

NAMING A FAVORITE GEM is like choosing a favorite sunset: How could you choose just one out of so many glorious variations? Though, I must confess, if I could only have one gem for "soul food," it would probably be spinel.

In fine spinel, the colors become more of themselves: reds are battery-

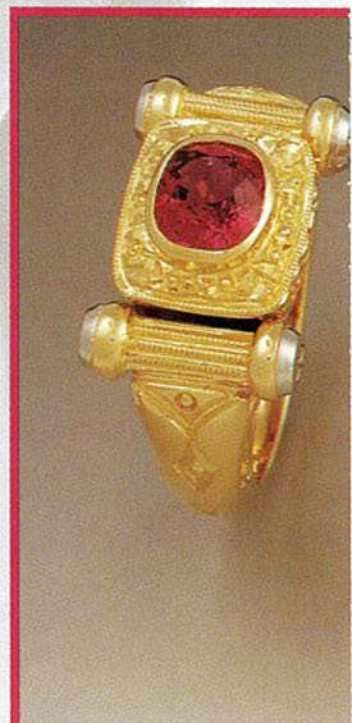
Spinel

T H E

powered, lavenders seem celestial, oranges a fiesta and pinks a mixed bouquet. Light and color hit the bull's-eye in spinel—they come together in sharp focus. This is no skin-deep beauty—it's the radiant inside of the gem that shines forth.

A possible derivation for spinel's strange-sounding name is the Greek word for spark, *spita*, referring to red spinel's fiery personality. Admittedly, the name spinel (pronounced spuh-nell) doesn't seem designed to convey the gem's great vitality. Initially, the word may be unfortunately associated with agonizing spinal taps or synthetic gems' beauty-queen falseness. Short of Italianizing the name to the operatic-sounding "spinelle," the most successful way to introduce your customers to spinel is by staging an enthusiastic and ethical "bait and switch," the bait being spinel's visual delights introduced with your confidence and enthusiasm. Once the bait is taken, your customer's mind's-eye impression of spinel will be one of light and beauty.

Selling spinel is not an uphill walk—just an indirect one. Since, for now, customers rarely come in requesting spinel, it is up to you to create their desire. Spinel has a tremendous amount going for it, and, once you learn your way around the spinel market and sales repertoire, success is yours. For starters, its relatively low price isn't at all reflective of its rarity and beauty. For a minimal investment, Jewelers can assemble a collection of spinel which will tantalize customers and cultivate new ones. Customers will delight in a beautiful new gem, and Jewelers will delight in the buyers' enthusiasm for a gem that is profitable.



S P I N E L



Elegant ring spinel garlanded with diamonds and sapphire. Ring by Paula Crevoshay. Photo: C. Russ.

crown, these royal examples show what a satisfying medium jewelry is to convey sentiment that passes through the generations.

Q. Where does spinel come from?

A. Today most gem spinel comes from Burma, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania, while the large historic spinels mentioned above are thought to have come from the area of Afghanistan.

Q. Is spinel treated?

A. Spinel is one of the few gems for which no heat treatment is used to bring its color to a beautiful shade. But buyer beware—recently some labs have seen spinels whose fractures are filled with an epoxy resin or glass which seals and hides surface fractures. As with all fine gems and jewelry, consumers' best protection is to purchase from a professional who has their best interests at heart and from whom they have recourse.

Q. I thought spinel was a synthetic!

A. Spinel can be an incredibly beautiful gemstone. Probably because it was one of the first gems to be synthesized, people often don't realize it also occurs naturally.

Synthetics mimic the chemistry of a natural gemstone, but they are not the same as the stone which forms over the vastness of geologic time and exists in only limited amounts on earth. Since synthetics are made in laboratories, rarity does not figure into their value.

Q. Why does spinel have an "icier" look than other gems?

A. Spinel, like diamond and garnet, is singly refractive. When light moves through it, it does not separate into two or more rays of light as it does in most other gemstones. As a result, there is no doubling of the back facets, and that yields a clearer and crisper look.

Q. What kind of inclusions should I

expect in spinel?

