

DIAMOND: THE SYMBOL OF UNCONQUERABLE OR IS IT?



Diamonds; today the symbol of wealth and eternal love, were such rarities and difficult to cut that ancients did not fashion them for millennia. The first polishing of diamond rough likely occurred less than a thousand years ago. This initial effort focused on polishing the rough without compromising on weight.

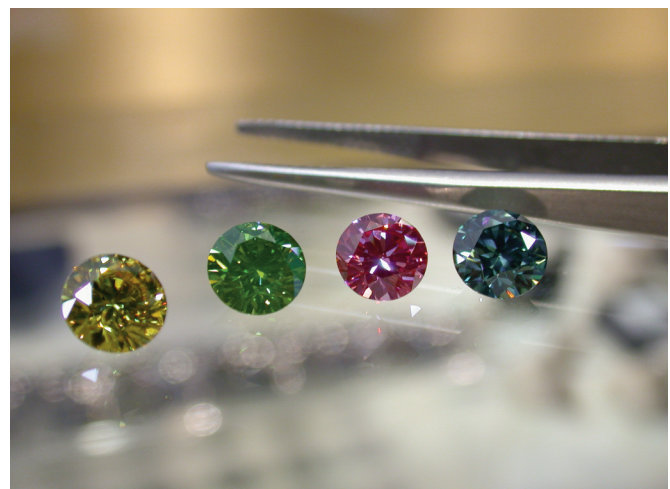
Eastern cultures were more familiar with polished diamonds in jewelry. As trade routes were established between East and West, more diamonds reached the western world. At that time, India was the only known source. Ancient Greeks and Romans were familiar with diamond, although its status was far more legendary than any other gem.

Around the 14th Century, an increased number of polished diamonds were being brought to Europe by merchants via newly established sea trade routes. European royalty started developing a certain taste for these exotic polished diamonds as symbol of power and wealth. About the 17th century, with Baroque fashion encouraging ever so colorful and flamboyant jewelry, more and more polished diamonds were brought from Golconda in India to the European ports.

Europe was also enjoying better understanding of optics thanks to scientists such as Newton and Snell in the 17th century. During the renaissance and baroque age, new discoveries in principles of light led cutters to achieve better results in diamond cutting. By the 19th century, new developments in cut-

ting technology; accompanied by the discovery of diamond in Brazil resulted in more diamonds entering the market. And with this new supply the number of brilliant cut diamonds increased considerably.

History was made by De Beers with the South African diamond discoveries in the 20th century. By the mid-1900s everybody was made to believe that diamonds were the rarest and forever. In a fast-developing technological world, not only the gem quality but also the industrial quality diamonds are used more and more thanks to their unique mineralogical properties such as extreme hardness and heat conductivity. Then Russia, Australia and Canada have joined the group of diamond mining countries



*Irradiated Diamonds.
Photo courtesy of Gary Roskin.*

respectively. The demand has become far higher than the supply in the latter half of the 20th century. Synthetic diamond production was first reported in the 1950s, and has since flourished into a giant, viable industry today. It was inevitable that larger and better quality synthetic diamonds would enter the market from the advances of HPHT and CVD growth processes during the past two decades. So much so, that major gem testing labs started providing grading reports for synthetic diamonds, although previously lab services had been limited to identification reports.

Previously synthetic production had been quite limited and so the gem labs focused their research attention to treatment detection. This had been the norm for the

past few decades. Yet today, undisclosed synthetic diamond trading, especially in smaller sizes, i.e., melee, is a major concern.

The current situation in the global diamond market may look chaotic due to confusion over identification, grading, disclosure, ethical and environmental issues, therefore affecting the pricing. One can only rely on true science rather than hearsay to keep up with new methods of production and identification. It is evident that there is no magic black box to tell it all. After all, the market somehow corrects itself in such conditions, hopefully by understanding the complexities and importance of full disclosure.

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