

All About Alexandrite

Alexandrite is like two gemstones in one because it changes color under different lighting: bluish-green in sunlight and reddish-purple in lamplight. Gem experts often say alexandrite is “emerald by day, ruby by night.”

A variety of the chrysoberyl mineral, alexandrite is nicknamed the gem of luck and fortune.

The gem is so rare and extremely expensive that most alexandrite on the market is lab-created.

Fine faceted alexandrite is more valuable than sapphire, ruby or emerald and can command more than \$30,000 per carat.

It's a birthstone for June, and the gemstone for 55th wedding anniversaries.

History

Alexandrite was discovered in Russia's Ural Mountains in the 1830s. It was named after a future Tsar of the Russian Empire, Alexander II, who was still young at the time. Its red and green colors mirrored imperial Russia's national military colors.

Most larger alexandrite gemstones are found in antique Russian jewelry from the Victorian era. Smaller stones are also featured in Victorian pieces from England.

Color

Alexandrite shifts from green-to-bluish-green in sunlight, and red-to-purplish-red in incandescent light. Stones that are too light are not as intense as fine-quality gems, and darker stones that lack brightness appear almost black.

Cut

Well-cut alexandrite highlights the drama of its color-changing properties. Alexandrite is often fashioned into *mixed* cuts: brilliant crowns and step-cut pavilions. Most alexandrite weighs less than a carat.

Fun fact

The largest uncut gem-quality alexandrite ever found is the Sauer Alexandrite. Found in Bahia, Brazil in 1967, it weighs 122,400 carats (54 pounds). Its founder, Jules Roger Sauer, chairman of Amsterdam Jewelers, holds it in his private collection at Amsterdam Sauer in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

Clarity

Alexandrite often contains inclusions. Clean stones are rare and significantly more expensive. Parallel alexandrite inclusions can create a coveted cat's eye effect called *chatoyancy*.

Sourcing

Originally discovered in the Ural Mountains of Russia in the 1830s, today's supply of alexandrite is low, and fine-color stones are extremely rare.

Small amounts are found in Sri Lanka, East Africa and Brazil, but rarely match the hues of those once found in Russia. Synthetic alexandrite composed of chrysoberyl has been around since the 1960s.

Hardness

The Mohs scale of mineral hardness measures the scratch resistance of one harder mineral to visibly scratch another softer mineral.

Alexandrite is an 8.5 on the Mohs hardness scale (with diamonds being a 10 out of 10). It's resistant to the effects of heat, light and common chemicals, making it a fine choice for everyday wear.

Treatment

Natural alexandrite is often left untreated.

Care

Clean alexandrite with warm, soapy water. Ultrasonic cleaners are usually okay for natural alexandrite that is not fracture-filled.

(Written by Mara Robinson for Sheiban Jewelers.)