

How one man's passion for gems led to a collection that rivals those of royal families.

By Kimberly Tait

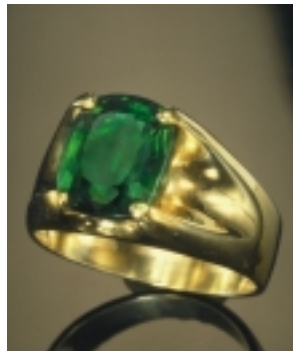


Photos by Erica and Harold van Pelt Photography

Romancing the Stones

On a 9th-grade school trip in 1957, Michael Scott saw his first computer—a state-of-the-art vacuum tube IBM 650 model—at the University of Florida. The first rule his class learned was “You may not wear jewellery, especially rings” while working with computers, because rings could dent the edges of the punch cards used at that time and jam the machine. This rule stuck with Scott, who went on to become the first president of Apple computers. Throughout his career he never wore a ring. It wasn't until many years later, when punch cards were a thing of the past and he was retired, that Scott finally decided to buy himself a nice one.

Buying his first ring sparked Scott's passion for the world of gems, where science, business, and beauty converge.



Demantoid Butterfly Brooch

Opening spread: Made from a matched set of 330 demantoid garnets from Urals, Russia, and 472 diamonds. The unique titanium mounting makes the brooch lightweight at just 28 grams.

Scott's Ring

Top: The first tsavorite ring in Michael Scott's collection—bearing the 7.81 carat genuine tsavorite replacement stone.

Ice Cube

Bottom: A cubic natural diamond crystal weighing 156 carats. Ghana, West Africa.



He settled on the idea of a green stone, but emeralds—the most popular of green gems—are expensive in the size he wanted and prone to cracking if struck. Instead he chose a tsavorite garnet, and asked a local jeweller to ship in three stones for him to examine. Before making the purchase, he asked for a third-party certification to confirm that what he was buying was indeed a tsavorite. It turned out that the stone was yttrium aluminum garnet (YAG), a synthetic mineral worth a tiny fraction of the value of the stone he intended to purchase. The experience sparked Scott's passion for the world of gems, where science, business, and beauty converge.

Today, as a private gem collector, Scott has few rivals other than royal families. I first met him this spring while preparing to curate an exhibition of his extraordinary collection of gemstones, jewellery, and gem sculptures (scheduled to go on display at the ROM in December 2008). What has struck me as I've gotten to know him over the past several months, aside from the sheer quality of the gems in his collection, is his passion for these stones and his evolution as a collector. His approach has been ambitious, but equally systematic and far reaching.

He began with a piece of "rough stone" not yet cut into a gem, to show how it would typically look when taken out of the ground. His original plan was to collect cut stones in the dominant colours they are known for—blue tanzanites, for example, or red rubies. But once he had amassed a considerable collection, he broadened his search to include the whole spectrum of colours for each stone. He was intrigued to find that—aside from diamonds—the colourless version of any stone tends to be the hardest to acquire, yet the least valuable.

The ROM exhibition of Michael Scott's collection, called *Light and Stone*, will feature among other things, a range of his emeralds from around the world, such as one from the famous Muzo mine in Columbia. As well, a display of gemstone giants showcases beryls, tourmalines, and spodumenes weighing in at 113 to more than 300 carats.

Aside from that first tsavorite ring, which he did eventually have made, when Scott started acquiring gemstones, he had no intention of collecting jewellery. But before long, he discovered that some of the best gems were to be found in bracelets and necklaces. So, he set out to collect a series of pieces—one item of jewellery representing every two decades over the past 200 years to show the progression of styles. Initially, he wanted to include all types of stones—except diamonds. For the price of a diamond, he thought, he would rather purchase a larger coloured stone, which interested him more. But he did end up buying

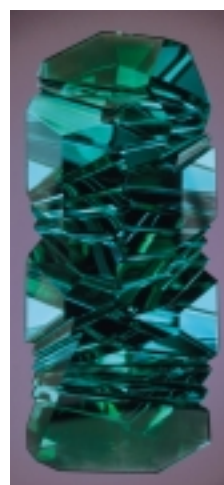
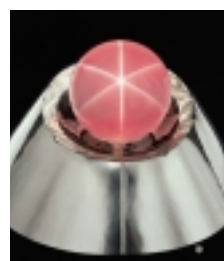


Ramona Orange

Left: This spessartine garnet necklace is made from 63 colour-matched garnets weighing 165 carats and 11 carats of diamonds.

