

BOOK Reviews

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Emeralds: A Passionate Guide: The Emeralds, the People, Their Secrets

By Ronald Ringsrud, 382 pp., illus.,
Green View Press [www.emerald-
passion.com], Oxnard, CA, 2009.
\$80.00

This is a personal account of the world of emeralds from the perspective of a renowned connoisseur. It offers an in-depth look at the life of a Colombian emerald dealer, illustrated with many personal adventures, experiences, observations, and opinions. Colorfully and tastefully illustrated, the book shows many superb examples of beautiful and unusual emeralds. Indeed, it is an unabashed celebration of colored gemstones, emerald in particular.

As the author states in the introduction, "This book is about passion, not polarizers." Comprising 23 chapters, it starts straightaway with how romance can influence deals between sellers and buyers, with an interesting explanation for the differences in behavior between a dealer and a broker. Subsequently, it details the discovery and ascendancy of the Colombian emerald mines under Spanish rule, roughly between 1500 and 1750. As a Dutchman, I learned how my ancestors used "well-placed bribes" to acquire emeralds during that period.

Subsequent chapters discuss the properties and optics of emeralds, color and clarity grading, and clarity enhancement. The author emphasizes the subtle differences in color and clarity, and the positive effect inclusions

may have. He expresses concern that emerald enhancements and their durability are discussed too much, often increasing confusion and fear. He emphasizes that size, quantity, and position of filled fissures are most important—not the type of filler—when assessing durability issues and degree of clarity enhancement.

Interestingly, *gem laboratory* is synonymous with *ivory tower* throughout this book, revealing the difference between an academic approach (which the author criticizes) and that of the connoisseur. He agrees it is important to know how to use the information on a gem report, but he maintains that in the trade there is also a need for documentation that gives some background information to evoke the wonder and reverence that fine gems deserve.

The book gives a clear explanation of what is meant by the term *gota de aceite*, which is not simply a catch-all superlative for a fine Colombian emerald, as often misapplied in Europe and the United States. Also clarified is the proper use of *old mine*, and the difference between that term and *gota de aceite*.

The reader is brought up to date with current Colombian emerald production, which still matches the quality of the beautiful antique emeralds the Spanish conquerors sent to Europe and India. The author explains that money spent on Colombian emeralds does not support narcotics trafficking and also discusses examples of fair trade initiatives that benefit the local miners.

The basics of emerald geology are

introduced in a loose, informal way. The author rightly emphasizes the importance of Terri Ottaway's geologic work, which marked a shift in thought about the formation of emerald in Colombia. Strangely enough, only her master's thesis is mentioned, not the landmark paper she and her colleagues published in *Nature*. Nor does the author refer to the similar formation theory proposed in articles by Giuliani, Cheilletz, and co-workers, which produced additional valuable data and insights.

This book is especially outstanding for its many interesting personal anecdotes. Among them is a witty, recognizable account of working in the field—with interaction between the investor, the geologist, the foreman, and the miners. It further includes a personal account on the business of buying and cutting rough emeralds, with a memorable story of missing a buy. A fairly expansive section on cutting emeralds explains the process, with revealing insight into the prices involved and what is at stake for the owner *and* the cutter. The author expresses his view on colored stone grading systems, contending that colored stones should be sold one by one, like works of art.

In the chapter on collecting mineral specimens, the author demonstrates his true love for emeralds. He describes parting with a nicely terminated crystal, rightly sold as a specimen rather than a faceted gem, only

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to see it end up as an inelegant 14 ct emerald-cut piece that had lost much of its color.

Still, the strength of this book can be a weakness at times. Because “there is no distance between the author and emeralds,” in the author’s words, facts and opinions are often intermingled. For instance, the statement that the color of tsavorite is always steely and too brilliant is purely subjective—a matter of taste. Other statements need a clear reference, such as the assertion that 70% of the emeralds of the world by volume and 30% by value are cut, polished, and marketed in Jaipur (which is inconsistent with other published data). The book also contains some small errors and omissions. The stated refractive indices of quartz (1.559–1.568) are too high (they are typically 1.544–1.553), and emeralds from Colombia show a wider range of RIs than indicated. The author describes glass doublets as imitations of emerald, but does not mention rock crystal doublets or the deceptive beryl doublets. The discussion of clarity grading is also unclear at times.

