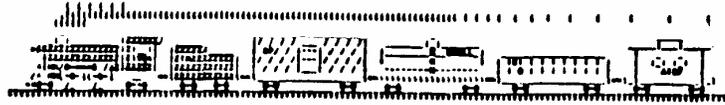




The OPAL EXPRESS

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JANUARY'S OPAL BIRTHSTONE IS RED-ORANGE OPAL

PRESIDENT'S PAGE: Happy New Year to you all. Welcome to our new board members. Harold Umberson, Ida Proue and Vick Mayo, being re-elected for a new term!

This past year has been a good one for the American Opal Society. We have acquired many new members; had a good show and added a new Chapter in Orange County. May the new year be as fruitful and make the American Opal Society more widely known and respected as the representative of opal in the gemstone world.

During the coming year, I hope we may further refine our opal evaluations on rough and finished opal so our members may be better able to judge the market values when they make purchases or sell their finished stones. The dollar falling in value against foreign currencies may cause opal prices to rise faster than ever before; we will try to keep you informed.

The board of directors will meet on the fourth Thursday of each month at 3303 Charlemagne Ave. Everyone is welcome to attend. The next meeting will be January 28th at 7:30 pm.

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN!!!!!! DUES ARE NOW DUE AND PAYABLE.
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(or you can pay at the meetings) Thanks very much.

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CHAPTER NEWS

Founding Chapter, Harold Umberson, President 213-693-7380

At last month's Christmas dinner it was announced that the election of officers would be postponed until January, so that will be our main item of business. The Christmas potluck was enjoyed by all. It was held in a new place, the Santa Fe Springs Library and everyone agreed it was very nice not to have to climb stairs! Dorothea Pattee won the opal pendant and there were enough door prizes that everyone got a chance to win something! We were sorry to hear that Sue Umberson had injured her back and had to be off work for quite awhile, but we all profited from her extra time to cook at the dinner. Remember, January 14th, 7:30 pm, Santa Fe Springs Library. (See map on back).

Orange County Chapter, Brian Franks, President 714-857-2743

Last month we had a Christmas social and shared goodies and conversation for the evening. One of the topics of conversation was the difficulties of photographing opal to bring out the true colors.

For the January meeting all agreed to bring their photographs and cameras and share their successes and non-successes. We hope everyone can be here for this. One of the benefits of Chapter membership is sharing the information we all have about opal and related subjects.

Remember, January 19th, 7:30 pm, College Park Clubhouse, Irvine. (See map on back.)

O P A L VOCABULARY

Black opal. Opal that has opalescent play of color against a grey or black background.

Cachalong. Porous and opaque opal that will absorb water quickly.

Cherry opal. Cherry red ground color. Occasionally has play of color.

Common opal. Some of this variety is not so common at all. Colors may be sky blue, lemon yellow, orange, red or green, but the opal is not very translucent and has no play of color.

Contra Luz. Opal, usually from Mexico, which shows its best colors against the light.

Fire opal. Translucent Mexican opal with red or orange overall color. *Not synonymous with precious opal.* If the red opal has play of color, it is precious fire opal.

Flame opal. Precious opal with elongated streaks of prismatic flamelike colors.

Flash opal. The play of colors in this precious opal comes as broad flashes.

Girasol opal. Water-clear opal with broad floating colors.

Harlequin. Precious opal with play of colors similar to a checkerboard mosaic.

Hyalite. Pure, transparent colorless opal that has formed as crusts.

Honey opal. Pale amber-colored opal, usually with play of fire.

Hydrophane. A variety of *cachalong* that becomes almost transparent in water except for the prismatic colors.

Jelly opal. Translucent colorless opal with play of fire, a variety of precious opal.

Lechosos or Milk opal. Opal with play of color against a pure white ground color.

Matrix opal. When there are only small flecks and veinlets of precious opal in opaque matrix, it is called *matrix opal*.

Pinfire opal. The iridescent colors are small, closely spaced pinpoints.

Precious opal. Opal that has the prismatic play of color for which this gem is noted. Without changing colors, it is not precious. *Precious opal is not the same as fire opal.*

Seam opal. Narrow seams of precious opal that has formed in fissures and cracks in host rock.

Wood opal. Wood that has been replaced by opal.

More opal still to come from South Australia

A government study concludes that Coober Pedy opal mining still has a long life, reports the South Australian Advertiser. The Minister of Mines and Energy says a government-subsidized exploration program and six years of geological tests show substantial potential for more opal fields in Coober Pedy.

The report lists areas with high and low potential for opal discoveries. Maps showing prospective areas and lineaments, interpreted from Landsat satellite imagery, will be displayed at the Mines and Energy department in Coober Pedy.

A similar subsidized exploration program in 1981 led to the drilling of 221 shafts. One result was the discovery of the Southern Cross field, a source of high-quality opal.

