

## MANY DEALERS ARE LOOKING TOWARD THE SEPTEMBER HONG KONG SHOW

### FEATURED GEM: FELDSPAR GROUP GEMS

The cautious optimism expressed by some dealers after the June Hong Kong show has eroded to an inexplicable sense of malaise about the current tepid market. With the US stock market hovering near record levels and US economic growth at a respectable pace for a mature economy, the middle class appears yet to feel an appreciable benefit. The market is active at the high end but demand at the middle and low end price points have slowed dramatically. Dealers are reporting soft demand and increased discounts for diamonds in the typical calls of 0.50, 0.75 and 1.00 ct. sizes. In colored stones, designers and custom jewelers are one active segment of the market while large chains are generally struggling to cultivate new customers. But in a market where consumers are spending in other sectors, one must question if the issue is the lack of a cohesive message. Many dealers are looking toward the September Hong Kong Show for a better gauge of what to expect this holiday season.

#### FELDSPAR GROUP GEMS

The most common mineral in the earth's crust is feldspar. It has been known and used since ancient times for personal adornment as well as for industrial purposes, especially in glass manufacturing. Feldspar is a group of complicated aluminosilicates and crystallizes in a solid-solution series. There are 26 species of feldspars, nine of which are known to be found in gem quality. Transparent feldspar species, i.e., transparent orthoclase and labradorite are more commonly sought as collectors' stones and seldom for jewelry since they are not very durable. They tend to be colorless, light yellow, sometimes gray. The unusual variety of microcline feldspar, which displays an attractive greenish blue color is called amazonite. The common transparent feldspar species become more desirable when they display phenomenon such as adularescence (moonstone effect), labradorescence, aventurescence (sunstone effect), chatoyancy and asterism.

In recent years, sunstone feldspar has become quite popular due to increased interest in unusual gems. The

Ponderosa mine in Oregon, USA, is considered to be the most important source of this variety. Along with transparent variety, green, orange and red aventurescent labradorite is mined in large quantities. The aventurescence is caused by microscopic copper platelets and the colors may vary based on the oxidization, size and reflection of these tiny inclusions. Some exceptional specimens that display two to three different colors are desirable by the collectors. Lapidary artists also favor these bi- and tri-colored specimens as labradorite is suitable for carving. It is these fine examples of cutting that made the sunstone more desirable since the standard faceting or cabbing would only yield into darker and less brilliant stones as labradorite has a lower hardness of 6 to 6.5 and brownish tinge no matter how light colored the hue is.

Prices for feldspar gems such as moonstone and sunstone are fairly stable allowing for the consistency that manufacturers look for when developing a new line. Sunstone comes in a range of attractive colors and is quite affordable often with price points below \$100 per carat. However, exceptional pieces are priced individually in a few hundred dollars per carat or more. ♦



Red Sunstone Feldspar, 7.15ct.

Courtesy of Mayer and Watt. Photo by Geoffrey Watt.

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