

# Chance Favors a Prepared Line

Cynthia R. Marcusson

*I'm not big on universal truths (okay, there's gravity, though less so on the moon). But, one thing I **know** as certain as the sun's rising (except, on earth, in the polar regions) is that salespeople must demonstrate confidence to sell colored gemstones successfully. Why do I sell more during store promotions? There is always the aura-of-the-expert effect, but a large part of my success with the retail consumer is that I can absolutely answer their questions in a simple, direct and warm manner. They sense my confidence and feel secure. I cannot be bluffed, and I don't bluff them. I do not flinch or answer their questions with a question in my voice. Of course, colored gems are what I do. They are my passion, and I have the opportunity to just work with them all day. The typical Jeweler or salesperson has many more hats to wear.*





Success is not a roll of the dice. The more prepared we are, the more things just seem to fall into place. One of the primary ways to help increase colored gem sales is by practicing answers to commonly asked questions. Practice them until the words become your own. The more you put into this, the greater "chance" you will have in successfully completing sales. "Chance favors a prepared mind," so let's get to work on some "prepared lines" that will help in answering questions, increasing your and your customers' confidence and boosting colored gemstone sales.

Below, I have answered as simply and accurately as I know how some of the most common questions on colored gemstones that are asked by retail Jewelers' customers. Sometimes, I have given a few approaches to answering one question or handling a particular issue. It's the rare individual who wants more detail. Primarily, they desire to feel secure that you know what you are talking about and can take care of them.

Higher sales *will* come with your practice of answering these questions. If you don't feel comfortable with my exact answers, adapt them into your own words. Practicing your answers aloud will help your voice develop an edge of confidence and will incorporate them into your sales vocabulary. Role-play with other staff members; gain an intuitive understanding so you are not answering by rote. You must practice for this to become second nature (I suddenly feel great empathy for my old piano teacher!). When your customer asks, it's too late to look for the book.

Should you create different techniques for answering these questions or have questions you are often asked but which are not addressed here, I would appreciate your sharing with me. We all learn from one another.

## **Q. What Makes a Gem Valuable?**

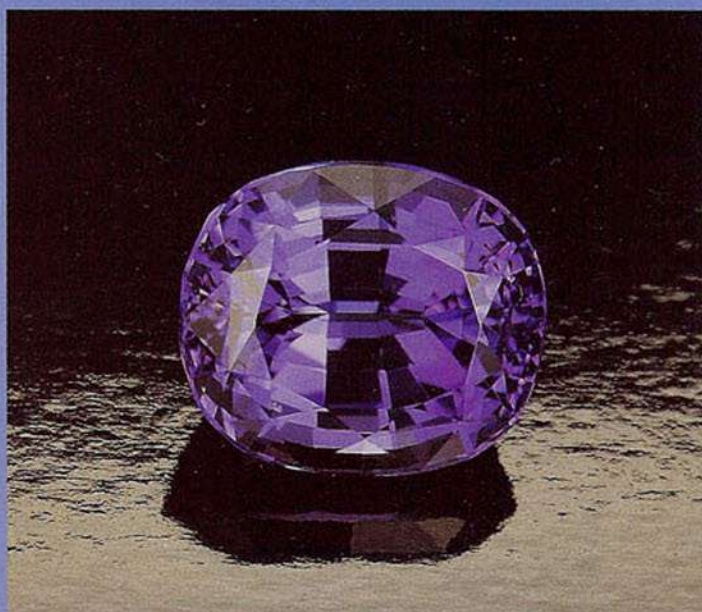
**A.** Several factors play a role in determining value: beauty, rarity, durability, cut, demand (desirability) and color. If a gem is not beautiful, few people will desire it. We may be drawn by a gem's beauty, but rarity gives the gem its exclusivity. The gem must be durable enough to endure over time. The degree of cutting finesse makes the difference between a dull stone and a brilliant gem. Though color preference is very personal, what appear to be subtle color differences to the layperson can be translated into significant monetary differences. The interplay of all these complicated attributes sets the value.