A. Spinel and diamond have the same crystal form: the octahedron. It is typical for a spinel to contain within it spinel crystal inclusions shaped in tiny octahedrons or negative octahedral voids, often surrounded by a fingerprint pattern series of inclusions. It's fun to scope the gem and see the crystal-within-a-crystal phenomenon.

Q. Can I wear spinel in a wedding ring?

A. In addition to its great beauty, spinel is known for its hardness and durability. It is great for wedding rings. If it is well cared for and properly maintained, jewelry of any form will last to be passed through the generations. I always advise customers to remove their fine jewelry, always storing it in one place as they change from their work and/or dress clothes to around-the-house clothes. This way, they won't be subjecting their rings to gardening, cleaning fluids or the sharp blows that can come with housework.

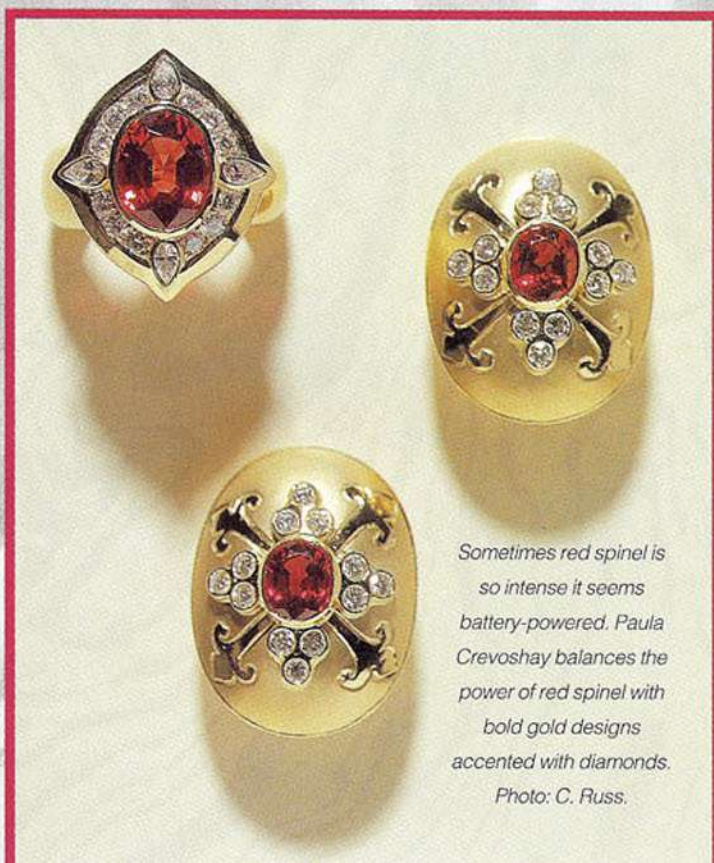
Q. Can I get spinel in any size and shape?

A. Choosing a gemstone size and shape is not like choosing fabric—we can't just cut it and sew it up! We are limited by the way light moves through the gem and by the rough crystal's size and shape. Expect spinel in oval, cushion and pear shapes; large rounds over 4 mm are rare. The oval or cushion cuts bring out more brightness in spinel than long rectangular pavilion facets of the emerald cut. Spinel is readily available up to 1.5 carats; after that, its availability tapers off.

Q. Does blue spinel look like blue sapphire?

A. To me, blue spinel does not look like sapphire as much as red spinel can look like ruby. Most of the spinel blues have a strong grayish overtone, making their colors a bit more "militaristic." I like a strong green component in many of the blues, which gives them a touch of teal color. A slightly purple blue is also very attractive. There is a very rare

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Sometimes red spinel is so intense it seems battery-powered. Paula Crevoshay balances the power of red spinel with bold gold designs accented with diamonds. Photo: C. Russ.

Below I have answered some of the basic questions concerning the sales and marketing of spinel. They form a solid basis for building your spinel sales repertoire, overcoming objections and answering consumers' questions with the confidence it takes to make the first sale—and repeat ones.

