

PUTTING ON THE GLITZ

Expert advice on watches and jewellery

Chasing rainbows

Jewellery featuring precious stones has moved to the forefront of fashion in recent years. As thebling culture became de rigueur for rappers and hip-hop stars, fashionistas chose coloured gems instead, using them to complement the latest trends off the catwalks.

Thanks to modern mining techniques, precious stones come in a host of colours, ranging from green beryl to purple amethyst and aquamarine, and sapphires in pink, violet, yellow and orange.

Traditionally, the three most popular coloured stones – ruby, emerald and sapphire – are classified as precious stones, and the rest are categorised as semi-precious. However, some industry experts say the term semi-precious is redundant.

"A fine tourmaline can be more expensive than a regular sapphire or emerald, so the term is misleading and unfair to other coloured gems," says Tayma

Allies, founder and owner of Tayma Fine Jewellery. Her sentiment is echoed by Stella Carlton Lee, director of the Gemological Institute of America's (GIA) Hong Kong branch. The institute, which is a leading authority on gemstones, doesn't endorse the term semi-precious, and that all natural gems are considered precious stones.

There are hundreds of different types of coloured stones from all over the world, including South America and Africa, and from Asian countries such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Many varieties such as amethyst, aquamarine and tourmaline are found in Brazil.

Coloured stones are popular for their generous sizes and are more affordable than diamonds.



Miss Dior
citrine ring with yellow gold and diamonds, \$88,000

An unmounted aquamarine weighing 45 carats went under the hammer for \$50,400 at a Christie's auction last week.

"Imagine the diamond you can get with \$100,000," says Allies. "The same amount can get you pretty far with coloured stones."

Choosing a colour

Precious stones come in many colours, allowing you to mix and match, according to your mood. Pick a colour that complements your skin tone. Warmer and more intense hues may look great with a tan, whereas lighter or pastel colours such as pink or yellow suit paler complexions.

As a starting point, Allies suggests a pale blue aquamarine, which is a colour that suits most skin tones. Choosing the type of stone is a matter of personal taste, although some women will wear their birthstone or choose a gem with symbolic value or mythology significance. For example, garnet represents faith and loyalty, ruby stands for passion and courage, and amethyst means hope.

As much as it's a personal preference, the colour, clarity, and cut are important factors in determining the value of coloured gems, says Carol Chan Kar-Jok, deputy director of Sotheby's China and Southeast Asia. Once



Tayma Fine Jewellery rose pink tourmaline ring (far left) in rose gold and natural forest green tourmaline ring (left) in yellow gold, \$68,000 each

you've decided on a colour that you like, examine its tone and saturation. Tones of black, grey or brown dull the colour of the stone and affect its overall value.

With the exception of emeralds, quality coloured gems should have a pure, vivid colour with no visible inclusions. An aquamarine in vivid blue is more valuable than the same stone in a paler blue. A well-cut coloured stone has an even colour, good brilliance and minimum inclusions. The polish of the stone should be smooth without any nicks.

Unlike diamonds, Lee says there's no internationally recognised grading system for coloured stones. Some jewellers have devised their own grading systems, but their standards may vary. She also says coloured stones are often treated to enhance their colour and clarity.

This affects the value and price. Treating stones is acceptable as long as it's fairly reflected in the price. The GIA issues reports describing whether gems are natural, and if they've been subjected to any treatment. The service isn't available in Hong Kong, although it can be arranged via the US. Expect to wait from four to six weeks for a result.

Statement pieces

Today, the trend is towards bigger and bolder statement pieces, as seen in colourful cocktail rings from Mauboussin, to the fine jewellery collections at Dior. Cocktail rings are the perfect item to showcase a solitary stone's beauty. The idea is to go all out, with sizes starting from under 10 carats to 30, 40 or even 50 carats, depending on how much you're ready to spend, the occasion and your outfit.

Allies has noticed a growing popularity for coloured stones among her Asian customers in recent years. Stones with warmer colours such as mandarin orange, garnet or lemon citrine are usually set in yellow gold, whereas pastel colours such as aquamarine or pink sapphires are set in white gold. Many jewellers like to mix diamonds with coloured stones, such as Bulgari's Allegra collection, which blends diamonds and pearls with coloured gems.

Caring for your gem

Clean your pieces with warm water and a little soap using a soft toothbrush. Store coloured gems in soft pouches to prevent scratching. Most gems are harder than the metal they're set in, and can scratch the finish of your gold, silver or platinum jewellery if not properly handled.

Shopping list

Bulgari
Shop G3, Chater House, Central; tel: 2523 8057.

The Allegra collection features coloured stones of all cuts.

Dior

Shop G43-45, the Landmark, Central; tel: 2524 8277.
One of the first fashion houses

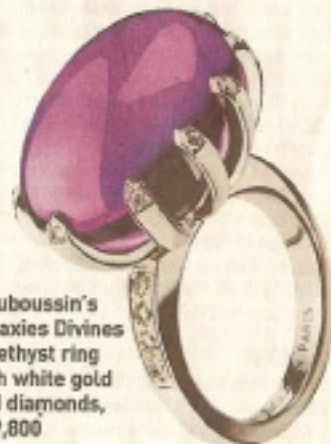
to feature elaborate precious stones, its fine jewellery collections (designed by Victoire de Castellane) feature cocktail rings with aquamarine, amethyst, pink and yellow sapphires, and many other coloured gems.

Mauboussin

Shop 2040, Podium level 2, IFC Mall, Central; tel: 2234 7618.
Its Divines collection features gems of every imaginable colour, including 30-carat stones from the Galaxies line.

Tayma Fine Jewellery

Shop 252, Prince's Building, Central; tel: 2525 5280.
Karen Ting



Mauboussin's Galaxies Divines amethyst ring with white gold and diamonds, \$39,800