## **Q. Why is this Rubellite \$2,000 and that Ruby \$12,000? How are Prices Determined with Colored Gems?**

**A.** Gemstone prices are determined like many other commodities: supply and demand. Short supply and high demand equal high price; short supply and moderate demand equal lesser price, even for something that may be rarer and/or of

*Continued on page 14*

*How do you explain simply the difference between aquamarine and blue topaz, and why pink tourmaline has inclusions? Jewelry by Nanz Aahnd, Nordstrom Fine Jewelry, gems by Cynthia Renée Co. Engelstadt photo.*



*Jewelers must be able to confidently answer such questions as, "What color of tanzanite is best?" and "I heard that tanzanite can't be worn in rings." Gem by Cynthia Renée Co. Photography by Weldon.*



finer quality. Some gems, like rubies, are in limited supply and very high demand, so their price is high. Fine rubellite, though also in short supply, doesn't have the demand of ruby, so its price is lower. This \$2,000 rubellite is one of the finest I have ever seen, yet available in an affordable price range.

The colored gemstone market isn't controlled like the diamond market. De Beers sets the supply available over a certain time period while stimulating demand through marketing. Their market is said to be artificially set, as they control actual output. There is no centralized mining cartel controlling the supply of colored gemstones; their prices are an actual reflection of availability and demand.

A gem must be in abundant enough supply to create a demand. Prior to 1990, there wasn't enough tanzanite to stimulate much public awareness. With a large yet limited find, a lot of tanzanite hit the world market at once causing the prices to drop, and increasing public awareness. At present, fine tanzanite isn't as abundant, but demand has increased. Prices are reacting by increasing.

### Q. Aren't Diamonds the Rarest and Most Expensive Gems?

A. Diamonds are not the rarest or costliest of the traditional gemstones. Rubies and emeralds are rarer, and comparable gems of five or more carats can easily surpass diamonds in cost.

### Q. I Know the Four C's, and I Want to Scope this Tsavorite.

A. Good, let's view this gem under the scope. But, while in diamonds we are looking for microscopic inclusions that can greatly decrease price, we hope we see inclusions in sapphire, because they will tell us whether the gems are natural or synthetic, have been treated or where they come from. The presence of inclusions in most colored stones doesn't detract from their value as significantly as with diamonds.

### Q. I Know the Four C's, and I Want My Sapphire VVS.

A. The presence of inclusions in colored gems doesn't detract from their value as with diamonds. What's more important is the type and position of the inclusions and if their presence creates a structural defect that affects durability. Diamond, like a lump of coal, is mostly carbon. That's very simple. Most colored gemstones have long lists of chemical ingredients and, therefore, much more opportunity for internal inclusions to be caught up, leaving a trace of the gem's liquid past.

Flawless colored gemstones may bring a disproportionately higher price due to their extreme rarity. If there are no

*Continued on page 16*



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Continued from page 14

inclusions, I wonder if the gem is natural and not artificial. Some gems, such as emeralds and red tourmalines, are allowed inclusions. Others, such as aquamarine and kunzite, should be clean or they will bring a much lower price.

Inclusions give keys to gem identification, help us determine whether we are buying a natural or synthetic gem, and provide clues to country of origin, which sometimes plays a big part in pricing.

### Q. Why is There "Stuff" in this Red Tourmaline and Not in the Green?

A. Due to the geology of the gem deposit, and crystal chemistry, red and pink tourmalines are rarely found without inclusions, and green tourmaline is typically eye-clean. It is not known exactly why this is. Like the Sphinx and Bermuda Triangle, it is one of Nature's mysteries.