Q. What is spinel?

A. Spinel is a gemstone with a chemical composition similar to that of ruby and sapphire, though they are not related in any gemological way. Ruby and sapphire are aluminum oxide, while spinel is magnesium aluminum oxide. Pure spinel is colorless. Thankfully, minute amounts of chemical "impurities" can enter the crystal as it is forming, giving rise to the bouquet of color variations we enjoy. When a little chromium makes its way into the crystal, we get red and pinks; iron and/or zinc give the blue and greenish colors, and sometimes we can find rare cobalt blue, star and color-change gems.

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Think of ruby as red velvet and spinel as red satin. But spinel isn't just red—it's also typically seen in various shades of pink and rose and blue, although the blues do not mimic blue sapphire like the red ruby can. Spinel is sometimes discovered in gem deposits with sapphire and ruby and is more often a by-product of mining efforts directed toward those more expensive gems.

Q. How can I tell a spinel from a ruby?

A. Spinel can be distinguished easily from ruby and sapphire by measuring its refractive index. The refractive index is unique for each gem and is based on measuring the way light moves through a gemstone. Before the science of

gemology was developed, red spinel was often confused with ruby. History abounds with famous "rubies" that have been misidentified as ruby.

Q. Is spinel a new gem?

A. The first documented ornamental use of red spinel dates to 100 B.C. and was found in a Buddhist tomb near Kabul, Afghanistan. Red spinel is strongly associated with the great treasure troves of Mongol emperors' jewels. Spinel was also used as decorations on popes' tiaras. A 120-carat red spinel was mounted on the coronation tiara of Pope Julius II.

Q. What are some of the famous spinels thought to be rubies?

A. The Timur "Ruby," in the private collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, is a 352-carat red spinel. Presented to Queen Victoria by the East India Company in

B E A U T Y

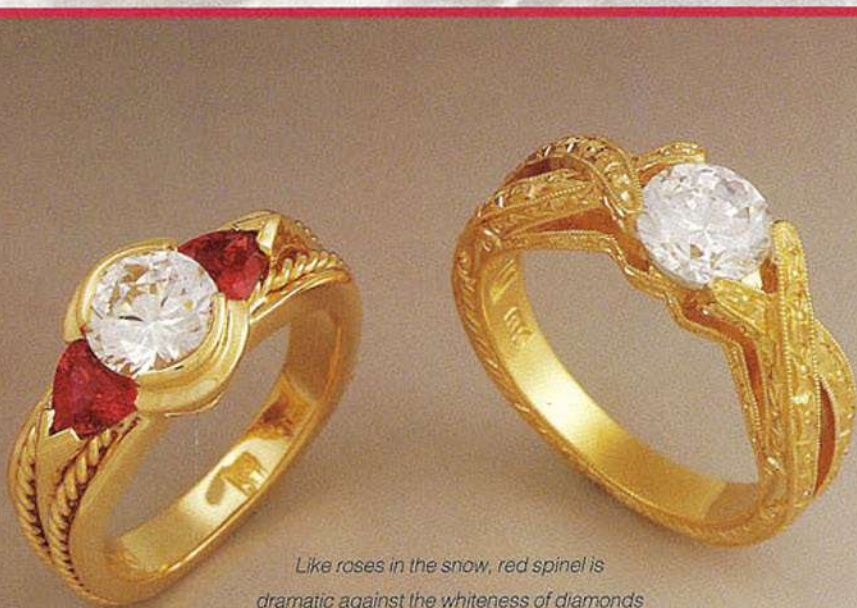
1851, the gem uniquely bears an inscription written in a Persian script dating 1743: "This is the ruby among the twenty-five thousand jewels of the King of Kings, the Sultan Sahib Qiron, which in the year 1153 from the collection of jewels of Hindustan reached this place." The names of the subsequent owners, which include Mongol emperors and shahs of Persia, are also engraved on the gem.

