

Tanzanite:

50 years of captivating brilliance

By *Bernardette Sto. Domingo and Marie Feliciano*

Tanzanite's exceptional blue-violet colour has mesmerised gemstone and jewellery traders for decades. Over the years, the stone has steadily carved out a niche in the global coloured gemstone trade, rivalling perennial favourites in terms of colour, appearance and allure.

This year, tanzanite celebrates 50 years of its discovery in Tanzania in 1967. According to TanzaniteOne Mining Ltd, when a Maasai tribesman first discovered these blue-violet crystals, they were first thought to be unusually vibrant sapphires. It was soon confirmed that they were more complex than a sapphire, with a colour that's more alluring and exotic.

In 1968, the stone was christened "tanzanite" by Tiffany & Co, which then embarked on a successful campaign to market tanzanite and build its reputation in the trade.

Tanzanite was ranked the second-favourite coloured gemstone in the US in 2001. It was also marketed as a stone that's a "thousand times rarer than diamonds" and with a little over a decade of supply remaining, according to TanzaniteOne.

The stone was also named a December birthstone, joining turquoise and zircon.

1. and 2. Square and round tanzanites
 3. Tanzanite and diamond rings by jewellery designer Stephen Webster
 4. Tanzanite pendant with diamond accents
 5. Polished tanzanite gems
 All gemstone and jewellery photos provided by TanzaniteOne



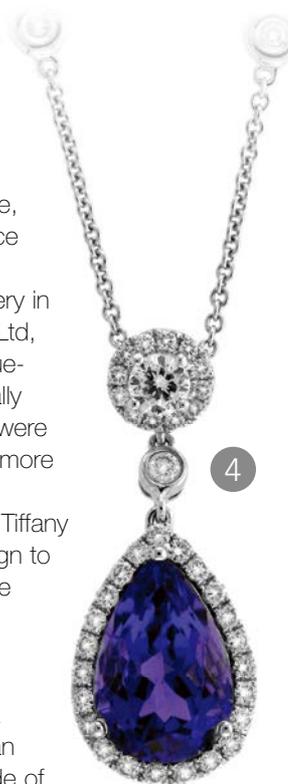
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Ruby and tanzanite ring

Major markets

Global demand for tanzanite is expected to pick up in 2017 as supply stabilises, according to Robert Grafen Greaney, managing director of TanzaniteOne.

"Supply from TanzaniteOne is back on track after experiencing a tough time in

the industry. This, coupled with a new management at the Tanzanite Foundation that will be working with retailers and wholesalers to promote the inherent qualities of tanzanite, will certainly push demand for the beloved gemstone," noted Greaney.

The key existing markets of the US, Europe and Japan are seen to drive growth in the tanzanite industry, but traders are locking their sights on another potential major market. "Traditional tanzanite markets will play a crucial role in 2017 but our focus this year will be increasing



Rough tanzanite

demand in China and the Far East," revealed Greaney. "The work that the Tanzanite Foundation does with wholesalers and retailers in China, for instance, will be critical to our success in growing the tanzanite market there."

Benjamin Hackman of US-based tanzanite trader Intercolor, meanwhile, said the US is likely to fuel movement in the tanzanite market, citing a decline in Chinese demand.

Rising interest in tanzanite among other markets such as India, Taiwan and Europe could

bode well for the tanzanite sector, added Hackman. "The fastest-moving products are stones of 5 carats and up in darker, more vivid tones. Our most popular products are top-quality, free-sized stones of 5 to 6 carats. Retail prices are currently pegged between \$600 and \$1,000 per carat," the company official said.

Blue temptations

Tanzanite's most enchanting attributes are its deep blue hues and vivid violets, which also determine the price of the stone.

"Tanzanite has so many incredible qualities that make it alluring. First of all, the stone is beautiful and clean, and comes in naturally captivating colours. The deep blues and exquisite violets you see in a cut stone are unlike anything else in the market. These colours imbue life to the stone," noted Greaney. "Light gives the stone an almost electric quality when it hits the facets, as if the natural beauty, life and soul of Africa are instilled in the stone."

Tanzanite is likewise celebrated for its rarity, the company official noted. Tanzanite is mined from only one source – a small 4km strip of earth in Tanzania at the foot of majestic Mount Kilimanjaro.