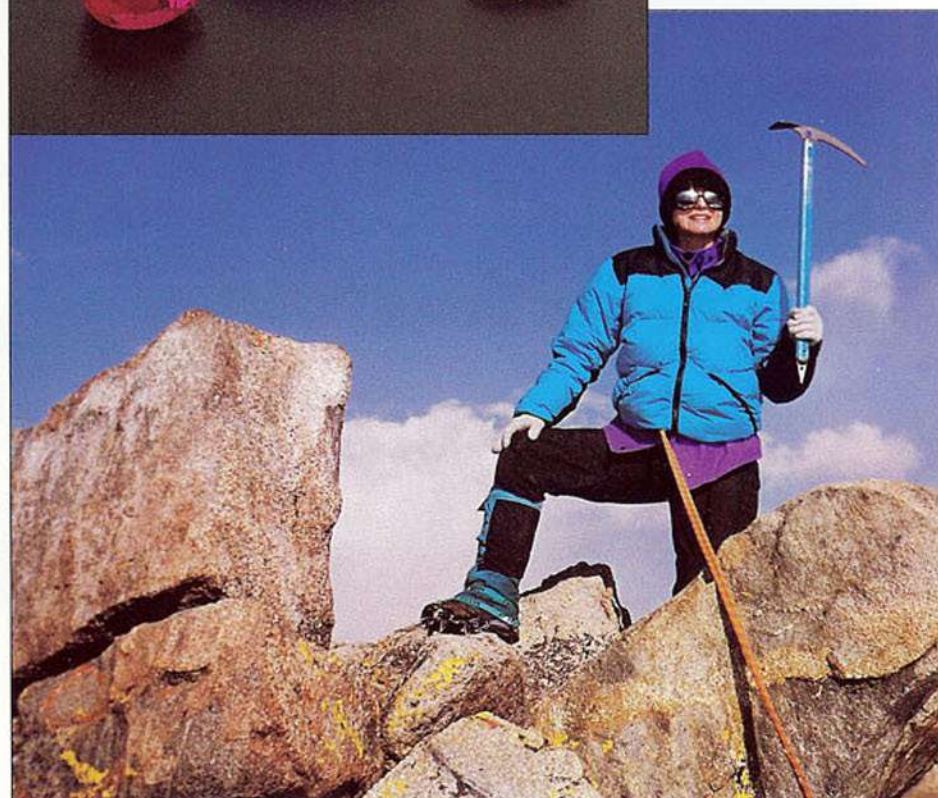
The last Empress Dowager of China desired the intermediate, included grades of pink tourmaline as they more "readily showed nature's handiwork and clean gems could be made by man."

Continued on page 18



If your customer wants to scope these sapphires and ruby, how will you explain that inclusions are typical?

All gems by Cynthia Renée Co. Photography by Weldon.



Geologist Cynthia Marcussen in her element.

# ALEX SEPKUS

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**Q. Which Color is Best?**

**A.** Color preferences vary with the individual. What moves one person may not stir another. Nevertheless, there are trade standards for preferred colors which translate into varying prices. Buy the color that speaks to you, but buy from a professional who is familiar with the colored gemstone market, has your interests at heart and can advise you accordingly.

Diamonds are graded according to absence of color. Colored gemstones are more complex, and several colors may be present in one gem with varying intensity. What may seem like slight differences in these colors may have a great impact on price.

**Q. What Color of Blue is Best in Sapphire?**

**A.** Darker is better...to a point. A sapphire can become too dark, or oversaturated, in color. I advise staying away from the "inky blues," but there is a range of beautiful blues and, like selecting a mate, the choice is very individual. I tend to like a slightly lighter blue while my partner wants a blue to be as dark as it can but not inky. We're both right—let's see what you like.

For years, uninformed salespeople have been telling the public that dark is good because that is what is most available to sell. Let your heart decide—Which is prettier: a sapphire that is a bright blue or one reminiscent of ink?

I want a blue sapphire to be blue and not mistaken for black onyx.

**Q. Is It True the Darker the Stone, the Better?**

**A.** To a point. It's like turning the contrast control on your television. Darker makes for a clearer picture until it becomes too dark and eventually unrecognizable.

**Q. What About Some Stones Being Treated?**

**A.** No gems, whether colored, diamond or pearl, come out of the ground looking like they do in a piece of jewelry. Faceting gems is a part of the enhancing treatment that goes into bringing unformed gems to market standards. Sometimes we go a bit further with this fashioning process and subject the gem to heating, irradiation or other permanent color enhancement techniques.

Have you ever seen a red sheep, white flax or a purple cow? I haven't either, yet we consider crimson wool, white

*Continued on page 21*





linen and blue suede to be natural materials. For centuries, gemstones have been processed in bringing them to the Jeweler. It's when these treatment processes are used in misrepresenting a gem that they are considered fraudulent.

Sapphires have been heated since Marco Polo's time. If we didn't heat sapphires, there would be very few available and their prices prohibitive.

