

what's in

lovely lodolite

Time out from clear quartzes with sparse, delicate rutile and dendrite needles. The next big thing in included quartz is stones with massive rockscape interiors.

BY DAVID FEDERMAN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Mark Lasater of The Clam Shell in Prescott, Arizona, is one of a growing legion of gem dealers who owe their survival to quartz. He entered the gem trade as an opal specialist. But when this play-of-color solidified silica gel became too scarce and expensive, he shifted his company's focus to much more plentiful and affordable quartz — starting with drusy, then branching out into included quartz.

At first, his emphasis was on the pins-and-needles varieties — clear, open-space stones featuring airy arrangement of rutile and dendrite needles as well as more bulky pencil-thick tourmaline crystals. But sensing market saturation of these delicate inclusion-arrayed stones, he added lodolite to his selection.

Lodolite is a rather comprehensive term for what dealers also call "rockscape" and "scenic garden" quartz found exclusively in Brazil. Imagine visiting an aquarium and watching fish dart in and out of huge rock formations. Depending on the mineral variety, these rocks masses can be, among other colors, moss-green, rust-red, taupe-brown, ash-gray, and jet-black.

Now imagine miniaturized sandstone formations housed in clear quartz cabochons. As you rotate the stone, you see

John Bajoras of The Village Silversmith uses lodolite, also known as "rockscape" or "scenic garden" quartz, to create stunning rings and pendants. Jewelry courtesy of The Village Silversmith; cabochon courtesy of Sierra Madre Mining Company. Photos by Jim Lawson.



Lodolite is found exclusively in Brazil and resembles seascapes or landscapes. Lodolite rough courtesy of Sierra Madre Mining Company; cabochons courtesy of The Clam Shell. Photos by Jim Lawson.

fascinating optical distortions, which only add to its visual appeal.

Lasater feels that consumers who have become quartz enthusiasts, but who find themselves in a drusy-drenched market, will take to lodolite because the stone "resembles very sparkly drusy encased in quartz." But it's drusy with many aesthetic plusses. "Drusy is usually a single-colored sheet of granulated quartz grown over matrix that is open to damage through knocking or dropping," he continues. "But lodolite has massed and multiple layers of material safely housed in clear quartz. You can find green chlorite, red iron oxide, and black shale formations. Some of these formations look like coral reef seascapes or terraced plateau landscapes."

If you are not yet familiar with lodolite, that is highly understandable. It is nowhere near as abundant as rutilated quartz — at least not yet — and requires considerable trimming to make gem-ready. But at prices around \$2 per carat or \$3-\$10 per gram, you are talking about buying large sizes for very little money. "It's amazing to think you can buy a behemoth of a stone, one that looks like no other, and is very durable, for \$40 to \$50 per piece," Lasater enthuses. ○

