



Blue is the Warmest Colour

The popularity of naturally sourced sapphires from the Auvergne region of France has grown exponentially in recent years, making them highly sought-after by Parisian jewellers

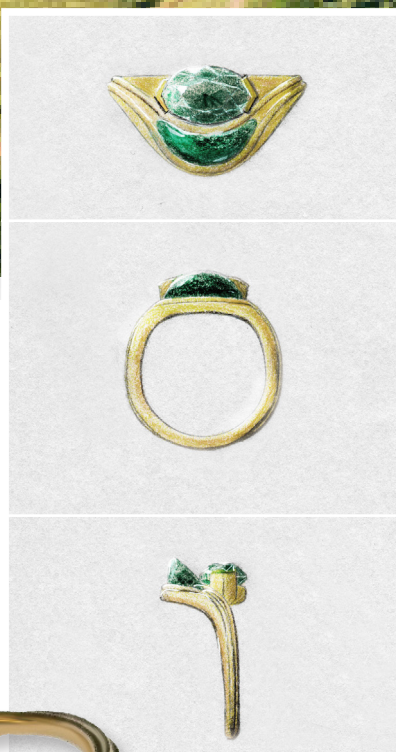
By Kate Matthams Spencer

With cornflower blue varieties from Kashmir, bluish-orange Padparadscha from Sri Lanka, rainbow hues from Madagascar: sapphires are synonymous with Asia. But they can also be found closer to home, in the Auvergne; a mountainous region of extinct volcanoes in central France. Business is booming for Alexandra Boiche of Geological Garden, a gem hunter, lapidary and Auvergne native.

In Paris, the jewellery designer Sarah Madeleine Bru is walking me through

her collections. White gold shell earrings are scattered with pearls, while chains inspired by the arum lily are frosted with diamonds. My eye is drawn to a gold ring on her moodboard, wrapped around the finger like a vine, set with two green stones, one polished, one milky. Both are French sapphires, mined and cut to her specification, by Boiche.

The Forêt La Selva ring is a bespoke commission inspired by the forest and the rush of water. The stones are alluvial Auvergne sapphires with a characteristic peacock blue-green hue. For Bru, local

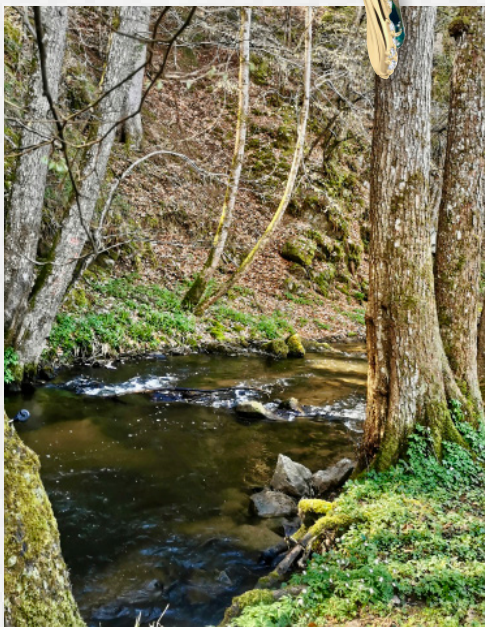


sourcing is fundamental and in Boiche she “could not have found a source that was more transparent, or closer to where the piece was made in Paris”. When she is not sourcing locally, she makes sure her materials are as ethical as possible, using gems sourced via BotswanaMark and Moyo Gemstones, suppliers who buy direct from the miners. She wants “to know why and how everything is produced. It’s constraining, but worth it.”

Like all the stones Boiche mines, these two were cut close to where she found them,



HIGH AND MIGHTY
From far left: Sarah Madeleine Bru; Auvergne region; Alexandra Boiche sourcing sapphires, Sarah Madeleine Bru La Forêt La Selva ring and drawings; Auvergne river; Sarah Madeleine Bru Arum earrings; a French green sapphire; Sarah Madeleine Bru Arum ring.



Around the world, sapphires are found in mountainous and volcanic regions, where their host rock—basalt—is plentiful. They were made at high temperature and pressure 15km deep in the Earth hundreds of millions of years ago, brought to the surface by magma, then washed down into rivers. Because of this journey, Auvergne sapphires are often smaller. Puy Sapphires as they were historically known, referencing the puy, or small volcanoes in the region, are known to have been prized as far back as the 8th century, when the town of Le Puy-en-Velay was a centre for goldsmithing, and were used in religious and royal jewellery and objects across medieval Europe. According to Boiche, they are similar to Madagascan sapphires, although gemmology labs are working on identifying them independently, which could mean that more historical jewellery is found to contain Auvergne sapphires.

Now fully recovered, she pans in local rivers and digs in the hills. She learnt to cut and polish, and started a business in 2020. “It’s a niche stone,” she explains during a talk for the ING Gemmology school in Paris. “Clients are often collectors or jewellers who choose Auvergne sapphires for where they come from, but there’s also growing demand from the public requesting these stones from jewellers.” The price is based on colour, and as Auvergne sapphires are

blue-green rather than royal blue, they are less expensive than better-known varieties. There is also low yield to take into account, with 70 percent loss of material on cutting, but larger faceted stones can sell for up to £1,100 a carat. Boiche now runs gemstone and lapidary courses, and is hopeful for the future of gem-cutting in France, a craft that has all

but died out in Europe. The pair are planning a small series of one-of-a-kind Auvergne sapphire rings. Bru believes that their unusual nature is a big part of the appeal: “There’s something very feminine about them; their colour, preciousness and rarity.” For Boiche, the stone’s history is a point of pride. She has also found rubies, amethyst and violet sapphires in the region, but “it’s a privilege to work with the same stones that were part of the jewels of the kings of France,” she tells me. A royal connection for a rare material. **W**

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in her atelier in the village of Sugères. She came to gemstones after health problems left her on crutches. Gradually, she gained strength and began climbing hills and clearing her mind, gathering the mineral treasures she found on her way. “I made some of my best discoveries during those years,” she says, describing a passion born of adversity. In November 2025, she won the LVMH Prix des Artisanés for jewellery and watchmaking.



TREASURE TROVE
Left to right: reproduction of the Saint Denis ring and Hand of Justice sceptre made for Napoleon I using Auvergne sapphires in the 13th century; the imperial German crown of the Holy Roman Empire used French sapphires.

BRU: ALEXANDRE TABASTE; AUVERGNE: CORMON FRANCIS/HEMIS.FR /ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. ALEXANDRA BOICHE: CROWN: KHM-MUSEUMSVERBAND; SCEPTRE: © GRANDPALAISMM (MUSÉE DU LOUVRE)/THERY. RING: © GRANDPALAISMM (MUSÉE DU LOUVRE)/ADRIEN DIDIERJEAN.