

VANITY FAIR

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On Jewellery

"A girl should be two things
classy and fabulous."
- COCO CHANEL

Suki

IN THE LOUPE

Jerrold Green appraises an array of coloured gemstones in his office in Manhattan's midtown diamond district



Director's Cul

Jerrold Green is one of the world's most respected lapidaries, in high demand for his practised eye, skilled hand, and artistic sensibility. By RACHEL GARRAHAN

Coloured gemstones, and especially the so-called big three—emeralds, sapphires and rubies—have been revered by kings and emperors for millennia. Yet while these miracles of nature grab the spotlight, the artisans who take the gem rough that has been pulled from the earth and bring its inherent beauty to dazzling life rarely emerge from the shadows.

Step forward master gem cutter Jerrold Green, who has handled some of the world's most important coloured gemstones of the last four decades. With auction records seemingly broken at the drop of every gavel in the past decade, it's no surprise his skills are in high demand from leading jewellery

houses and gem traders all over the globe.

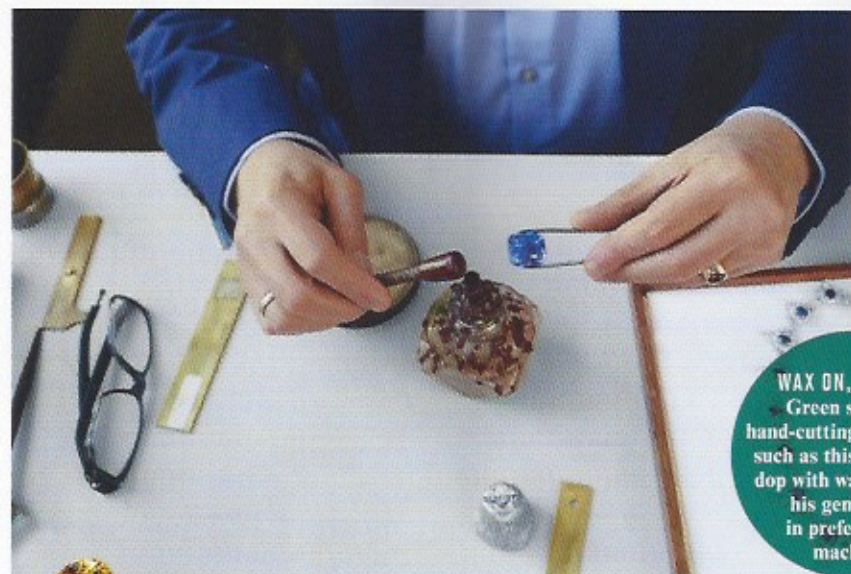
In December last year, the 15.04ct Crimson Flame, an extremely rare pigeon's-blood ruby, grabbed the headlines when it was auctioned at Christie's in Hong Kong. Having been cut by Green in his alluring and beautifully balanced signature cushion shape, the captivating stone, from the legendary Mogok mines of Myanmar, broke the world-record price-per-carat for any ruby at a jaw-dropping £798,000 per carat.

The very first precious gemstone Green got his hands on was the giant 62.02ct Rockefeller sapphire, in 1980. For more than 30 years following, the famous stone, once owned by American philanthropist John D Rockefeller Jr, would become the record holder for the world's most expensive sapphire. As a young apprentice,

however, Green says that when Reginald Miller, his boss and one of the leading gem importers and lapidaries of his time, handed it to him, he had no clue about its uniqueness and value. It had just been given a whole new look after being transformed from an octagon to an emerald cut with daringly sharp corners.

"I cut it. You polish it," said Mr Miller," smiles Green, displaying the dry humour of a lifelong New Yorker. "And I did. That's how this industry works. The master cuts; the apprentice polishes; and you learn by following the work of the cutter." Learn he did, and in 1988, on Miller's retirement, he bought the business.

To this day, Green works his magic entirely by hand and by eye, on all manner of coloured gemstones, eschewing



WAX ON, WAX OFF
 Green still uses hand-cutting techniques, such as this traditional dop with wax, to shape his gemstones, in preference to machines

the colour really bright and it turned out so beautiful," he says, putting such problem-solving skills down to his many years of experience.

Green credits his encyclopaedic knowledge of historical gems to his years of training with Miller, who himself had apprenticed in the 1930s under London masters who demanded painstaking perfection in their work.

"It was a professional standard that is now lost," laments Green.

"Today, for the most part, lapidary is a hobbyist profession. There's no one there to teach people; yet the learning curve is so great."

Green's cutting work, like the

"THERE'S A KIND OF GRACE THAT A HUMAN HAND CAN ADD THAT A MACHINE SIMPLY CAN'T"

modern technology for the 100-year-old cutting wheels that his former mentor first shipped out from London to New York for a job with Mauboussin in 1946. "There's a kind of grace that a human hand can add that a machine simply can't," explains the master cutter, who likens handmade tools such as his ancient wooden dop stick, which holds gemstones in place for cutting at the wheel, to prosthetic devices.

Just as Green dedicates himself to using the tools of times past, he is among the last jewellery craftsmen to remain in midtown Manhattan's famed diamond district. It is an area that once bustled with jewellery designers and manufacturers, stone setters and suppliers, but which, like so much of Manhattan, has lost many of its former residents to the rampant ambitions of property developers.

For now, Green's office is open to the sky, and its wide windows still afford him the quality of daylight he needs for assessing gemstones and seeing if their beauty can be improved upon. "I like happy stones. I don't like sombre pieces," he explains. "If nothing else, they should make you feel something when you look at them. If not, then they are not right for you."

Walking the 10 blocks to work every morning from his apartment overlooking Central Park, he enjoys the quiet of an early start. Each day brings something different. Often, a client visiting from Europe or Asia brings a new challenge such as an imperfect stone, whether it be damaged, blighted by inclusions, or not cut to its best advantage. In which case, he says, "I want to find a way to improve it."

Whatever the challenge, one thing Green continues to do every day is spend time at the cutting wheel. "I don't want to give it up; I like it," he explains. "Plus, it's a big responsibility. I cannot entrust that to one of my workers. They can polish it for me, but I need to make the major decisions."

Major decisions like deciding, recently, how to handle a broken emerald for one of New York's pre-eminent socialites, who had inherited it from her mother. Emeralds are notoriously delicate and this one had suffered the indignity of a large corner being broken off and the whole thing being glued back into its ring setting.

With the aid of the leading auction house that had initially connected them, Green persuaded the client he should recut the stone as a rarely seen lozenge shape.

"She was very happy in the end. It made

brushstrokes of Picasso, is immediately recognizable to those in the trade. Discretion, however, is the name of the game, and he declines to discuss those he works with. In the gem trade, client relationships are almost as important as the stones themselves. Given that a coloured gemstone's beauty is in the eye of the beholder, where that of GIA-certificate-laden diamonds is not, Green says he must understand what he describes as someone's "vocabulary of beauty" before he can touch their treasured possessions.

"One person wants minimum weight loss; someone else wants maximum beauty. Everybody's different, and I have to know you somewhat to discern what will make you happy," he says.

While faceting must be precise in order to give a distinctive cut, Green, a former art student whose colourful paintings of Sri Lankan gem mine workers populate the office, says his work is primarily from the art point of view. "I use a little math, but not much," he says.

That is not to say that he does not want to create a distinctive cut. "I like it when the shapes are readable. The jewellery designs of today are so minimal that the stones themselves have become the design. The cut is more important than ever." □