JEWELERS CIRCULAR-KEYSTONE, November 1987

SHOW NEWS !!!!

The 21st annual show of the American Opal Society, Inc., will be held September 10th and 11th, at the Anaheim Convention Center.

Theme will be "OPAL, THE QUEEN OF GEMS".

More information next month!

BE A SHOW-OFF!

Good idea, I thought while visiting the Tuscarora Lapidary Society (Springfield, Pennsylvania) recently. The chairman of the meeting had introduced that evening's "Two-minute Talks," impromptu chats where a couple of members get up and give brief descriptions of their interest in gem cutting.

A cheerful but somewhat nervous woman stood behind the lectern, describing how she had followed her husband into the hobby. Suddenly she clapped her hands and exclaimed, "And oh, yes! Now I remember what I was going to say! I love to show the stones to the children." Her eyes brightened as she focused on this thought and she grew at once more relaxed. "That is what I like best," she announced with conviction and pleasure. She continued to warm to her subject, describing how excited the children became at seeing and holding the beautiful gems she had cut. It was obvious that their delight in hearing all about the craft of "the stone lady," as they called her, added to her own love for her work.

This is true of most endeavors. As we teach and share and demonstrate our knowledge and ability in a field, we stimulate not only our audiences, but ourselves. As we explain something to others, we also teach ourselves, even if it is something we have known and understood and lived with for a long time. And when we are inspired, by a thing of beauty, for instance, we all want others too to share that sensation.

Certainly the happy, unrestrained response of a child is heartening. But the interest of an adult,

though often more reserved, is infectious too. The joy of sharing isn't limited to sharing with children, just as the ranks of potential lapidaries aren't so limited. Who doesn't enjoy the admiration of others? We all like a little attention now and then and to have our accomplishments appreciated — by interested people of any age.

While amateurs and professionals alike have a genuine interest in gem cutting, club members especially enjoy the camaraderie afforded them by membership. It's fun to show a new stone we've cut to someone who knows what he's looking at. It's rewarding to talk about how we did it with someone who understands.

Gem clubs serve their members by providing opportunities to meet people in the field and to exchange ideas with them. But a club is never a static entity. It is constantly changing, looking into new trends and offering new programs, losing some members and, if successful, absorbing new ones.

Just being there and admitting new members who happen to find the club, though, isn't enough. Many people might become interested if they knew something about it. Very few, though, will stumble into lapidary accidentally. It's up to club members to seek out newcomers. Be proud of your craft, and act it.

So show the children! Show their parents and their grandparents, too! Show off your talents, introduce someone to the hobby you love — and keep it fresh and sparkling for everyone!

Merle Berk

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF OPAL or YOUR JUNK PILE MAY BE A GOLD MINE

A given piece of rough opal can sometimes influence the gem cutter to try for a fair sized cab which, when finished, is a disappointment. Perhaps one area of the stone locks the beauty of the rest; maybe a flaw may have appeared uninvited or this area is a problem because the play of color in this portion should be oriented differently.

Generally speaking, we do not study the rough with an eye to quality although thorough examination via strong light and magnification would have revealed that a problem existed — in which case the rough could have been sectioned prior to cutting and polishing.

Sometimes we get a bit greedy and include in our layout a portion of color that inclines down and away from the principle layer of fire. This can only cause diminished intensity because the fire layer is further from the surface.

To illustrate, here are several sketches with suggested solutions:

Section the rough, study the sections, then layout and cut for the best yield.

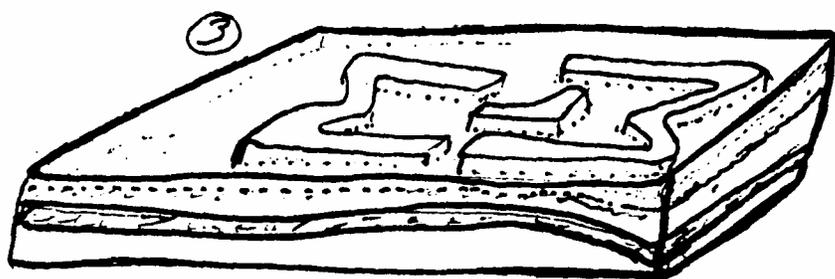
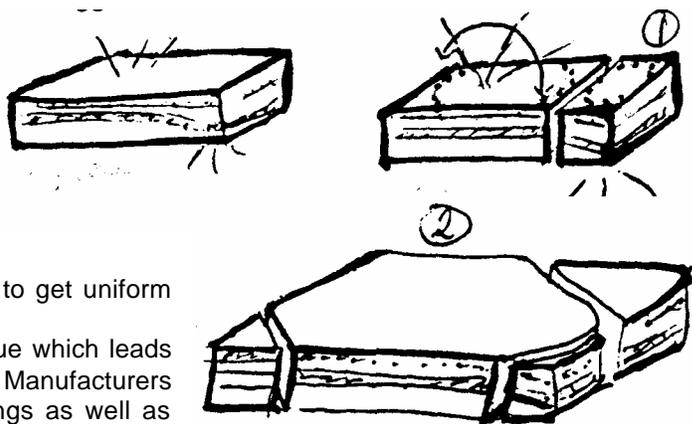
Grind away the non-producing down to the fire producing material and shape to a nice baroque or free form gem.

