

Distinguishing traits of Mozambique ruby

Market demand for Mozambique ruby was evident in Gemfields' inaugural auction of rough ruby and corundum from Montepuez Ruby Mining Limitada. Held in Singapore from June 12 to 17, the auction saw 2.03 million carats of ruby and corundum placed on offer, of which 1.82 million carats were sold (representing 90 percent by weight). According to Gemfields, the event, which sparked considerable market excitement, generated gross auction revenues of \$33.5 million.

In an interview with *JNA*, Dr. A. Peretti, founder of GRS GemResearch Swisslab AG, explains why the Mozambique material has caught the market's fancy and talks about the driving force behind a gemstone's popularity.

JNA: Recently, numerous jewellers and designers have been using Mozambique ruby in their high-end collections. What do you think makes Mozambique ruby such an attractive precious material for jewellers and designers?

Dr. A. Peretti: There are several important traits with the material that makes it so appealing. First of all, gem-quality Mozambique ruby is distinguished by its high transparency. One can find vivid-red colour and abundant unheated material in the market, and importantly, 2- to 3-carat stones, plus singles over 5 carats are currently available in the market – all key sizes to creating a commercially important necklace. A variety of shapes like oval, cushion, pear and round cuts are readily available too.

Major wholesalers throughout the world, particularly in Bangkok had begun investing in rough from Mozambique a couple of years ago when the mines first made big news. The material has gained prestige for being fine-faceted goods with more than two dozen companies in Thailand and abroad. So with different companies offering these goods via international gems shows, its price can be compared and established by a free market, rather than being monopolised by a few specialised companies, as was the case with Burmese ruby. Therefore, the prices, although not inexpensive, have been stabilised and not subjected to undue influence of the occasionally highly-charged auction. While Mozambique rubies have already passed the test at important auctions, a conservative world market



Dr. A. Peretti, founder of GRS GemResearch Swisslab AG

for luxury goods requires more time to realise its true importance. Mozambique rubies set in jewellery reveal such stunning beauty that they have captured the market by storm without needing a romanticised introduction.

JNA: In terms of colour and clarity, how would Mozambique ruby compare to ruby from Myanmar?

Dr. Peretti: First of all, there is a critical difference between Mozambique and Burmese rubies. The majority of Mozambique ruby is spared from thermal enhancement. Conversely, unheated Burmese rubies are almost completely unavailable. Most unheated Burmese rubies, seen in jewellery sold at astronomical prices at auction recently are actually not from the classical Mogok mines; but from the Mong Hsu mine, several hundred miles away from the historical source of Mogok.

Mong Hsu ruby often contains tell-tale blue zoning, visible to the unaided eye or with a loupe or microscope. Therefore, Burmese rubies are often heat-treated at relatively low temperatures. High-temperature heat treatment of these Burmese rubies also results in enhanced clarity. Heat-treatment has been the subject of controversy within the trade; the gemstone alteration process has not always been understood by the consumer. Cutting unheated Mong Hsu ruby (nearly the only Burmese source today) is very difficult and often results in asymmetrical pavilion shapes; an attempt



Rough Mozambique rubies from Gemfields

to avoid reflection of blue zones in the faceted gem. Clearly, compromises are made. Such challenges often create colours that are not the best, like the many border-line Pigeon's Blood colour. This scenario makes it difficult to acquire a set of graduating gem-quality Burmese rubies suitable for jewellery purposes. The stone sizes have to be kept at around 2 carats, with the centre stone rarely exceeding 5 carats.

Mozambique rubies have been found in pure vivid red hues and Pigeon's Blood colours that are indistinguishable from the best Mogok ruby, and superior to unheated Mong Hsu rubies. Actually, there are two types of vivid red colours in Mozambique ruby; those that fluoresce in UV-light (corresponding to the classical rubies from Mogok) and non-fluorescent ones that are reminiscent to those found in Mogok.

End users have split opinions as to which one of these two types is preferred, but it appears that fluorescent Mozambique rubies are earning more attention. When Mozambique ruby layouts are being prepared with rubies of the same shape, in graduating sizes, one can find the best vivid red colour and highest clarity in unheated goods. Even more compelling is that larger sizes over 10 carats can be obtained for the centre stone. This is almost unheard of with top-quality Burmese ruby from Mogok. In practical terms, a Burmese set is extremely expensive to make and takes a long time to acquire. The majority of high-priced Burmese necklaces sold at auction actually came from Mong Hsu (based on our test results of the auction previews) and not from Mogok, unless explicitly stated in the catalogues.

The recognition of the beauty and rarity of Mozambique ruby has steadily risen in the last two years and so the value has actually tripled. That said, Mozambique stones are still about half the price of comparable Burmese rubies when the Burmese is even available. This explains why such Mozambique jewellery sets are still available today. The market has realised this unique opportunity and well-informed consumers have started hunting for them wherever they turn up in

the market. The consensus is there is assurance that Mozambique ruby will be available in the future. High auction results for Burmese rubies will ultimately drive up all ruby prices, regardless of their origin.

JNA: In a market where geographic origin is closely linked to price, how do you think will Mozambique rubies fare since they are a relative "newcomer" to the market?

Dr. Peretti: Every newly discovered gem variety makes incredible strides in recognition when they are deemed very beautiful. Look at Paraiba neon-blue tourmaline for example, and Vietnamese cornflower-blue spinel. A stone's natural beauty remains the main driving force for their ultimate popularity.

Mozambique rubies are the most beautiful rubies in the market today and are available as unheated (besides a current supply of heated ruby is also in the market). Its beauty will ultimately drive both demand and the eventual price.

An interesting side-note on this topic concerns the prestige generated by a major international investor, Gemfields, which has obtained a good portion of the mining rights in Mozambique rubies. With their name and reputation at stake, they will do their utmost to insure fair and ethical mining practices in the region. It is anticipated that this global entity will promote a good image of the product in both investment and in social responsibility. As a prominent investor, they will be held to accountability for what they leave behind. This transparency with regards to ongoing conflict-free mining is attractive to other investors and should generate more capital funnelling into the production.

This represents quite a different picture than that of the production of Burmese ruby in retrospect to that of the ruby ban (from a Western perspective). By contrast, Mozambique rubies will be more easily promoted by major brands that incorporate socially responsible practices with Mozambique ruby mining. This can only help to elevate the Mozambique ruby brand.

Someday in the future, Mozambique rubies will eventually be mined out, as happens with every deposit. At that point, Mozambique rubies will become treasured collector's gems, mostly appearing in couture jewellery and resurfacing in auction houses. This will unfurl Mozambique ruby's final great price spike. No one can predict when this will happen, but it may happen sooner than expected. One only has to look to the tremendous drive and the appetite for fine gems in our resurging economy. **JNA**

**Price predictions and statistics, see literature: A. Peretti (2013), Tiancheng International Auctioneer Limited, Jewellery and Jadeite Auction Catalogue – 8 December 2013, Pages 238 and 239*

**Gemmological differences between rubies from Mong Hsu and Mogok, see www.gemresearch.ch/news*