

# AROUND THE WORLD IN NINE STONES

The most sought-after  
gems right now aren't  
the ones you might  
think. Take a tour of the  
new ancient wonders

*By Kristen Shirley  
Photographs by  
Joanna McClure*

## BLACK OPAL

Chopard High Jewelry ring  
in titanium and 18K white  
gold with an 8.26-carat black  
opal, 3.47 carats tsavorite,  
3.15 carats blue sapphire,  
0.64 carats ruby, and  
0.60 carats diamond. Price on  
request; [chopard.com](http://chopard.com)



## CONCH PEARL

Mikimoto necklace in platinum  
with an 8mm conch pearl and  
12.14 carats diamond. \$200,000;  
available at Mikimoto, New York



## TANZANITE

Wempe ring in 18K white gold with  
a 6-carat tanzanite, 1.48 carats  
diamond, and 1.02 carats emerald.  
\$11,235; available at Wempe,  
New York



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Forget diamonds, emeralds, and rubies. Today discerning collectors are looking for jewelry that forefronts rare, striking, and sometimes almost impossible-to-find stones.

These spectacular gems are sought-after because they have fantastic optical effects such as changing

colors, as in the case of alexandrite, or come from a unique organic process, as with conch pearls.

For the finest gemstones, provenance is paramount—so follow along on this guided tour around the globe to shine a light on the stories behind the most exciting stones on the market today.

## Alexandrite *Russia*

First found in Russia's Ural Mountains in 1830, this remarkable gem with extremely rare color-changing properties was named for Czar Alexander II, who was heir to the throne at the time. The stone shifts hues under different light sources: In daylight, alexandrite is green to bluish-green, and under artificial light it changes to a red to purplish-red tone. The Russian mines

where the gem was originally sourced are limited in production today, but deposits have also been found in Sri Lanka, Brazil, and East Africa. Alexandrite is one of the world's most expensive stones, at times reaching \$70,000 per carat for the highest-quality specimens with intense color changes and vivid hues. Most examples, however, are less than one carat, so larger stones are exceptionally valuable. This ring from Oscar Heyman features a stunning 5.74-carat alexandrite that's flanked by two oval diamonds. The size of the stone and strength of its colors make it an unparalleled piece for collectors.



### ALEXANDRITE

Oscar Heyman ring in platinum with a 5.74-carat alexandrite and 1.84 carats diamonds. \$370,000; available at Oscar Heyman, New York

### PERIDOT

Verdura X necklace in 18K yellow gold and platinum with 55 peridots, 217 yellow sapphires, and 46 diamonds. \$265,000; available at Verdura, New York



## Peridot *Myanmar*

One of the world's oldest known gems, peridot has been coveted since the time of the ancient Egyptians, who called it the stone of the sun. Associating the yellow-green mineral with the stars was prescient. Peridot crystals have been collected from meteorites that crashed into Earth and by a NASA spacecraft gathering samples from comet dust trails in space. Peridot comes in a range of hues, and the greenest versions can be so rich that before lab identification, the best pieces were sometimes confused with emeralds. Peridot has high double refraction, meaning more light reflects off its facets, giving it some of the fire and brilliance of a diamond. The finest peridots traditionally come from Myanmar, and these stones are celebrated for their vibrant, saturated colors. This necklace from Verdura showcases 55 cushion-cut Burmese peridots weighing more than 275 carats.

