

Reviews

SUSAN B. JOHNSON, EDITOR

FANCY-COLOR DIAMONDS

By Harvey Harris, 180 pp., illus., publ. by Fancoldi Registered Trust, Liechtenstein, 1994. US\$175.00*

Harvey Harris's wide-ranging dissertation on the history, folklore, and science of colored diamonds is noteworthy in that it is the only book in print that is devoted exclusively to colored diamonds. The author graciously acknowledges Tino Hammid's exquisite photographic images as the book's most impressive attribute. However, readers need to be mindful that colored-diamond photographs, even superb ones like Mr. Hammid's, cannot always accurately depict the subtleties of tone and saturation actually seen in fine colored diamonds. These stunning photographs might easily distort a potential buyer's expectations.

The first two chapters of this book, which deal primarily with the history of fancy-color diamonds in the context of global diamond production and marketing, are good reading. Mr. Harris points out that the remarkable prices we now attribute to rare "fancy colors" are a recent phenomenon. He underscores this observation with an anecdote about two almost identical 1¼-ct fancy green diamonds cut from the same rough. The first stone sold in 1962 for \$500 per carat. Now, a little more than three decades later, its twin is for sale at "a strong six figure price."

The chapters immediately following these two—those that address the technical provenance of colored diamonds, including the causes of

color, faceting, treatment, and synthesis—have problems. The chapter explaining causes of color is disappointing. Augmenting the text are absorption spectrograms for several fancy colors. However, the author does not lay adequate foundation for the general reader to understand spectral absorption data and the attendant terminology. This would not be a deficiency in a purely technical text written for professionals; however, in a book that appears to be directed to a more general readership, subjects such as spectral analysis need greater clarification.

Mr. Harris's treatment of laboratory grading reports and their pivotal role in today's colored-diamond market depicts the GIA fancy-color grading system as inscrutable and inadequate. However, GIA's recent publication (in this journal) detailing their color-grading methodology and improved color-grading system negates the substance of this criticism.

Three final chapters focus on the romance of colored diamonds in jewelry, at auction, and in the limelight. Mr. Harris relates compelling stories of the famous, the infamous, and the unusual members of this unique subset of gems. This well-written section is highly interesting and entertaining reading. To his credit, the author candidly admits that some of his stories may be apocryphal.

Of concern, however, is the fact that errors and distortions of technical terminology and scientific fact appear frequently throughout the book, misinforming and misleading the general reader. For example, the author states that: "Even D-E-F col-

orless diamonds contain approximately 3 to 14 percent gray (or else you couldn't see them)." In fact, the reason we are able to see a colorless diamond in air is because the diamond's refractive index (R.I.) is very different from that of air. Place a D-flawless diamond in a clear liquid having the same R.I. as diamond and it will disappear. You can see an approximation of this refractive phenomenon by dropping a clear ice cube into water. Whether a D-flawless stone contains the level of gray he attributes to it is highly questionable; however, he lays no foundation for his assertion. Mr. Harris's statements regarding the unknown cause of color in fancy orange diamonds are also questionable in light of current information. However, because he provides no references or technical foundation for this claim, verification is not possible. This illustrates another serious weakness: the absence of supporting references throughout the technical sections.

Fancy-Color Diamonds is nicely written and earns high marks for presentation, photography, and historical perspective. However, the book fails when it attempts to leapfrog from general-interest information, which is quite good, to subjects that require technical crudition on the part of both the writer and the reader.

SHARON WAKEFIELD
Wakefield Gemological Laboratory
Boise, Idaho

*This book is available at the GIA Bookstore, 1660 Stewart Street, Santa Monica, CA 90404. Telephone (800) 421-7250, ext. 282.