

Hue and cry

Colour diamonds are expected to be all the rage in Hong Kong this autumn, writes **Wilson Lau**

A diamond in natural vivid colour is so rare it is believed to occur once in every tens of thousands of colourless diamonds. Spectacular gems of rarity such as these are the top attractions at the autumn jewellery auction season in Hong Kong.

At the Sotheby's Hong Kong auction in October, an 8.41ct internally flawless fancy vivid purple-pink diamond, mounted on a ring by Sotheby's Diamonds, sold for a world-record HK\$137.88 million. Strong bidding was also seen for a 3.32ct emerald-cut internally flawless fancy vivid blue diamond and diamond ring. It went to a private Asian buyer for a whopping HK\$41.56 million.

Many diamond aficionados around the world are expected to be holding their breath as an exceptional 3.39ct fancy vivid blue internally flawless diamond, set in a ring by Moussaieff, goes under the hammer at the upcoming Christie's Hong Kong auction later this month.

It is estimated that it will fetch between HK\$35.5 million and HK\$50 million.



Orange sapphire and diamond 'Fujiyama' bangle by Marina



Tourmaline, diamond and onyx 'Cristina' torque necklace by Marina B

Sotheby's auctioned this 8.41ct internally flawless fancy vivid purple-pink diamond.



Sapphire and diamond ring



Diamond and sapphire 'Claw' dress ring by Marina B



Ruby earrings

There will also be a stunning ring with a 2.09ct fancy red diamond at an estimated price from HK\$28 million to HK\$38 million.

Natural fancy coloured diamonds of such superlative quality and rarity have traditionally been offered at auctions in London, New York and Geneva. The increased availability of these diamonds at Hong Kong auctions underscores the city's growing importance in the international auction market.

Terry Chu, director for China and Southeast Asia and deputy head of the jewellery department at Sotheby's Hong Kong, thinks the Hong Kong market has surpassed New York and is on a par with Geneva. "The quality and rarity of the lots helped attract strong bidding."

Jadeite items, for which Chinese gem enthusiasts have traditionally had an affinity, were also of great interest to buyers at a Sotheby's auction. A jadeite Guan Yin ornament fetched HK\$14.44 million.

"It's probably the first jadeite ornament that exceeded HK\$10 million at an auction," she notes. "We are glad to see European buyers put in bids for jadeite items."

Sotheby's jewellery auction in Hong Kong in October yielded close to HK\$600 million. Despite the antigraft campaign in full swing on the mainland, Sotheby's customers from the country were not affected. "Added to that is the strong presence of international buyers," Chu says. "The overall atmosphere at the Hong Kong auction remained the same [as before]."

In addition to the fancy vivid blue diamond, other star lots at Christie's Hong Kong upcoming Magnificent Jewels auction include a rare 10.10ct Burmese Pigeon's blood red ruby and diamond pendant, by Cartier, and a superb pair of 4.25ct and 4.18ct Burmese Pigeon's blood red ruby and diamond ear pendants.

Vickie Sek, director and head of Christie's Hong Kong



Bidding proceeds for an 8.41ct vivid pink diamond, which sold for a record HK\$137.88 million. Photo: AFP



Bonhams unveils 'The Future of Auctioneering'. Photo: Nora Tam

jewellery and jadeite department, expects strong bidding for the top lots at the upcoming auction. Demand from mainland buyers has remained strong. "At the auction held in May, we ran out of seats for our buyers in the packed auction room," Sek says. "We also saw spirited bidding via phone and internet, with strong, consistent bids throughout the auction. Even as the auction was drawing to a close at 8.30pm, one-third of the room was still filled with serious bidders vying for the last lots."

This month's auction by Bonhams Hong Kong features

a rare collection of 16 D-colour, flawless and internally flawless "Hearts and Arrows" diamonds from 1.16ct to 4.49ct. Most of the stones are of type IIa, which means they are chemically pure. "To my knowledge, only three similar collections were sold at auctions worldwide in the past 10 years," says Graeme Thompson, director of jewellery for Bonhams Asia. "These are big attractions for buyers in Hong Kong, mainland China and Asia ... many mainland Chinese appreciate the investment value of these top-quality diamonds. Expectations are also high for

a jewellery collection designed by Marina B, the granddaughter of Sotirio Bulgari, founder of the Italian brand.