## Grandidierite *Madagascar*

### GRANDIDIERITE

Omi Privé Monaco ring in platinum with a 2.21-carat grandidierite, 118 carats alexandrite, and 0.34 carats diamond. \$97,000. [omiprive.com](http://omiprive.com)



Grandidierite is so rare that most collectors have never even heard of it, much less seen it in person. It was first discovered in Madagascar in 1902, but since then, so little gem-quality grandidierite has been found—only 1 in 10,000 roughs meet the criteria—that it hadn't made its way into jewelry. All of this changed when a new deposit was discovered in southern Madagascar in 2014. Top-quality grandidierite has a blue-green color and is intensely saturated. The stones also tend to be quite small. Last year, Phillips had the first, and possibly only, grandidierite ever to sell at auction, when an exceptional 4.78-carat unmounted gemstone hammered for \$52,500, which comes in at almost \$11,000 per carat. Susan Abeles, senior vice president for jewelry at Phillips, says the bidders were the most sophisticated gemstone collectors who “recognize that it was unique and different. They probably don't know anyone who has gem-quality grandidierite in their collection.” Today only a small number of specialists produce bespoke grandidierite jewelry, including Omi Privé, which created this ring featuring a 2.21-carat stone surrounded by alexandrite and diamonds.

### PARAIBA TOURMALINE

Oscar Heyman necklace in platinum with 46.95 carats

Paraíba tourmaline and 10.01 carats diamond. \$600,000; available at Oscar Heyman, New York



## Paraíba Tourmaline *Brazil*

Tourmaline comes in many colors, but only special and unique hues earn their own names. Paraíba tourmaline, renowned for its swimming-pool blue, was first discovered in Paraíba, Brazil, in the 1980s. Copper deposits in the region give the gem its turquoise tone, which is truly electric in the finest stones. A few deposits have been found in Mozambique and Nigeria, but there's less copper in the soil there, so the color can be less arresting. Many purists consider Paraíba

tourmalines only from the original mines to be true Paraibas, so Brazilian stones command higher prices. Those first mines have closed, limiting the South American supply today, and at the same time, in recent years more collectors have discovered its beauty. The market has responded. Quig Bruning, head of jewelry at Sotheby's New York, says, “We've seen an enormous jump in the demand of high-quality Paraíba tourmalines at auction in the past few years,” leading to record-breaking prices. Oscar Heyman, a jeweler in New York, frequently works with Paraíba tourmaline, and this necklace is an exceptional example. It features 32 perfectly matched pear-shaped Paraíba tourmalines with 52 diamonds scattered throughout, which give additional brilliance to the necklace and enhance the color.



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**PADPARADSCHA  
SAPPHIRE**

Lorraine Schwartz earrings in 18K rose and white gold with 30 carats Padparadscha sapphire and 5 carats diamond. \$245,000; available at Lorraine Schwartz, New York

**TANZANITE**

Tiffany & Co. necklace in platinum with 108 carats tanzanite and 8 carats diamond. \$245,000; available at Tiffany & Co., New York



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**CONCH PEARL**

Cicada ring in platinum and 18K gold with a 3.95-carat conch pearl, 5.90 carats alexandrite, and 0.60 carats diamond. \$74,000; cicadajewelry.com

## Padparadscha Sapphire Sri Lanka

The rarest of all fancy-colored sapphires, the Padparadscha sapphire comes from Sri Lanka, where it's been cherished for centuries. It has a distinctive pinkish-orange hue and takes its name from the Sinhalese word for lotus flower, which has a similar color. "It is the rare balance of pink and orange that gives the sapphire at once a bright warmth and soft, subtle texture," says Bruning at Sotheby's New York. The color doesn't appear in any other natural gemstone, and the most valuable have a more intense color reminiscent of a tropical sunset. Sapphires with a similar look have been found in East Africa, but many jewelers and collectors believe a true Padparadscha sapphire can come only from Sri Lanka. The limited supply makes the finest stones quite expensive. Lorraine Schwartz showcases the range of this special gemstone in these earrings by mixing different cuts, including pear, oval, and marquise, and featuring different shades, ranging from pink to more orange.

