

Pinkish-red spinel
by Nomad's.

Innovative gem cuts are both breathtaking works of art and increasingly popular in jewelry.

BY RICHA GOYAL SIKRI

ANY WAY YOU SLICE IT

While the popularity of unusual gem shapes and innovative cuts has grown, they remain a niche segment compared to classic cuts — albeit an expanding one. Multiple factors go into determining which stones get these “special” cuts, and one of the most important is the material being used.

Good-quality rough in the holy trinity of ruby, emerald and sapphire is typically cut in the traditional manner, since it's a safer bet for these more marketable stones. Special cuts are usually reserved for relatively accessible materials like tourmalines, aquamarines, amethyst, citrine, and others in the quartz and garnet families, since the cutter can afford greater wastage of rough. When cutters do employ innovative faceting on more precious stones, it's either for special orders or to maximize the yield on the rough.

“On a special order, in order to match the unique measurements or shape the client has requested, the yield might be lower, which will result in a higher price in comparison to a classic cut,” explains emerald and diamond specialist Liran Eshed from Eshed Diam – Gemstar. “On the other hand, if there is no special order, the cutter will follow the shape of the rough emerald. [An alternative cut] might deliver a higher yield than a classic style, causing [it to have] a lower price point.”

Eshed has witnessed “more companies requesting distinctive cuts. We believe designers are looking to stand apart, make a statement, and this offers interesting opportunities for manufacturers.”

Here are some of the top figures who have gotten creative with their gem cuts.

NOMAD'S: ABOUT THE SHAPE OF IT

Nomad's has always marched to the beat of its own drum. Emerging from the ashes of the Soviet Union, the company started its journey in Ukraine with mineral specimens. Over time, the founders realized the value in precision-cut gems and, given their limited resources, collaborated with a weapons manufacturer to build a bespoke faceting machine employing the same steel used for rifles. Today, Nomad's is considered one of the best in the lapidary field, having won numerous gem-cutting awards from the American Gem Trade Association (AGTA).

“Designers looking to create distinctive collections often buy unusual shapes. While classical-style cuts have a much larger market, the popularity of these shapes is proliferating,” says founder Mikola Kukharuk. “We like how some of the kite shapes play off the natural pleochroism in the stone. By orienting the facet patterns right, especially in tanzanite and tourmaline, [we can make] the facets pick up different colors that blend in some cool ways.”

The head cutter at Nomad's starts with sample stones, experimenting until he ends up with a satisfactory design. It's a combination of science and art, as the cutter has to balance critical light angles for different materials with the feeling he wants to communicate through the final gem. “Anyone can make an abstract shape. If you start adding facets without limitation, you can get some pretty crazy shapes [and] cuts,” Kukharuk says. “But working within the constraints of symmetry is important. The process is harder, but the result is more impressive and visually pleasing.”

BERND MUNSTEINER: BRINGING FANTASY TO LIFE

In the mid-1960s, gem cutter Bernd Munsteiner started changing the rules of the game, creating a new genre: the fantasy cut. Coming from an art background, he embarked on a journey of experimentation that led him to create the world's largest faceted aquamarine, Dom Pedro (currently on display at the Smithsonian museum in Washington, DC).

“Since the emergence of faceting in Europe 500 years ago, the cutting style has remained the same. When I started in the '60s, Japan was the first market that accepted my one-of-a-kind gem creations,” recalls Munsteiner. “Since then, the market has grown very slowly. I remember, in the early '70s, there were many copies of my designs in the US, but afterward, people started creating their own original styles. If the level of interest was 2% to 3% then, it's probably in the 20% range now.”

Among the designers incorporating the distinctive gems Munsteiner has produced is Barcelona-based jeweler MISUI, which aims “to rethink the notion of luxury in today's modern world,” according to its website.

Platinum ring
with a tourmaline
by Bernd
Munsteiner.



Earrings with morganite
and Prosecco tourmaline
by Paolo Costagli.



PAOLO COSTAGLI: NIGHTTIME TREASURES

Paolo Costagli can appreciate the appeal of capturing light in a gem. “I create jewels women can enjoy during the day, but that truly come alive at night,” declares the Italian jewelry designer and gemologist.

To achieve this, he follows a strict set of parameters. “First, stones should have no windows, as they make a gem dark in the evening. Second, I think about how light travels inside the stone. The objective should be brightness and color in the night. Finally, there needs to be a revisitation of certain parameters that were used at the beginning of the early 20th century. So with my stones, I like the culet to be open, [with] wider corners, so you feel the history, feel the aura of France and feel high luxury when you experience the stone.”

VICTOR TUZLUKOV: SPIRITUAL FACETS

One of the big names in the field of innovative faceting is Victor Tuzlukov, who combines his background in mathematics with his spiritual views as a practicing Buddhist.

“For me, gem faceting is an instrument that allows me to express my feelings, transmit images and symbols from my imagination to reality,” reflects Tuzlukov. “Our thoughts create images, which join to form compositions, becoming the base for a

faceting diagram. Once the diagram is done, all I have to do is cut off all the material that stands in my way.”

While this may sound simple, following his diagrams to recreate his masterpieces is no easy task. A grand master of the US Faceters Guild and holder of the world record in the International Faceting Championship (299.17 points out of 300), Tuzlukov has gained industry-wide respect for his technical skills, as well as for his willingness to share his time and knowledge with others.

Victor Tuzlukov
holding one of his
gem creations.

