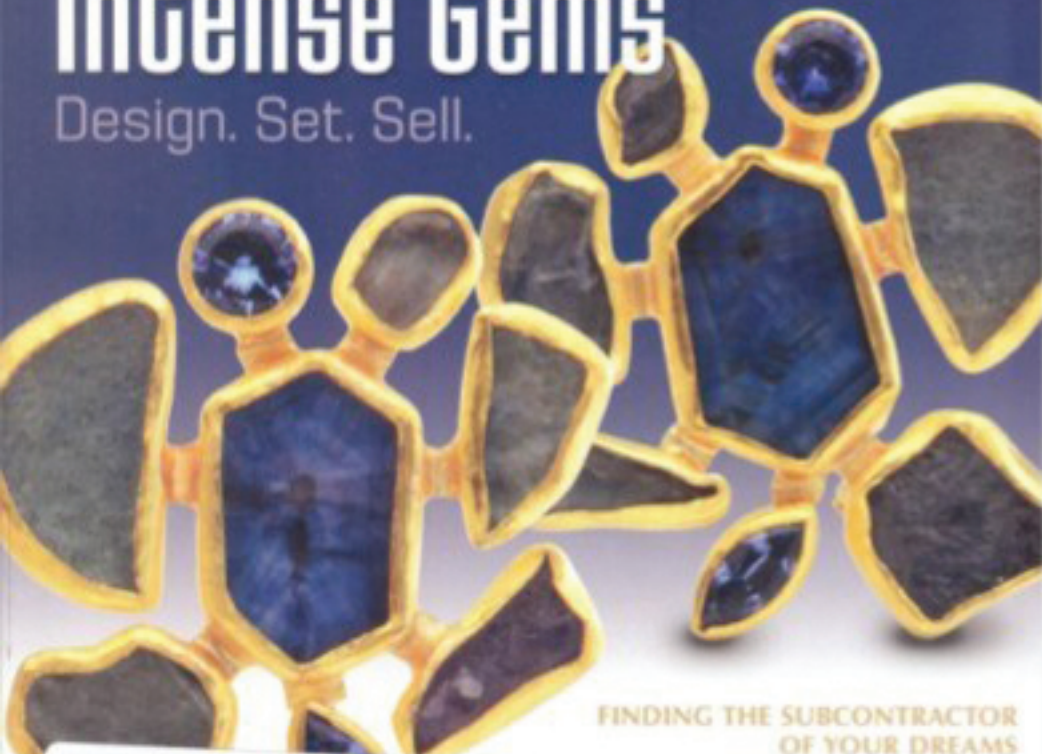


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A MULTI-PHASE MARKETING APPROACH | CREATING A RENAISSANCE RING

FROM THE EDITOR

Ringing in the Uncommon

A new year often sparks resolutions to make positive changes in lifestyle, attitude, and business. If you've not yet considered it, perhaps you should make this the year to explore a new material for your jewelry line.

According to a number of jewelers and traders, consumers today are more open than ever to adorning themselves with nontraditional jewelry pieces. "We are now carrying a much more diverse selection of unique metal and stone options than ever before," says David Gordon of Samuel Gordon Jeweler in Oklahoma City. "From hands with wood inlay to rutilated quartz rings, the savvy jewelry consumer in today's market wants something unique that stands out and sets them apart. Where once this was just a trend with private craft jewelry makers, now big brands we carry are aware of this mainstay in the jewelry world—and they are jumping on board [by] creating pieces [to meet consumer] demand, which seems to be escalating more and more."

The growing demand among consumers for "something unique" is inspiring jewelers to take the path less traveled—and many are turning to uncommon gems to set their work apart. In this month's cover story, "Off the Beaten Path" (page 22), we present two such jewelers, Tom Lisenberg and designer Petra Class. Both specialize in designing around and setting uncommon gemstones, and in this article they tell the stories behind their creations. The tips and tricks they share for working with and selling unusual stones are timely, considering the current mindset of many jewelry shoppers.

"Gemstones formerly unfamiliar to most jewelry consumers are now at the forefront of fashion and custom jewelry," says Roxanne Peacock of Von Bargen's Jewelry LLC in Stratton Mountain, Vermont. "Current trends include gemstones that were once maligned, [such as] peridot, whose recent specialized cutting styles are commanding attention. Specialized cuts are seen in gemsets of all colors,



Rutilated quartz, anyone?

green tourmaline, yellow beryl, Morganite, and kunzite."

The fact that most of these gems command a much lower price point than the staple diamonds, rubies, and sapphires is not lost on today's consumers. As they search for unique adornment, these shoppers must also consider how that adornment will affect their budgets—especially given the current climate of economic uncertainty. Jewelers looking to satisfy that demand for big looks at reasonable price points can turn to unusual stones to offer value in style and distinctiveness rather than cost per carat.

And if consumer demand isn't enough to convince you to consider a collection

with exotic gemstones, maybe the fun of working with them will. Jewelers who work with unusual stones speak with such passion about the process, it may be hard to resist the temptation to try it out.

For Class, designing with gemstones in their rough state is unmatched. "The colors and textures of the rough stones communicate a certain mood," she says. "They evoke a different emotion than a polished stone, and they are fascinating to work with."

Another designer, Susan Eisen of Susan Eisen Fine Jewelry in El Paso, Texas, says she enjoys working with unusual gemstones "because they steer you into a different direction than a traditional gemstone does. The story behind this process is a special feature that you can share with the customer unlike anything else in the store."

And for Eisen, finding customers who appreciate jewelry materials off the beaten path is almost as exciting as working with the materials themselves. "Customers who truly value the unique are those who cherish the unusual fantasy cuts, rutilated-quartz-type gemstones, and designs that are modern or abstract," she says. "It takes time to cultivate these customers, but once you do, it's like finding a treasure—the acquisition is a real joy."

Happy jewelers. Happy customers. Happy New Year! ♦