## Tanzanite Tanzania

Intense, violet-blue tanzanite is found in only one place on Earth: Tanzania. Geologists say the tanzanite deposit was created at the same time as the formation of Mount Kilimanjaro. The presence of a rare chemical element, vanadium, amid the shifting of the tectonic plates gave the crystals their remarkable color. With such unusual conditions behind its creation, tanzanite, experts believe, can't be encountered anywhere but the Mererani Hills. In 30 years the mine complex's supply could be completely depleted, and no more new tanzanite will be available, making it a true collector's stone. Customers discovered tanzanite only in the late 1960s when Tiffany & Co. named and introduced the new gemstone to the world in a spectacular jewelry collection. It's a pleochroic crystal, meaning it shows three different shades of blue and violet when viewed in different crystal directions. The most highly prized stones have a deep purple color, which separates them from another famous blue stone, the sapphire. This exceptional high-jewelry necklace from Tiffany features 108 carats of pear-cut tanzanite encircled with diamonds, which highlight the violet tone.

## Conch Pearl The Caribbean

Like true pearls, the conch pearl also comes from a mollusk, but it's not formed by nacre (mother of pearl) as a true pearl is. It's a stony growth. Centuries ago, both conch and true pearls were found only by chance in nature, which made them very scarce and valuable, worn exclusively by royalty and the nobility. Today true pearls are cultured in great quantities, so the thirst for wild versions has diminished. Conch pearls, however, cannot be cultured, so they remain exceedingly rare and thus among the most expensive specimens. These pink ones are found only in the Caribbean inside the Queen conch. Although conch is abundant in the region, there's just a 1-in-10,000 to 15,000 chance of finding a conch pearl inside one, and only 10% of those found are gem quality. Conch pearls come in shades of white, pink, red, and brown, but a deep pink, bubble-gum color is the most desirable. They have a characteristic flame structure on the surface, which looks like the faint wavy lines of a flickering fire, and they are smooth, shiny, and sometimes compared to porcelain. Jeweler Cicada surrounds an almost 4-carat conch pearl with alexandrite in this cocktail ring.

## Star Sapphire Sri Lanka

Certain gemstones, including sapphires, exhibit a phenomenon called asterism, which causes a star to appear when the light hits the stone in the right way. Although star sapphires were quite popular in the 1940s and '50s, today they are not as well known but are still coveted by knowledgeable collectors. These rare sapphires are found in Sri Lanka and Madagascar, but the beauty of the star is more important than the provenance. Star sapphires

appear silky, and in the best pieces a crisp, clear star appears at the center of the domed cabochon gem. These stones have bands of needle-like inclusions that cross in the center, which cause the light to reflect and create the illusion within. The quality of the star depends on several factors. As Tom Heyman of Oscar Heyman explains it, "The best star sapphires exhibit asterism with six equally spaced, straight legs that cross in the center of the stone. A collector looks for a stone with a primary leg along the long axis of the stone." Asterism can appear in sapphires of all colors, but blue sapphires are considered the top-quality ones. This ring from Oscar Heyman features a large 5.04-carat intense blue star sapphire surrounded by oval diamonds.

## Black Opal Australia

Australia's unique geology produces 95% of the world's opals, and some types can be found only on the continent. Its dazzling black opals are the most famous and prized of all. Contrary to its name, black opal is a stone full of rich and vibrant colors, usually shades of green or blue, that flash across the dark surface. These most famous and prized opals are found only in three small towns—the most famous is Lightning Ridge in New South Wales. These sensational high-jewelry earrings from Chopard feature two Lightning Ridge black opals placed within open flowers, which are fully set with precious blue-and-green gemstones that accentuate the opals' play-of-color, including pink and blue sapphire, garnet, tsavorite, emerald, and diamond.

### STAR SAPPHIRE

Oscar Heyman ring in platinum with a 5.04-carat star sapphire and 1.56 carats diamond. \$70,000; available at Oscar Heyman, New York

### BLACK OPAL

Chopard Red Carpet Collection earrings in titanium and 18K white gold with 7.44 carats black opal, 20.28 carats pink sapphire, 10.41 carats garnet, 7.55 carats blue sapphire, 4.06 carats diamond, 3.76 carats tsavorite, and 1.40 carats emerald. Price on request; [chopard.com](http://chopard.com)