### **Q. But Isn't Tanzanite Semi-Precious?**

**A.** "Precious" and "semi-precious" are outdated marketing terms which in no way reflect the rarity, or preciousness, of a particular gemstone. Trying to create higher prices for ruby, sapphire and emerald, marketers described them as precious to the general public, thereby relegating all other gems—even though more rare and beautiful—to the semi-precious category. Compare this top-quality five-carat tanzanite, which is very rare, to a mediocre emerald, which isn't anywhere near as rare or beautiful. How can one be precious and the other semi-precious? We refer to them all as colored gemstones.

### **Q. Isn't a Synthetic a Natural Gem?**

**A.** Synthetics mimic the chemistry of a natural gemstone found in nature. But, they are not the same as the naturals which form over the vastness of geologic time and of which we have a finite supply. Since synthetics are made in laboratories, rarity does not figure into their value.

### **Q. Spinel—Isn't That Synthetic?**

**A.** Spinel can be an incredibly beautiful gemstone! Probably because it was one of the first gems synthesized, people don't realize it also occurs naturally. In Great Britain's Crown Jewels, the Black Prince's Ruby is really a spinel. Before the science of gemology evolved, spinel was often confused with ruby.

### **Q. Why Don't You Have Any Alexandrite?**

**A.** Alexandrite is an extremely rare gemstone that is very difficult to obtain in sizes over one carat. It is rarely found in finer qualities, so I choose not to stock it. I buy fine alexandrite when I see it; it's just that I rarely do.

### **Q. I Want a Two-Carat Tanzanite the Color of this Ten-Carat One.**

**A.** Think of the ocean. A cupful of seawater is much lighter than the whole sea, isn't it? The mass of the sea concentrates the dark color. I'll get you the finest color two-carat tanzanite I can; but it won't exactly match this fine larger one.



*How would you explain the rarity of this extremely large and clean rubellite to your customer?*



*Fine red spinel from Burma. Customers often mistake it for a synthetic.*

*All gems by Cynthia Renée Co. Photography by Weldon.*





Though the cabochon allows use of the more included rough material, many fine gems are cut in this sophisticated, sensuous form. This 15.20-carat pink spinel cabochon is appealing for its subtle inner calling as compared to the sparkling screams of a faceted gem.



One of the primary ways to increase your colored gem sales is by practicing aloud answers to commonly asked questions.



Amethyst and opal have the same hardness, but amethyst is more durable.

All gems by Cynthia Renée Co. Photography by Weldon.

## Q. Why is this Small Aquamarine More Money than the Big One?

A. Look at differences in color. This one-carat gem has a darker color than the eight-carat. It is so much more rare to find a small aqua boasting this dark color. Since the one-carat aqua in the very dark color is quite rare, it is \$800 per carat. The eight-carat aquamarine, in this color, is \$80 per carat. I offer you two choices: a gem rarity representing the finest of the fine, but in a smaller size so the price is affordable, or a less expensive, yet larger, aquamarine that is very nice but in a color that is not as rare.

## Q. What's the Difference Between Blue Topaz and Aquamarine?

A. Though both are very pretty, fine aquamarine is a gem rarity. The topaz is turned blue in a laboratory using a very safe and permanent irradiation process. Since the topaz can be turned blue in a laboratory and we get aquamarine at the whims of nature, the supply of blue topaz is very high, keeping the price low. There's something for everybody: a natural rarity at a higher price that may increase over time, or a pretty gem that you can wear right now, available at a lower price. It's like buying the original painting or the print.

## Q. How is Your Tanzanite Different from the \$50-a-Carat Stuff I Saw on the Shopping Channel?

A. Gemstones come in different grades. Most available are in the lower, or commercial, grades. The finest grades are the most difficult to find. A mass merchandising campaign cannot offer the top grades. In our store, we select the finer qualities and offer them at fair prices.

## Q. How Can Tanzanite Be Rare? It's Everywhere!

A. Tanzanite is only found in a limited area of the African country of Tanzania. Ruby, emerald and sapphire are found in many countries throughout the world. Though tanzanite was first discovered in 1968, many are just becoming aware of it due to an unusually large find that hit the market several years ago. This has been a period of relative abundance; most tanzanite on the market is of a very commercial quality, and finer qualities are scarce.