Garnets

Above: A sample range of coloured garnets, which come in almost every shade—except blue.



Dynamic Symmetry

Top: This silver sculpture features a Brazilian gemstone, the world's largest rose quartz star. 5,500 carats. John Marshall. 1990. Seattle, USA.

Reflections & Perspectives I: Envy

Bottom: The sculpture features "chrome" bluish-green verdelite tourmaline. Fantasy cut. 114 carats. Bernd Munsteiner. Idar-Oberstein, Germany. (5 x 2 x 1.5 cm)

some diamonds, which he chose for their colour or rarity of form, such as a 156-carat diamond described as an "ice cube" because of its shape and size.

Recently Scott commissioned several artists to design jewellery pieces, or "picture frames" as he calls them, from some of his most important loose stones. One stone, the Queen of Kilimanjaro, is thought to be the world's largest faceted tanzanite crystal. Now mounted in a white-gold tiara with 803 garnets and 913 diamonds, it is one of the show's highlights. Another dazzling stone is an 83-carat cabochon emerald known as the Treasure of Gachala. Originating from Coscuez, Colombia, the stone has been set in a bracelet of diamond and palygorskite—an opal-like mineral from Mexico. And then there's the Ramona Orange necklace, which consists of 63 colour-matched spessartine garnets, with 11 carats of diamonds that set off the garnets' intense orange. One of the most spectacular pieces, which Scott acquired just recently, is a hefty gold man's cuff wrought from over a kilogram (more than 2 pounds) of gold. Never seen by the public, it features a 233-carat blue Sri Lankan cabochon star sapphire set with more than 1,000 carats of blue moonstone cabochons.

Many other stunning pieces will be on view. One case will display a series of gem-encrusted butterflies in myriad colours and styles, from an antique diamond-and-ruby pin to a demantoid garnet butterfly with 330 garnets and 472 diamonds mounted in a unique titanium setting (so the brooch wouldn't weigh down its wearer).

Faceted gemstones and gems set into jewellery are surely works of art, but as Scott's appreciation for gems deepened, he developed an interest in precious stones that are themselves carved into artworks. In that vein he has acquired numerous carvings and sculptures from the renowned gem-carving villages of Idar-Oberstein in southwestern Germany. While no one knows how long the craft tradition has persisted in these twin German villages, some believe it may date back to Roman times. One of the first and most striking pieces visitors will see upon entering the *Light and Stone* exhibition is *Repose*, an Idar-Oberstein quartz carving of a young man on an obsidian base with 18-karat gold cloth draped over his lap.

Among Scott's fantastic gem artworks are a group of pieces by Bernd Munsteiner. An extremely accomplished third-generation contemporary gem sculptor from Germany, Munsteiner, inventor of the Fantasy Cut, has redefined how precious stones can be faceted to best interact with light—in sculptures as small as a few carats on up to giants weighing more than 90 kilograms (200 pounds).

No one knows how long the craft of gem carving has persisted in Idar-Oberstein, Germany, but some believe it may date back to Roman times.



Magnolia Flower

Left: Ametrine quartz—which has yellow and purple in the same crystal—with gold. 1,250 carats. Gunter Petry, 1992. Idar-Oberstein, Germany.

Agate Starfish

Above: The deep red starfish is carved from a single piece of agate material. 9,306 carats. Gerd Dreher, 1995. Idar-Oberstein, Germany.