Hackman echoed this sentiment, adding that colour, clarity and competitive prices are the most attractive features of tanzanite.



AG Color's award-winning pair of smooth tanzanite drops with a combined weight of 30.37 carats; and a 43.96-carat oval cabochon from AG Color. This stone was awarded the top prize at the 2015 AGTA Spectrum Awards for the category, 'Other Faceted'



Hollywood actress Cate Blanchett dons a tanzanite necklace in a red-carpet event



Top: A pair of smooth tanzanite drops from AG Color. Right: Heart-shaped tanzanite gems from AG Color

He also underscored the compelling charm of tanzanite, adding that “most people like the colour blue; it’s human nature. The sky and the ocean are blue. Good-quality stones are very clean. There’s no other stone that I know of that is as visually appealing.”

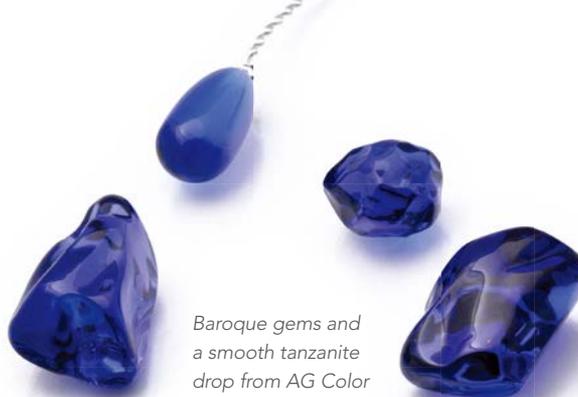
At the recently concluded Hong Kong International Diamond, Gem & Pearl Show, US-based AG Color Inc presented its fine selection of tanzanite gems. The gemstone dealer, which has received numerous awards for its perfectly cut and fine-quality tanzanites, highlighted goods weighing 3 to 50 carats, including exceptionally cut and faceted stones, cabochons, singles and pairs, at the fair.

“Demand is good for stones in calibrated sizes,” company official Hemant Phophaliya said. “We are also seeing solid demand for tanzanite gems within the 3- to 50-carat range. Of course, perfectly cut pairs are always highly desirable.”

The gemstone dealer is seeing demand from major markets around the world, including the US and China. “We are hoping for increased demand from the China market in particular,” said Phophaliya. “We have a very extensive collection of top-colour, finely-cut goods, which our Chinese customers find exceptionally desirable. To top it off, we have rare and hard-to-find certified unheated tanzanite gems, which are ideal for those looking to build up an alternative investment portfolio from a long-term perspective.”

AG Color’s large selection of goods is so varied that it virtually caters to every market segment and budget.

“Prices could be anywhere from \$5 a carat for commercial-grade goods in calibrated sizes to \$500 per carat for fine and exceptional pairs, singles and fancy cuts,” Phophaliya said.



Baroque gems and a smooth tanzanite drop from AG Color

In spite of market uncertainties, AG Color is bullish about its future business prospects.

“Times are challenging but our loyal customers who are always looking for fine-quality goods keep us in a positive mood,” he said. “Our strategy is simple: Produce top-quality gems that our clients can use to create beautiful jewellery.”

Demand for fancy and remarkable tanzanite gems is still increasing, according to Germany-based Paul Wild OHG. “Normal” or regular items are likewise seeing stable demand, the company added.

“China is still a strong buyer but the demand for tanzanite is coming from all over the world,” the coloured gemstone expert said, noting that the company does not foresee any negative movements for the stone in 2017.

Challenges and opportunities

Further growth in the global tanzanite market hinges upon aggressive marketing campaigns and trade education, according to Greaney.

“There are massive opportunities for tanzanite in the coming years. We firmly believe that working with retailers and wholesalers, and educating them and their customers about tanzanite as a priced possession and a viable investment tool, we can create stronger demand for tanzanite,” he added.

Hackman remarked that tanzanite has always been an “easy item to sell because of its beauty and affordability.”

“Tanzanite’s rarity is unparalleled and we are banking on this characteristic of the stone, as well as its natural beauty. With the right approach, we can drive further interest in tanzanite. Due to the rarity and limited resources of tanzanite and the fact that it is a single-generation gemstone means we have to do things right and fast, and make sure the potential of this African treasure is realised,” added Greaney. **JNA**



Heart-shaped tanzanite from Paul Wild OHG