

ZIRCON: THE INDUSTRY DARLING IN 2026

Brecken Branstrator, GIA GG

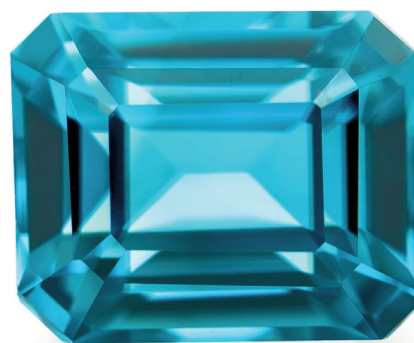
Zircon is one of the best values in gems right now, with an affordable price point and a lot of liveliness.

Zircon can be found in a variety of colors, including yellow/orange, green, red, brown, and of course, blue, making it a favorite among buyers. In addition to its diverse offering of colors, zircon also boasts a brilliance and fire that give the gemstones a lot of life.

According to GIA, some gemologists classify zircon into three types: high, intermediate, and low. A stone's classification depends on its properties, which are related to the amount of radiation-induced damage done to its crystal structure.

High zircons have full crystal structures, with little or no damage, and thus have the normal physical and optical properties associated with the mineral. Most zircons used in jewelry fall into this category. Intermediate, or medium, zircons have some structural damage, with physical and optical properties between high and low types. Low zircons have "extensive" damage to their crystal structures from radioactive elements and therefore have much lower optical and physical properties. Sometimes they lack any crystal structure at all.

Many of the zircon stones used in jewelry also have been heat treated to enhance their color, producing blue and golden hues as well as some colorless. Though the blues have long been the popular hue for zircon, it's the brown and brownish hues, like brownish orange or champagne, and other earthy tones that are leading the market forward now. (GemGuide will be highlighting what exhibitors were saying about zircon at the Tucson gem shows in its next issue,



An emerald-cut zircon weighing 2.22 carats from Mayer & Watt.



A yellow-orange zircon weighing 1.74 carats from Color First.

March/April 2026. To read more about that, [subscribe to the GemGuide now.](#))

Some retailers have said their customers still need

more education about the stone before they will buy as confusion over the name remains and causes some buyers to confuse zircon with cubic zirconia, leading them to believe it is a simulant rather than a natural gemstone. But for those that can cross the divide to educate buyers on the differences as well as what zircon can offer, there remains plenty of opportunity.

But jewelers should be careful when dealing with zircon, because even though its dispersion and brilliance can compare to diamond, it is much softer (Mohs 6 to 7.5) and more brittle, making it prone to chipping and abrading. Zircon jewelry should be cleaned with soap and warm water or a damp cloth; ultrasonic or steam cleaners should be avoided. ♦

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