

# Treasure from the Sierra Madre

**A father and son team have discovered exceptional new Mexican agate**

By Helen I. Driggs, Managing Editor

Agates are enticing. Typically, they are the stone that draws in the casual observer and converts them into a rockhound. The mesmerizing patterns, colors, and texture of agate are fascinating works of Mother Nature's paintbrush. Once drawn in, many embark on a lifelong obsession with the agate: first as enthusiast, then collector, lapidary, and perhaps even miner of rough. For father and son team George and John Bajoras, of Village Silversmiths, a group of rock and lapidary Shops in Massachusetts, that's precisely the path agate has led them to follow.

After 35 years in the lapidary business, George and John began to mine a claim in north central Mexico. In September of 2005, they began a partnership with Armando Barrera, a native of Casa Grandes, Mexico, and formed the Sierra Madre Mining Company, leasing the land together. Armando and his brothers have been cutting stones for about 40 years. John told me, "Our claim in the Sierra Madre is about 400 miles from where laguna agate used to be. It's in north central Mexico in an area near historic

**Above:** Sunset in the Sierra Madre — a Bajoras family photo from their claim in north central Mexico. Sierra Madre agate cabochons cut by George and John Bajoras, of Village Silversmiths in Massachusetts. Photo by Todd Murray.

**Right:** A vein of Sierra Madre agate reveals its potential when wet. **Far right:** Agate rough, fresh from the field. The exciting colors coming out of the claim include ochre, red, yellow, lilac, purple and blue. Deposits are both nodules and massive. Photos courtesy John Bajoras.



**Right:** John Bajoras and one of his miners doing the dirty work of sorting through rubble and rough along a vein.

**Below right:** George Bajoras with a particularly nice hunk of Sierra Madre. Photos courtesy John Bajoras.

Mexican agate mines." Located approximately 150 miles south of El Paso, Texas, the claim is nestled among its namesake Sierra Madre mountains. In an area of about a thousand square acres of flatland between two mountains, the miners are finding exceptional material in a wide variety of colors, including red, yellow, and pink, as well as a fine and unusual purple.

What is remarkable about the claim is the wide variety of rough they are pulling from the ground. John says, "There are so many types of agate there because it has a really different geology. The stone is both in massive veins and nodules. We follow whole seams — some go to over 200 feet. You can see from one hole where the agate is red and black with quartz over to another hole and the seam there, it might be lavender and blue."

Deposits are being found both at or near the surface, and to date, as far down as 25 feet. "This claim offers an exceptional quantity of choice agates; in one 10-day period, we recovered over 10 tons of material! Most of it was A to B grade rough in two very distinctive colors." John added, "The surface of our mining claim is littered with agates, jaspers, and quartz. The first time I saw it, I thought it looked like a rock shop exploded! We're calling it Sierra Madre agate as a sign of respect for where we are pulling it from. And, we want to show people we aren't destroying the environment. Our workers are happy and paid well."

As lapidary artists, Village Silversmiths have cut and polished some of the rough. At presstime, they were planning to offer it to the public for the first time at the Colorado Mineral and Fossil Show in Denver, in September. Both rough material and finished cabs, spheres, eggs and finished jewelry are available. All of the finished jewelry was designed by Village Silversmiths and produced by Ambreeze Co.

John was excited to provide *Lapidary Journal* with the first peek at this beauti-



ful agate. He added, "This will be limited batch material. We're cabbing our two big colors and will have both rough and cabs in Denver. My father and I have read *Lapidary Journal* for over 35 years. It was all that we learned in reading our favorite magazine that has led us from hobbyists, to professional lapidarists and jewelers, and now to mining our own rough." ♦

For more information about the Sierra Madre Agate claim, contact John Bajoras at Village Silversmith, 138 Main St., Gloucester, MA, or e-mail [neyla@villagesilversmith.net](mailto:neyla@villagesilversmith.net).



**Right:** Finished jewelry of sterling and Sierra Madre agate. The pieces were designed by Village Silversmiths and produced by Ambreeze Company. Photo courtesy John Bajoras.