He adds: "Marina B designed jewellery for only 20 years ... these are rare items."

"Educated Hong Kong buyers understand the brand's rarity, value and quality of designs ... there is also a significant amount of endorsement by international celebrities with whom mainland Chinese identify. We are presenting something different, of unique heritage and superb craftsmanship to the Chinese market."

AUCTIONS



Necklace by Van Cleef & Arpels

Dazzled by rarest blue

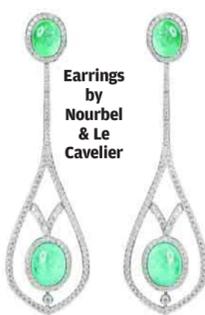
Francesca Fearon

Theo Fennell calls them the Marilyn Monroe of stones because they had a short and stellar life. Wendy Yue says their turquoise colour reminds her of the Blue Grotto in Capri. These jewellers are talking about the Paraiba tourmaline. This stone is a million times rarer than diamonds, is highly sought after by jewellers and connoisseurs, and comes with an extraordinary tale of discovery.

Before the 1980s, nobody knew of the existence of this coloured tourmaline and, perhaps, if it weren't for gem prospector Heitor Dimas Barbosa they would never have been discovered. On a hunch, he and his team spent years digging in a dilapidated mine in the Brazilian state of Paraiba. In 1989, eight years after Barbosa began, a handful of tourmaline crystals in a neon turquoise hue were found. Rare traces of copper in the tourmaline creates the colour that has captivated jewellers. The discovery triggered a mining frenzy, and within five years the hill was razed to the ground and the mine was exhausted.

But in 2003, similar tourmalines were found in Nigeria, and then in the copper-rich mountains of Mozambique. Millions of years ago, before the continental drift, Nigeria and Brazil would have been joined, which might explain presence of the gem on these two continents. This new wave of blue-green tourmalines started arriving in the jewellery houses of Paris, New York, London and Hong Kong. These stones are often bigger, 5ct or more, whereas good-quality Brazilian gems, which rarely appear in the market now, weigh less than 3ct.

There was a debate as to whether the tourmalines found in Africa can bear the Paraiba name but, nowadays, the jewellery houses describe them as African Paraiba, or sometimes simply as tourmalines. Their luminous hue is popular with jewellers, complemented beautifully by emeralds in the Baia Verde necklace by Van Cleef & Arpels or enhanced with diamonds and turquoise in a



Earrings by Nourbel & Le Cavellier



Ring by Theo Fennell

sweet dancer brooch from their new Peau d'Ane collection.

Chopard, Theo Fennell and Chaumet make rings with African Paraiba stones encircled with diamonds. The gems' scarcity adds to the attraction - only one Paraiba is mined for every 10,000 diamonds.

Chaumet's parure of tourmalines and emerald-cut aquamarines appears in its new Lumieres d'Eau collection, including a hair ornament and necklace. "The best of them have an intensity of colour that is unrivalled, a sort of internal glow," says Fennell, who was one of the first to use the Brazilian Paraiba in jewellery designs, and still occasionally comes across the stones.

"I've always liked a variety of spectacular colours, but this is a special kind of blue colour, a neon blue, that you cannot find in any other stone," Yue says. She has used African Paraibas for her rings, setting them with opals, coloured sapphires and diamonds.

"It is the most magical gemstone I know," says Paraiba specialist Valerie Le Cavellier, creative director of Nourbel & Le Cavellier, adding that its hues create "this great feeling of travelling to a dreamy turquoise sea".

She has seen some large Brazilian free-cut stones over 40ct each, but says they are now impossible to find. The largest faceted stone she ever worked with was 33.72ct, but she tends to use cabochons to show off the inclusions in the stone.



Chopard's peacock feather gemstone earrings in 18ct white gold and titanium



Ring by Wendy Yue