Aside from these criticisms, this book is a must for anyone who loves colored gemstones and wants to know more about the world of emeralds. In particular, it is highly recommended to gemology students as it will help put into broader perspective and context what they learn in the classroom.

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The French Blue

By Richard W. Wise, 489 pp., illus., publ. by Brunswick House Press [www.thefrenchblue.com], Lenox, MA. \$29.95.

This is a fascinating account of both fictional and factual events surrounding the six voyages that Jean Baptiste Tavernier made to India from 1631 to

1669. The story starts with Tavernier’s early life and his introduction and apprenticeship into the jewelry industry. It then focuses on his dealings in gems, with emphasis on the trade routes, mining procedures, and business practices of the period that Tavernier wrote about and his fictional quest for “the one stone” that would set him up for life: the diamond that would one day be known as the French Blue. The author began with Tavernier’s famous memoir and researched other historical documents to weave a fascinating tale of adventure and global intrigue. Those who wonder what life was like during the mid-17th century will find the fictional scenarios quite plausible, delivered in an entertaining, easy-to-read manner.

Although the cover states that the book is based on a true story, it would be impossible for the casual reader to separate fact from fiction. The epilogue notes that several chapters and characters were created to fill in the years that Tavernier omitted in his writings. Other details and events scattered throughout the book are also clearly fictionalized, particularly some rather descriptive sexual trysts.

In addition, one would have to be familiar with the history of the French Blue diamond to see the correlation between the title and the story. The slab-cut diamond Tavernier purchased in India and sold to France’s King Louis XIV has been known as the *Tavernier Blue* since the late 1800s. In 1671, it was recut into the *Diamant Bleu de la Couronne*, or *Blue Diamond of the Crown*, which also was not known as the *French Blue* until the late 19th century—long after it, too, had been recut, to become the Hope diamond. Unfortunately, the author uses each of the terms *Tavernier Blue* and *French Blue* only once, while the diamond is referred to many times in the last two chapters as either “the Blue” or “the Great Blue.” This is likely to be confusing to anyone unfamiliar with Tavernier’s writings.

The blurring of fact and fiction precludes this book from being considered an authoritative reference,

although it does provide plausible insights into gemstone and diamond trade practices, trading routes, and the challenges Tavernier encountered. The *French Blue* is recommended for those interested in a well-written, entertaining story surrounding a singular figure in the history of diamonds.

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The Pearl Oyster

Edited by Paul C. Southgate and John C. Lucas, 582 pp., illus., publ. by Elsevier [www.elsevier.com], Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2008. 91.95 (US\$111.00)

“The shell is prosocline, inequilateral, typically rounded to anteriorly obliquely ovate in outline. The umbones are subterminal, located posterior to the anterior auricles, and slightly projected beyond the straight hinge, with the umbo in the left valve elevated slightly more dorsally than the umbo in the right valve.” As the preceding sentences attest, *The Pearl Oyster* is written and edited largely by and for academics and others with a background in mollusk science. However, the book also has great value for lay readers, especially if they can get up to speed with the vocabulary of mollusk biology.

In 16 chapters written by 26 credited contributors, the editors have compiled a wealth of information previously available only in hundreds of academic journal articles and other documents. Nearly every chapter has an extensive list of references at its end, giving each at least the appearance of authority and accuracy. Chapters 2 (“Taxonomy and Phylogeny”) and 5 (“Reproduction, Development and Growth”) are each followed by nine pages of references listed in 8-point type.

It’s disturbing, then, that a somewhat knowledgeable reviewer easily finds factual, typographic, style, and usage errors. Unfortunately, their

presence detracts from the authority of the book. Perhaps if Messrs. Southgate and Lucas, who are academic marine biologists and not editors *per se*, had enlisted help from a professional editor, the errors could have been caught and corrected.