## Q. What Color of Tanzanite is Best?

A. Tanzanite can be a violetish-blue, even purple, or pure blue depending on how the gem is handled during the cutting stage. Which color is best is a matter of personal preference. Tanzanite is a very passionately colored gem and everyone seems to remember it, once experienced. I am attracted to the violetish-blue colors which, for me, heighten the sense of the exotic. True blues seem to be preferred



by sapphire fans. In pricing, a rich, highly saturated color free from gray is the primary consideration. All things being equal, the violetish-blue and blue colors command similar prices. Of course, the color of a two-carat tanzanite will be lighter than a seven-carat.

**Q. I Heard Tanzanite's Not Hard Enough for Rings.**

**A.** Tanzanite makes a beautiful ring, but like emerald or opal, one has to take a little more care when enjoying it in a ring. Behave as you do when wearing a nice silk blouse: You enjoy wearing it, while paying extra attention to your actions. Ring design also plays a part in your enjoyment of tanzanite; some designs provide more protection than others.

There is a difference between hardness and durability. Tanzanite is hard enough but is susceptible to thermal shock, meaning it can crack when extreme cold or heat is applied quickly. Don't take your tanzanite ring from the kitchen's cold water to the hot oven. In fact, if you take all your jewelry off at home, it will last much longer.

**Q. You Mean Opal and Amethyst Have the Same Hardness?**

**A.** Yes, both have a hardness of seven. But, hardness is not the same as durability. Jade is not hard yet is very durable because of its internal structure; topaz is hard but, due to its cleavage, is not as durable. Opal and amethyst have the same hardness but, due to internal factors, opal is not as durable. Let me know how you plan to wear your piece of jewelry, and I can direct you towards the right gemstone for your use.

*Continued on page 82*

The collage features several images of gemstones: a large orange tanzanite, a rectangular blue tanzanite, a large red tanzanite, a large green emerald, a large red tanzanite, and a large green emerald. The brand name 'Cynthia Renée' is repeated in a stylized font across the collage.

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**Q. I'm Going Overseas and Will Buy a Gem There.**

**A.** Don't spend more than you can afford to lose! It's a romantic idea to go overseas with the fantasy of bringing back a beautiful jewel at a bargain price. It's the Marco Polo Syndrome, but think about it: You're buying a commodity about which you know next to nothing, for significant money, from a stranger 5,000 miles from home who probably comes from a culture with a long tradition of trading. Who has the advantage? How do you know you are not buying a synthetic, misrepresented or fraudulently treated gem? You can generally buy at a better price in the States from a reputable Jeweler who is offering a properly represented gem and from whom you have recourse.

**Q. You Mean You Can't Tell a Real Gem from Synthetic by Just Looking?**

**A.** No, this is a tremendously complicated issue and is getting more so by the day. I wouldn't believe anyone who said they can give you a definite answer through sight alone. Even the most experienced gem dealer can be fooled.

**Q. But I Bought This in India from a Family of Miners. I Must Have Gotten a Deal!**

**A.** With an Italian accent, my sales would triple! This is the "Lure of Accents." Just because you feel you are buying closer to the source does not mean you are getting a "deal."

**Q. What is My Best Protection Against Misrepresentation and Fraud?**

**A.** To purchase from a knowledgeable and stable professional. Buy in your "backyard" from someone with whom you have established a relationship and who has your best interest at heart. Ask questions and become informed but realize that book knowledge doesn't equal trade knowledge. Colored gems are especially complex and not understood by everyone.

**Q. What's the Difference Between Morganite and Pink Ice?**

**A.** "Pink Ice" is the marketing term for a man-made cubic zirconium which does *not* occur in nature. There is a mineral called beryl, like the woman's name. Green beryl is emerald, blue beryl is aquamarine, and pink beryl is called morganite, after J.P. Morgan, the noted American financier. Morganite is a natural rarity; pink ice is only made in a laboratory crucible.

**Q. But Morganite's So Pale!**

**A.** Yes, Morganite's a *delicately* colored pink. But, when it's well cut, it absolutely glows in subdued light. Here, put this on your hand and move it out of the light—see how it dances?

