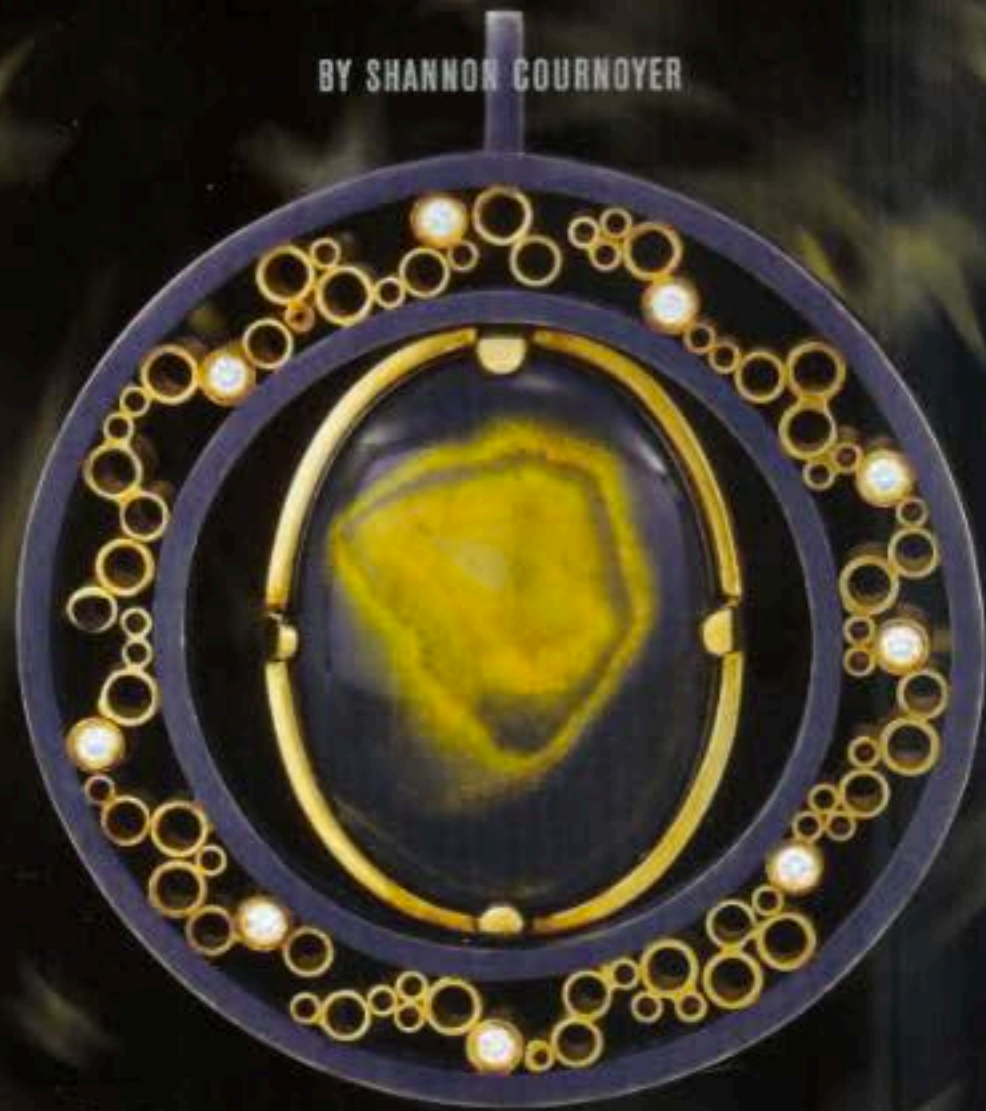


SOLAR POWER

Designing around an unusual jasper cabochon

BY SHANNON COURNOYER



How do you approach designing with a gemstone so new it's virtually unnamed? *MJSA Journal* asked three jewelry designers to take the challenge with this jasper—a jet black stone with a bright yellow splash in the center, which is currently being called “sunflower,” “sunburst,” and “mustard” jasper, among other names. Coming from varied backgrounds and aesthetics, the designers took, not surprisingly, very different approaches.

The oval cabochon shape of the stone isn't unusual, unless one isn't accustomed to using cabochons in their work. But the color is. “Nothing competes with its perfection of yellow,” says John Bajoras of Sierra Madre Mining Co. in Gloucester,

Massachusetts, the importer and supplier of the stone. “This is one of the truest Crayola yellows that I could imagine. It's striking against black.”

Bajoras first saw the stone in the U.S. five years ago, then searched for it on one of his buying trips overseas. He was initially told that it was coming from Myanmar, but later learned that it hails from Indonesia. Though he frequently travels to this part of the world, he has yet to pinpoint the exact source of the jasper. He purchases rough material in Indonesia and has it hand-cut on a lapidary saw to his specifications.