Each chapter begins with an introduction and ends with a summary, which is a blessing, especially for lay readers. In Chapter 8 ("Pearl Production"), Joseph Taylor, a PhD marine biologist and, until recently, the hands-on managing director of Atlas South Sea Pearl, and Elisabeth Strack, author of the monumental *Pearls* (reviewed in *G&G*, Spring 2007), give an excellent account of pearl formation. In text worthy of applause, the chapter debunks the oft-repeated notion that natural pearls form around an irritant lodged in a pearl-bearing mollusk's tissue.

In Chapter 13 ("Economics of Pearl Farming"), Clem Tisdell, an economist at the University of Queensland, and Bernard Poirine, of the University of French Polynesia, make a gallant effort to analyze and explain the topic. Their sentence, "It is very difficult to obtain accurate global statistics for pearl production and sales" is revealing. This reviewer knows from extensive personal experience that "impossible" would have been a better descriptor.

Although *The Pearl Oyster* is nearly exclusively about saltwater pearling—Chinese freshwater cultured pearls, which annually outweigh saltwater cultured pearls by a factor of about 13, are barely mentioned—and although much of the information has little or no practical application, the book is a worthwhile addition to any serious pearler's library.

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Collector's Guide to Fluorite

By Arvid Eric Pasto, 96 pp., illus., publ. by Schiffer Publishing [www.schifferbooks.com], Atglen, PA, 2009. \$19.99

Fluorite, one of the three most popular collector minerals, is certainly deserving of a book covering the many aspects of its appeal—aspects realized in this *Collector's Guide*. The author has been a mineral collector since the 1950s, and nearly all the specimens depicted are from his collection. Their quality and variety demonstrate his keen knowledge and good taste in fluorite specimens.

The introduction includes a discussion of fluorite's composition, uses—including, very briefly, as a gemstone—color, and fluorescence, with a bit about its history. In the next section, "Structure and Crystallography," fluorite's crystal form is detailed down to the unit cell, with understandable text and clear, colorful graphics. Its crystallography and many forms and combinations thereof are well addressed and illustrated. Photographs that clearly display these forms will assist collectors in identifying them in their own specimens. "Physical Properties" describes cleavage, hardness, and specific gravity, among others, and even touches on such topics as radioactivity, magnetism, and electrical and thermal properties. The "Optical Properties" section features a table on fluorite's colors and their causes, and another on its fluorescence colors. Other factors of interest such as mineral associations, phantom growths, pseudomorphism, and inclusions are covered next. This is followed by a section devoted to formation that describes four types of economically important ore deposits and the five major types of physiochemical environments in which they can occur.

Last, and perhaps most interesting, is the section on classic fluorite localities. The best-known sources are broken down by continent, country, and region. Very good color photographs taken by the author accompany these descriptions. The specimen selection and the quality of the images should prove valuable to all levels of collectors as an aid in distinguishing a specimen's origin. Rounding out the book is a bibliography with a wealth of references.

Collector's Guide to Fluorite is an excellent resource for this highly collectible species and should be of great value to mineral collectors at all levels. For the gemologist, there is plenty of useful data on its properties, structure, history, and even inclusions, though the book includes little on fluorite as a fashioned gemstone. Despite this, one would still hope that lapidaries and gemologists will appreciate the natural beauty of fluorite and gain much from this work.

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OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

The Bohemian Crown Jewels. By Andrej Šumbera, transl. by Zuzana Jurgens, 114 pp., illus., publ. by the author [http://korunovacni-klenoty.cz], 2008, 20.

This pocket-sized work is a photographic catalogue of the Crown Jewels of the Kingdom of Bohemia, which date from the reign of King Charles IV (1316–1378). The book is the product of gemological examinations conducted in 1998 and 2003; a review of these examinations is also provided. Included is a CD-ROM with 600 additional photos.

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