The Black Prince's "Ruby," weighing 170 carats, is yet another famous spinel central to the crown jewels of Great Britain. Set in the cross at the front of the Imperial State Crown of Great Britain, this spinel is about two inches long, polished yet irregularly shaped. Its provenance is fascinating: It first became known in Badakhshan in 1367, when Pedro the Cruel, the king of Castile, killed Abu Said, the

king of Grenada (Moors), in order to abscond with the gem. Within a year, he gave the stone to the Black Prince, Prince of Wales and son of Edward III, as a reward for his crucial help in the battle of Najera in northern Spain. Henry V wore the spinel in his helmet in the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. The red spinel talisman saved his life by blocking what would have been a fatal blow. Before coming to its final resting place in the Imperial State Crown, the Black Prince's Ruby was worn as a pendant; if you look closely you will see holes in the gem that are now filled with small rubies.

Though the spinel your customer selects will probably not be worn in a

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Like roses in the snow, red spinel is dramatic against the whiteness of diamonds and pearls. Jewelry by Brian Sholdt.

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cobalt blue spinel found almost entirely in the gem gravels of Sri Lanka. Don't get too excited here—they are very rare, small in size, and much of what's offered as cobalt blue spinel is synthetic.

Q. So, red spinel is a ruby substitute?

A. Absolutely not! Spinel has a tremendous beauty of its own and should be enjoyed and revered for its own distinct character.

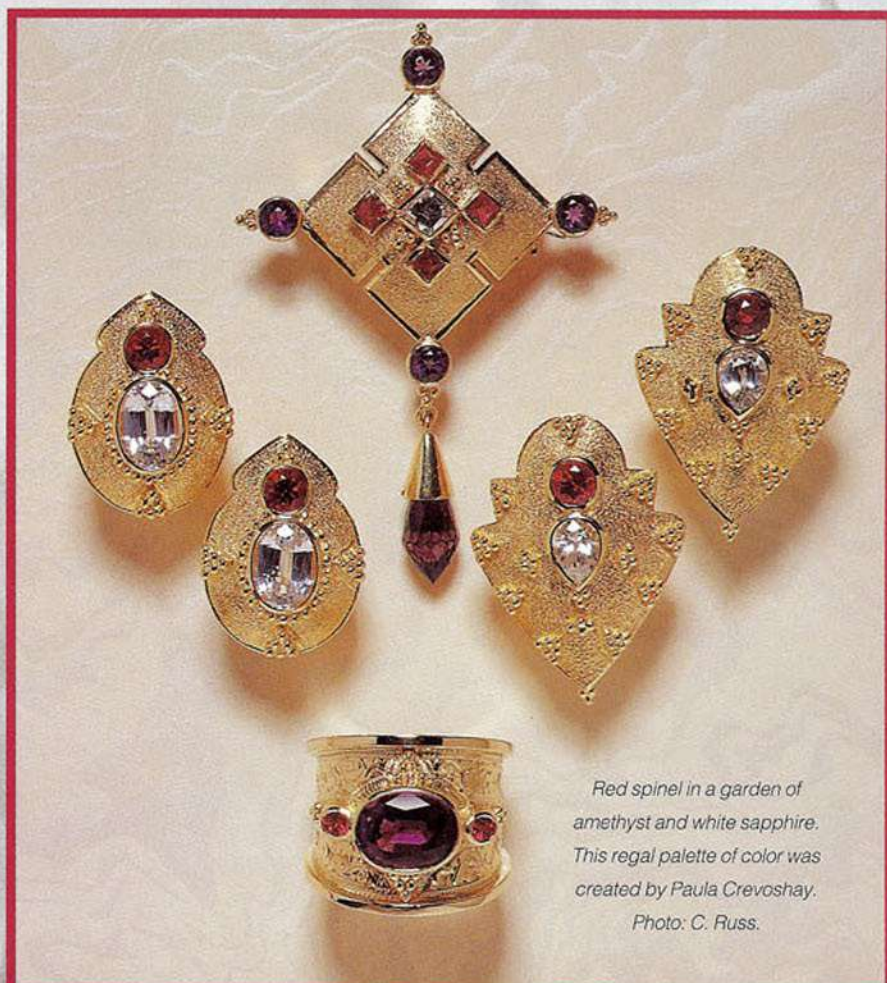
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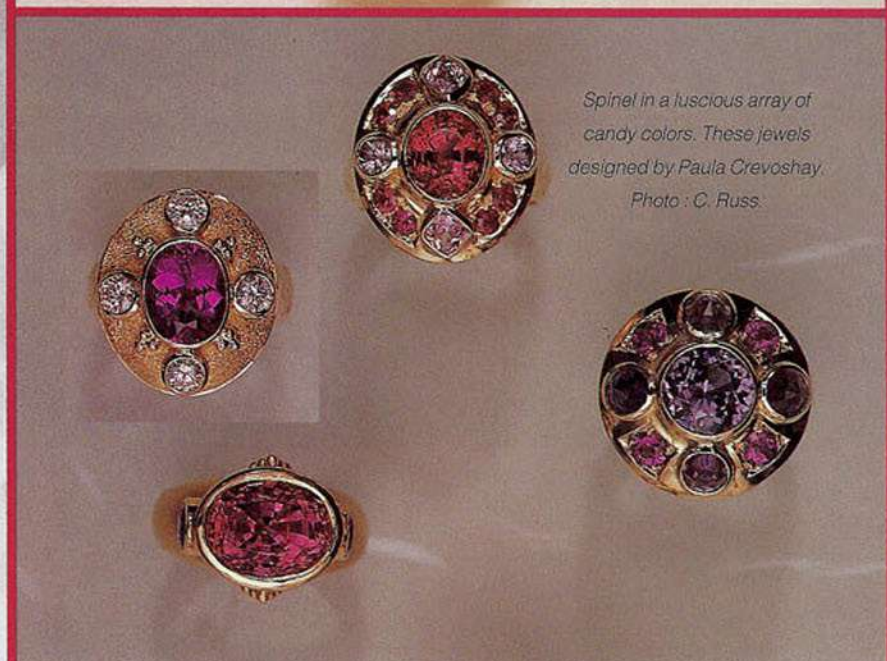
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*Red spinel in a garden of
amethyst and white sapphire.
This regal palette of color was
created by Paula Crevoshay.*

