

Gemstones: Raw and Sliced

By Lorraine DePasque, Contributing Editor

For those of us who love colored gemstone jewelry, cookie-cutter just doesn't cut it. Luckily, many contemporary designers get that. Some, in fact, are addressing our "desire for the distinctive" by intensifying their own inventiveness. Enter, the new era of two cool gem trends: raw and sliced—a.k.a. *rough gems* and *sliced gemstones*.

You've seen them in jewelry worn by celebrities and runway models or maybe in the showcases of innovative jewelry stores. Still, sometimes you wonder: *Are they real? Does the piece come in a gem that I especially like? Can I afford that jewelry?*



*Basser &
Bigio*



Katie Diamond

To all of the above: *yes, yes, and yes!* There's a wide range of prices on jewelry with rough gemstones and gem slices because, as the looks have been getting increasingly popular, more designers have been inspired to incorporate the unconventional non-uniform stones into their newest lines.

Consequently, they're set in gold, platinum, and sterling silver, and in every natural colored gem imaginable--from a palette of precious and a spectrum of traditional (what used be referred to as semi-precious) to a kaleidoscope of colored diamonds.

The Raw Truth: Rough Gems

To be perfectly honest, much of the appeal of raw gems is that they look *imperfect*. The irregularly-shaped raw stones possess an inherent, very organic, natural beauty because they aren't precision-cut with mathematic perfection. Each gemstone is, therefore, one-of-a-kind. Their freeform Gaudi-esque silhouettes are almost sculptural, never flat and, for the most part, three-dimensional. Although every gem is available in its natural form, "Colored diamond roughs are really becoming popular," says Haridas Kotahwala, vice president of New York City-based AGTA Member Royal India USA, which supplies roughs to many of the country's leading jewelry designers.



Todd Reed

This comes as no surprise to Boulder, Colorado's Todd Reed. The



Todd Reed

award-winning designer and AGTA Member — who just won "Best in Show" for the 2011 AGTA Spectrum Awards™ competition—has been featuring them prominently in his artisanal jewelry since he began his career in the early Nineties. An original advocate of the gems, the tagline on Reed's website home page reads: "*raw diamonds...raw elegance.*" For a necklace he designed (shown here) of 221.58 carats of raw diamonds, Reed says, "My inspiration was the intense colors the diamonds have in their raw state. It was my intent to showcase the stones and let them take center stage."

Additionally, Reed's many collections feature rough traditional color, a design path that Chicago jewelry designer, AGTA Member Diana Widman has also taken. Widman, too, regards roughs as elegant, saying, "I think they look like raw silk, which is why I've recently started setting some in my 'Raw Silk and Satin Collection.'" (earrings shown here)



Diana Widman

Shining a Light on Sliced



While sliced stones and rough gems share the same non-traditional aesthetic, craftsman-like quality, and silhouettes based on misshapen shapes, their similarity pretty much stops there. For one thing, while rough gems are generally 3-D in form, the slices typically are 2-D with smooth sides and a flat bottom. The flatness allows light to pass through the piece, much in the way natural light shines through a stained-glass window. Sometimes the sliced gemstone is polished on both sides, but the designer's individual vision determines that. Kotahwala, who supplies gem slices, says many jewelers choose tourmaline slices because there are so many different shades of tourmaline to choose from.

That said, sapphire is also a popular choice, due to its multi-hued range of colors referred to as "fancies." Diana Widman's "Big Sky Collection" is built on a soft palette of slate, teal, and sage sliced sapphire crystals from Montana (earrings shown here). "The colors



Diana Widman

look wonderful on whatever skin tone you have,” she explains, adding, “I had the gemstones cut by a master lapidary artist. I really wanted this collection to be special luxury but, at the same time, wearable for every day. Elegant, but not serious—something happy and fun to wear.”



Ashleigh Branstetter

Slices, in fact, are perfect for jewelry you want to wear every day. New Orleans designer, AGTA Member Ashleigh Branstetter won second place in the “Business/Day Wear” category of AGTA’s 2010 Spectrum Awards™ for her 18-karat gold drop earrings (shown here), featuring 11.23 total carats of moss-green natural color diamond slices. Branstetter says she likes mixing the patterns, shapes, and textures of slices with smooth stones. “So these earrings blend rough with refined. And, today, unlike many years ago, we have these great lapidary techniques for slicing gems.”

Ditto, says Ellen Sideri, CEO of trend forecasting firm, ESPTrendlab, New York City. “Today’s jewelry takes advantage of many of the new technologies that never existed before.” Pieces with rough stones and gem slices are examples, she says “and they speak to 21st century design, which values innovation, inventiveness, and sustainability.”