

Trade Journal
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All that **Glitters**

Coloured Stones Special

GEMSTONES FROM VIETNAM

STONES REFLECT AUSTRALIA

THE GIRL OF THE SEA



COVER STORY

Grand Colourful Success:
Mines to Market



Dear Readers,

It was indeed a pleasant surprise when the Editor of All that Glitters, Ms. Rakshitha Lokesh asked me to be a Guest Editor and I was wondering what I should do. Fortunately for me many of my International colleagues and friends were coming for the Coloured Stone Conference "Mines to Market" which took place in Jaipur in the first week of November. So I thought why not present coloured gemstones from different corners of the world literally on a silver platter for the readers to read!

My friend Dr. Ms. Gayle Webb the world renowned authority on Australian Gems discusses the wonderful gemstones from the Australian Continent. Australia has gems for everyone opal, ruby, blue sapphire, beryl, lovely aquamarine, spessartite and almandine garnets, peridot, iolite, topaz, sphene, and especially the lovely opals tempts one to visit this kangaroo land. I had told Gayle not to write anything about the pink diamonds and champagne diamonds and she kept her word!

From the Center for Gemstone Research, University of Mainz Dr. Tobias Häger and from Hanoi University Dr. Le Thi-Thu Huong tell you about the new gem finds in Vietnam and show you around the mines in Luc Yen. There are regions in Vietnam which have high quality ruby, rare blue spinel as well as other colours in spinel, feldspar, topaz, aquamarine, tourmaline, fluorite, peridot and zircon. It is indeed exotic! Last year I visited Vietnam and the mines and it was a mind boggling experience!

"The Girl of the Sea" Kora Halos -is a superb article on coral by none other than my friend Dr. Margherita Superchi, Chairperson of the Gemstone Panel of the International Mineralogical Association and former Director of CISGEM Italy. Extremely informative and technically perfect Dr. Margherita has added so much to our knowledge about different varieties of coral.

Bill Larson of California, USA sends us information about how the San Diego mines of tourmaline became famous, got exhausted and were again revived. There are also interesting points about how gems like Morganite and Kunzite got their names! It is definitely a treat to visit the Pala mines and having been there I know that it is a great feeling to see the tourmaline crystals actually being mined.

My good colleague and friend, Dr. Wilawan Atichat, Director of Gem & Jewellery Institute of Thailand, has given a very lucid description of Thai gems and has added substantial statistics to prove how Thailand is doing very well in the field of coloured gemstones.

I have written an article on Tanzanite with inputs from the great legend Dr. John Saul, a big name in field of coloured gemstone. Ruby Mine of Kenya is named after him. Dr. Saul tells us that the Tanzanite was first discovered by a Goan who had migrated to Tanzania. The gem tanzanite is getting exhausted and Tanzania is so far the only place one finds them.

Added to this you have a full report on the Mines to Market conference first time exclusively on Coloured Gems so you see you have all the fabulous gems from different corners of the globe served to you in this issue dedicated to coloured gems.

Have a feast!!

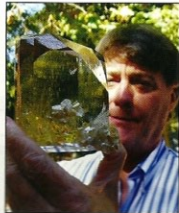
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The Rise, Fall and Rise of San Diego Mines of Bill Larson

I met Bill Larson in 2006 when a field trip was arranged to see his Tourmaline Mine, in San Diego County, USA. Bill was personally showing us his fantastic personal collections from the mines as well as explaining the history of Gem mining in California. One could see the intense pleasure and that sense of achievement after hard work in his explanations he was thoroughly enjoying it and had great patience to answer all our questions. He told us about the history, the rise and fall and later the rejuvenation of the mining.



Bill Larson

Days of Glory

It is said that in the early 1900s San Diego County was a cornucopia of gems. Large sized garnet, kunzite, morganite and topaz were mined and added to that the pink variety of tourmaline for which the region became very famous. The glorious years were those between 1890 and 1912 when it was a major gem mining, cutting and exporting center. Today the famous landmark street clock jeweled with gems from Southern California—including tourmaline, topaz and other gems, at Horton Plaza in downtown San Diego stands witness to those days of glory. It was installed in 1907 and was built by one of San Diego's most famous jewelers, Joseph Jessop, founder of J. Jessop Sons, as a culmination of and tribute to California's gem-rush days.

Pink Tourmaline
PHOTO BILL LARSON

Sino-San Diego trade

Fortunately the discovery of pink tourmaline in San Diego County just near the turn of the century coincided with the reign of this gem's greatest enthusiast in recorded history: Tzu Hsi, the Dowager Empress, who ruled China from 1860 to 1908. She was wild about pink tourmaline carvings – it is interesting to note how the pink tourmaline was being procured by her. It was the New



Kunzite

York firm Tiffany Co. that coordinated the entire procedure smoothly: First, J.L. Tannenbaum, a Tiffany gemologist, would receive an order from the Imperial Chinese Court for a specific quantity, usually several tons, of tourmaline. Next, he would wire money deposited by the Chinese government in a special account at the Import-Export Bank of New York (later to become Chase Manhattan) to hire local ranchers and cowboys to mine what was needed from San Diego. When the shipment was exhausted, the court would make another order and Tannenbaum would repeat the process!

How the gem got its name

Peter Bancroft, Joseph Jessop, John W. Ware as well as miners like Frederick Sickler, who is now credited with the discovery of San Diego kunzite, Ryerson, Herbert Hill and Ralph Potter and others of San Diego are also known to have added to the history of gem mining in that County. Yet for all their knowledge of and commitment to California gems, the local devotees of these stones like Jessop and Ware were overshadowed as players in the San Diego gem boom by the New York based Tiffany and Co.