Photo: C. Russ.



*Spinel in a luscious array of
candy colors. These jewels
designed by Paula Crevoshay.*

Photo: C. Russ.

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Q. Which color of spinel is best?

A. Choosing a gem is like choosing a mate: what moves one person may not move another. Nevertheless, there are trade prices that correspond to certain colors. Size, clarity

and cut being equal, the purest vivid reds bring the highest prices. Add orange and/or brown, and the price decreases. Pink, which is actually a light red, will decrease the price from a pure vivid red, though is preferred over orange and/or brown. Personally, I like my spinels to be a bit pink—similar in color to watermelon hard candy. What's also very important is that the gem have life and brightness; stay away from somber gems oversaturated in color or poorly cut.

Q. Why does a common ruby cost more than a fine spinel?

A. Some gems, like ruby, are in limited supply and very high demand, so their price is high. A fine red spinel is very difficult to find. Jewelers don't have as many requests for spinel as ruby since most consumers are unfamiliar with spinel's immense beauty. Spinel is a gem whose low price is not reflective of its beauty and rarity. But the Jeweler and consumer are catching on, and spinel's price is rising.

Q. If spinel is cheaper than ruby, why aren't there more of them?

A. A spinel will be less money than an equivalent-quality ruby, but fine spinels aren't easy to find. With gemstones, prices are set by supply and demand: low supply and high demand equal high prices, as in ruby. Low supply and low demand equal lower prices, as in the equally rare, but less expensive, red spinel.

Q. How do I know a Jeweler isn't selling me a spinel as a ruby?

A. A gemologist can easily distinguish between ruby and spinel by measuring the way light moves through the gem—it is distinctive for each type of gem. Your best protection is to purchase from a colored-gem professional who is stable in your community and has your best long-term interests at heart. JQ

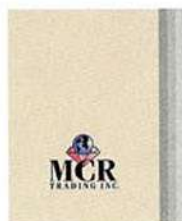
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