as the colors of Imperial Russia, the Alexandrite became the national stone.

The uniqueness of the stone lies in its ever-changing hues. In the daylight, the gem appears green. In the evening it turns red. The more distinct the colors, the more valuable the stone; Alexandrites were often used in Russian and Victorian jewelry and are revered, as legends say,

for their powerful intuition and ability to provide good luck to the bearer. Over the past few years, Alexandrites have been uncovered in Brazil, Sri Lanka and parts of Africa.

As for Moonstones, which were not brought back to earth by the Apollo 11 crew, were actually named by the ancient Romans, for they believed Moonstones were actually made from moonlight. One of the most fragile stones, its value varies enormously depending on its color, its transparency and, of course, its size. It is known for the sheen that glows on its surface when cut in cabochon, or oval, making the bluish shimmer seem to float inside the gem.

JULY: RUBY

You need proof of his passionate love for you? Ask for a ruby!

July's birthstone, the gorgeous red ruby represents love, passion, warmth and power. Its name comes from the Latin word "*rubens*" which meant red. Often referred to as the king of gemstones, the ruby is extremely rare and can be worth more than diamonds. And based on its country of origin, its color can vary greatly. Ancient Indian literature is full of stories about rubies, adorning the crowns and jewels of many maharajas.

Today, rubies are found in Burma, now called Myanmar, which produces stones of a deep, almost bluish, color with unparalleled shine. Vietnam offers a more purplish tone while Thailand is known for a reddish-brown called Siam. Rubies can also be found in Pakistan, Laos, Nepal and East Africa.

Large rubies with no inclusions are few, and their rarity makes them choice items at auctions around the world. Recently, an 8.62 carat Burmese ruby broke all records at a Christie's auction selling for \$3.6 million dollars.

AUGUST: PERIDOT

The peridot was discovered on an island in the Red Sea as early as 1,500 B.C. and decorates many pieces of ancient jewelry in museums throughout the world. Named from the Greek "*peridona*," meaning generous, it is prized for its golden green and is said to bring peace, success and good luck. Throughout the years, peridots have often been confused with emeralds and many antique "emeralds" have turned out to be peridots. ©

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