Morganite
PHOTO BILL LARSON

The firm's prominence—better yet, dominance—in the domain of colored stones—was unassailable. Indeed, by the turn of the century, George F. Kunz, then a Tiffany's vice president and buyer, was already the godfather of gemology—so influential that when a new gem violet-pink spodumene was discovered near Pala in 1902 it was named kunzite over the protests of some miners and mineralogists!

How it was called Morganite

It is said, that the ultimate demonstration of Kunz's power came a few years later with the discovery of a new pink beryl in San Diego County soon after named morganite by Kunz for tycoon J.P. Morgan. As it just so happened, Morgan was a major Tiffany's customer and one of the main benefactors of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Indeed, the museum's gem collection was studied with Morgan donations, many of them U.S. gem and mineral specimens originally bought from Tiffany's at the urging of Kunz, who acted as advisor to the plutocrat.

The Kimberley of tourmaline

Just prior to the outbreak of World War I, San Diego began to lose its grandiose reputation as "the Kimberley of tourmaline". The region's reversal of fortune as a gem producer only accelerated after World War I. The mining in

Southern California never went into full eclipse. Between 1912 and 1925, the Chinese continued tourmaline extraction operations that were secretive. One Chinese jeweler was known to have shipped local tourmaline to Peking in the 1920s. Another Chinese, himself a miner, also ran a gambling parlor where losers at roulette were given pieces of tourmaline.

The Rebirth of San Diego

According to records the credit for San Diego's rebirth as a viable gem mining locality belongs to Potter, who, in the early 1950s, acquired the Himalaya Mine at Mesa Grande and tunneled in some 500 feet on the mine's west side. Fortunate to find pockets filled with beautiful crystals, Potter traveled around the country selling and was able to make his mine a paying operation. Shortly afterward, Louis Spaulding began profitable mining of gorgeous orange spessartine garnet at his Little Three Mine near Ramona. Their success paved the way for a new generation of miner-dealers who were part of the explosion of interest in mineralogy and rock-hounding in the late 1950s and '60s. It is here that Bill Larson comes into picture.

William (Bill) Larson is clearly the fulcrum of the San Diego renaissance and a perfect embodiment of its traditions: gem miner, lapidary, custom manufacturer, importer, dealer and retailer. But he hasn't only followed in others' footsteps. He's cut a path of his own, one so successful, says John Sinkankas, that "he has become a magnet drawing other dealers and cutters to the area."

A little About Bill Larson

Bill Larson is a 1966 graduate of the Colorado School of Mines with a degree in geological engineering. Larson is equally at home in the gem and mineral worlds. For him, there is no separation between the two, although he recognizes a Great Divide between them in the minds of most jewelers and rock-hounds. That's a division he would like to see end because he feels there is no basis for it. "As a miner I'm as much on the lookout for fine specimens as fine rough crystals," he explains. "Both are miracles of nature."

This isn't just rhetoric. If one walks into either of Larson's two retail stores one in Fallbrook and the other in La Jolla

[now Carlsbad], and one sees an impressive intermingling of fine cut stones and mineral specimens. Owner of perhaps the finest private gem and mineral collection in America, Larson is as fond of showing guests stunning specimens as faceted gems—and equally conversant about both. The unity between the gem and mineral realms exists in every phase of his business. Maybe that's because he's been a miner as long as he's been a dealer.

Pala International

Larson entered the gem mining field in 1968 when, along with fellow dealer Swoboda, he formed Pala Properties International and leased three San Diego mines, the Stewart Lithia, Tourmaline Queen and Pala Chief. Of the trio, the Queen produced the most memorable material. Indeed, one strike made in January 1972 at this mine uncovered what Larson calls "the pocket of the century," brimming with magnificent rubellite crystals, some with crystals of peach-colored morganite attached to them, that remain among the most unusual and valuable mineral specimens ever found. "That find put us on the map," Larson says.

In 1978, Larson, then on his own, bought out a nine-man syndicate formed by Potter that owned the greatest of all San Diego's tourmaline mines—the Himalaya—and immediately began to extend old tunnels. Pala International has dug 7,000 feet of tunnel at the Himalaya, extracted around 3 tons of gem material (90% of it suitable for beads or carving, 10% for cabochons and only 1% for faceting). "From a pure ledger standpoint, we're just breaking even," Larson had said. "But if you factor in all the publicity the Himalaya has received, it has been highly profitable for us."

Away From It All

The trip from Larson's store in Fallbrook to his mine in Mesa Grande takes roughly an hour by car—preferably one with four-wheel drive for the mine's steep, rocky access road. Unlike his predecessors, John Ware and Joseph Jessop, Larson does not feel the need to run his retail store in downtown San Diego. Instead, he chooses to base himself on the outskirts of the small, sleepy town of Fallbrook in a spot one needs directions to find. From the outside, in fact, his store could be mistaken for a stylish ranch home and passed right by. Inside it's more like a small museum meant to heighten gem awareness and appreciation for the shoppers who make the trek there—obviously predisposed to buy something.

Consumers aren't the shop's only visitors. Mineral dealers from Italy as well as buyers from Tiffany's and similar companies also visit. German, Brazilian and Hong Kong dealers come to buy as well as to sell. Fallbrook's proximity to San Diego County's gem mines makes the town an important stopover for dealers from all over the world. "Just before the Tucson show in February hundreds of dealers from Europe and Asia visit here," says Tony Jones, California Rock and Gem, a Fallbrook resident. All said and done it's the enthusiasm of Bill Larson and the mark he leaves behind attracts one to the place. I am sure I too would like to go back again. ■

—By Jayshree Panjikar

[References: David Federman, *California Gem Mining: Chronicle of a Comeback*, John Sinkankas, *Pers. Comm.* Bill Larson]



Tourmalines from Himalaya Mine



Queen Mine PHOTO BILL LARSON