A Question of Blue-Green

Michael Scott's gem collection is the only one in the world with enough blue-green, copper-bearing elbaite tourmaline, known in the gem trade as Paraíba tourmaline, to fill an entire display case. And we plan to do just that with his collection when it arrives at the ROM for exhibition in December. Discovered in the 1980s, Paraíba tourmalines came from a region in northeastern Brazil, Mina da Batalha, in Paraíba State. Similar tourmaline was later found in the adjacent state of Rio Grande do Norte, but until just a few years ago Brazil remained the only supplier of this stone to the world market. This makes Paraíba tourmaline extremely rare and by far the most valuable of the tourmalines.

In the past few years, though, copper-bearing tourmaline from Nigeria and Mozambique has come onto the market. In the gem trade, stones are typically priced according to appearance. But there is considerable controversy over whether the stones from Brazil, Mozambique, and Nigeria should all be referred to as Paraíba tourmalines—because they are all neon blue in colour and have similar chemistry—or just those from Paraíba State. The ROM display will show neon blue tourmalines from both Mozambique and Brazil in a range of sizes and varying degrees of blue to blue-green. A highlight of the case, the Paraíba parrot brooch, boasts a 7-carat faceted Brazilian Paraíba crystal, with “feathers” composed of diamonds and 119 tourmalines, totalling 31 carats in weight.

Repose

Right: Nude male youth in quartz on an obsidian base with 18-karat gold. 9,000 carats total weight. Gunter Petry. 1991. Idar-Oberstein, Germany.

Blue Paraíba Tourmaline

Above left: Rough stone. 104.35-carat crystal. Paraíba Mine, Brazil.

Whenever Scott's collection is exhibited, he likes to attend the openings and ask visitors to pick their favourite stone



Scott also owns several pieces by John Marshall. He first met the Seattle-based contemporary artist and silversmith at the Seattle Opera in 1988. A fan of composer Wagner, Scott was drawn to the opera's presentation of Wagner dramas one fortuitous evening. In the opera house's General Directors Room, a couple of silver pieces from a local artist were on display. Scott asked the only other person in the room if he knew who had made them. He was face to face with Marshall himself. Scott lost no time in arranging to buy one of the works: *Growth Cycle*, a 1989 piece in sterling silver on an acrylic base. He didn't have a cheque book with him, but suggested that the head of the opera association could vouch for him since he was a regular patron.

A few years later, he bought a 5,500-carat quartz sphere that reminded him of how important lighting and positioning of a stone is in showing off its beauty. He decided a base would show off the sphere to better advantage, and contacted Marshall to discuss what type of stand would work with his crystal. Marshall told him that silver is an ideal neutral background since gold can compete with coloured stones. He wanted to ensure that using his artistic eye he could “wed” the stone with a designed base without overpowering the gem. The original globe and its new base worked so well together that over the years Scott went on to commission a total of 20 pieces from Marshall. Scott would provide a cut stone that required a base of silver or mokume-gane—a traditional Japanese style of laminating combined metals, such as silver and gold, or silver and palladium. John Marshall's merging of silver and gemstones into large sculptures is believed to be the first work of its kind. The ROM will be showing four of Marshall's pieces.

Having had a hand in encouraging the creation of such high-calibre original pieces, Michael Scott is no ordinary collector—his passion for gemstones is evident. Whenever his collection is exhibited, he likes to attend the openings and ask visitors to pick their favourite coloured stone. No one ever chooses just one, he says. They will usually say that one is their favourite, but that another is, too. The catch, he adds, is to push them, at that moment, in their current mood, to decide on their absolute favourite. It nudges them to pay more attention to the details of the stones—and to delight as he does in their beauty. When the exhibition comes to the ROM's Gallery of Gems and Gold in the Teck Cominco Suite of Earth Sciences Galleries in December, you, too, will have the chance to pick your favourite. ROM