**Q. Wow! All of Your Gemstones Are So Lively!**

**A.** That's no accident. Very careful attention was paid to the angles on the gem's bottom so that when light enters from above it completely turns around and sparkles back to you. That's why you can't see your hand through this lightly colored gem—the light doesn't go completely through it but is refracted back out. Some gems have what's called a window, where the light isn't completely bent and you can see your fingers through them.

**Q. So, I Don't Want Any Gems with Windows.**

**A.** I try to get the most perfectly cut gems possible. But, I have to operate within the constraints of what is found in the market. Sometimes it is realistic to have perfectly cut gems; other times not. Most gems are from Third World countries and cut under conditions more primitive than Western technological standards. When these gems are very rare and/or costly, sometimes we have to overlook slight cutting irregularities.

**Q. You Mean, I Have to Accept the Slight Window in the Fine Imperial Topaz?**



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**A.** Topaz rarely comes out of the ground so fine; we are extremely lucky to have this gem. Imperial topaz is mined in Brazil and a small window is acceptable for a Brazilian-cut gem. When mounted in jewelry, the window will not be nearly as noticeable. To turn this rare beauty aside because of the small window is like tossing aside Cindy Crawford because of her mole!

**Q. I Want a More Unusual Shape in Green Tourmaline than Emerald-Cut.**

**A.** It's not an accident or whim that you usually see green tourmaline in the rectangular emerald-cut. Each gemstone behaves differently in light. Most green tourmaline when cut in other than the rectangular emerald-cut reacts by adding unattractive yellows and browns to the green. The emerald-cut has very steep ends on the bottom which prevent the unattractive secondary color from showing. Gems aren't like fabric—we can't just cut any shape we want to!

**Q. Why Is This So Expensive? It's Garnet!**

**A.** Many people think of garnet as a small, dark, cheap gem found in Granny's boring jewelry. Garnet can be very inexpensive, but in the larger sizes and with the addition of pinks and purples, the price increases. This eight-carat rhodolite garnet is quite a find!

**Q. Where Do These Stones Come From?**

**A.** Sometimes we can track the origin of the gem with certainty. Other times, gems in their rough form are sent to cutting centers where they are cut and redistributed according to quality. Colors and internal characteristics are indicative of certain localities, but we can't always be certain.

**Q. But the Finest Rubies Come from Burma.**

**A.** Yes, Burma produces some extraordinary rubies, but not all Burmese rubies are fine. Geology knows nothing of

our geopolitical boundaries. Thailand, neighboring Burma, also produces some fine rubies, as do other localities around the world. I purchase gemstones on the basis of beauty and value, not birthplace.

**Q. Are Cabochons Just Cut Out of Cheaper Material?**

**A.** Cabochon is the domed rounded cut most often seen in opal and jade. Since the cabochon doesn't have facets that can call attention to inclusions, more included rough material is generally used in its fashioning. Though the cabochon allows use of the more included material, many fine gems are cut in this style. Some people prefer them.

Cabochons are very European, sophisticated and sensuous: a rounded, full shape offering a bold dose of color. Its appeal is more of a subtle inner calling than the sparkling screams of a faceted gem.

**Q. But Isn't Citrine the Same as Topaz?**


**A.** It's true they sometimes have similar colors, but they are very different gemstones. There is a strong demand for both. Citrine is readily available and, therefore, inexpensive. Topaz, particularly in the orangish and red shades, is much less abundant and, therefore, pricier. They are different gems

for different people—one preferring a beautiful, durable and quite affordable gem, the other a more costly rarity. **JQ**

*I tip my hat in thanks to Ralph Rossini for his insightful manuscript critique, laughing at my jokes and always giving his opinion about everything. If only I could turn such savvy into scents...*

**Cynthia R. Marcusson** is a frequent contributor to *JQ Magazine* on the subject of gems and gem promotion. In addition to operating her own business of selling fine colored gemstones to the jewelry industry under the name of Cynthia Renée Co., Cynthia is a popular speaker/educator and conducts in-store marketing/training seminars. For information, please contact Cynthia Renée Co., P.O. Box 1763, Fallbrook, CA 92088, Tel: 619-728-5150, Fax: 619-728-2636.

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