At about 30 mm long by 22 mm wide by 5 mm deep, the jasper inspired three unique approaches.

SEEDS OF MEANING

Bajoras is not only the stone's supplier, but also one of the designers who accepted the challenge to design around the jasper. Owner of Village Silversmith, a jewelry retail store with multiple locations on the North Shore of Massachusetts, Bajoras is no stranger to unusual stones.

“Diamond work was kind of a nightmare for me,” he says. “I'd think, ‘Okay, I've got round stones.’” But the shape and color of stones like the jasper featured here speak to him. “Every one is suggestive,” he says. “The stone itself is beautiful. You have to be careful what you do for design; it doesn't need much.”

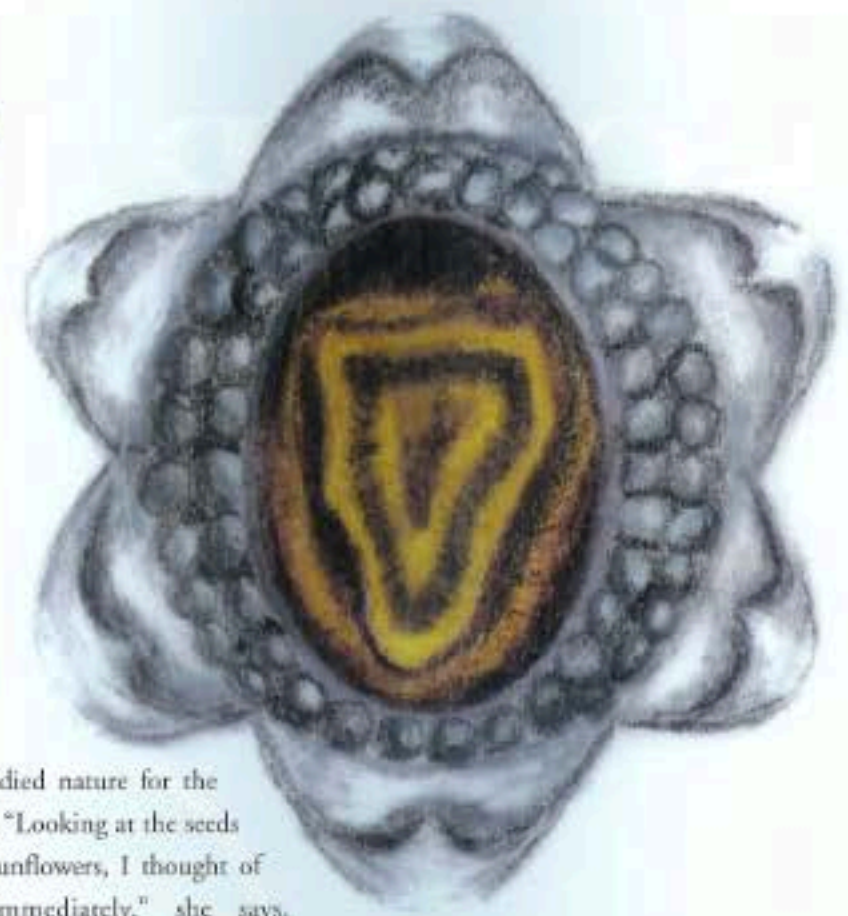
Bajoras came to the challenge with another edge: He's been working with this variety of jasper for years, which he prefers to call “sunflower” jasper. Perhaps that explains the literal interpretation of the stone in his design, a sunflower pin.

“I like my pieces to have some underlying meaning to them,” he says, adding that he and Village Silversmith designer Alyssa Cataldo worked together on the project.

Cataldo studied nature for the design's details. “Looking at the seeds in the actual sunflowers, I thought of granulation immediately,” she says, adding that she envisioned the granules with a dark patina to contrast with the silver of the rest of the piece. They would closely surround the jasper to work together as the center of the flower.

To make the piece look and feel organic, Cataldo opted for three-dimensional petals in a slightly abstract shape. “The petals will have a brighter silver look that will complement [the dark stone].”

Bajoras suggested a unique twist to the pin: It's not only a pin/pendant, but also a freestanding piece of art. When extended, the two pins on the back enable it to stand freely on a surface. “This is just another



way for the design to speak for itself,” says Cataldo. “The stone is the centerpiece, and, like in most of our work, the design revolves around the stone.”

Village Silversmith plans to have the piece made, a process that starts with design and prototyping in the shop, followed by contracting production to the company's partners in Bali.

“They do such amazing work with granulation in Bali,” says Bajoras. “It will look like the seeds of a sunflower, and that special detail is what will make it a unique piece of jewelry.”