Use a tile snip or a small saw to remove the corners and save them for small calibrated stones. Keep in mind that if you cut for the trade the greatest demand will be for calibrated stones.

(A word of caution here: It is foolish to grind away trying to get uniform brilliance until the beauty is all gone.)

There is an ever increasing call for free forms and baroque which leads into carved stones for which there is a more limited demand. Manufacturers of exclusive, one-of-a-kind jewelry do buy nicely done carvings as well as baroque.

What we are stressing here is that you should study the rough with an eye to quality. Thorough examination of the sketched piece would have revealed that the problem existed and the rough could have been sectioned, prior to cutting and polishing. These sketches are illustrations and possible solutions to one problem but each piece is different and must be carefully thought out before work progresses too far.



Shown here is what one might do with a rough which showed irregular color stratus. Carve a monogram, perhaps, or a cameo. Or you could do a leaf or an arrowhead. The pattern might be suggested after the carver has done some preliminary work on the rough.

Many dealers in opal offer the rough for sale by putting the rough gemstones in bottles of liquid usually water is preferred. That practice prompted me to write this little bit of doggerel:

Where are you going, my pretty chunk
To market, to market I go . . . "kerplunk".
In a bottle of water I've been sunk
Else I would resemble a piece of, JUNK! ?

Certainly there is no written law against this method of showing opal for sale. And it's as good as any other way to package a product, I guess. It's true that fractures and flaws seem to disappear in water and the curvature of the bottle seems to magnify the chunks and enhance the color, but... you can see it dry by asking that it be removed and weighed dry.

Most sellers try to please the buyer. In turn, the buyer can visualize and judge the possibilities of winning a few nice gems. Whether you buy it by the bottle or by the chunk doesn't matter. You have to pay for digging, cobbing packing, shipping, sorting, grading and the cost of marketing.

There are always enough good cutters to more than pay for the bottle. Once we pay for the rough, we are on the other side of the counter.

It is up to us to sort, orient, cut and polish — and get the most out of our pocket of rough — then grade and price our gems. We become the seller, looking for a prospective buyer. When I buy a bottle of opal, I take the attitude of a butcher — I want to package everything but the squeal. And as of now, I'm trying to make chittlins out of opal dust. After cutting the goodies, don't just throw away the scrubbies — but you have to use your imagination.

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IT'S ONLY A ROCK TILL YOU CUT IT AND SHAPE IT or DON'T LET OPAL INTIMIDATE YOU!

If you were to take a chunk and remove all that is not fire, go with the contours, shape up the sharp and rugged edges to develop a nice form, you might suddenly find as you were working that you were carving. How sweet it is! Your finished piece might not be a work of art . . . but you may have a free form. Just to illustrate, here's a few sketches that indicate what you might do with a chunk.

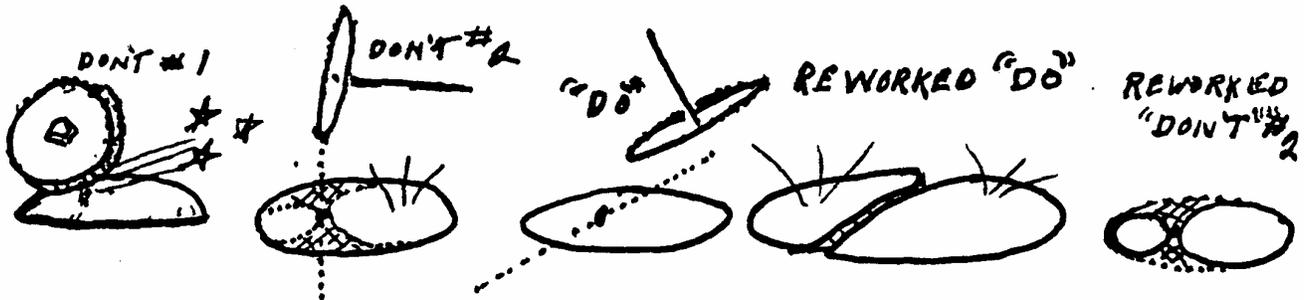
Whenever I'm talking to people I always stress a couple of basic points:

- Point 1. A cabochon must be absolutely symmetrical otherwise it is a free form.
- Point 2. Don't try to grind out a flaw from the top down if you want a nice cab.

In the accompanying sketch I've shown a stone which has a surface flaw. The don'ts are:

- 1. To eliminate the flaw, don't grind from the top down.
- 2. Don't cut the stone like a loaf of bread, but cut diagonal at the flaw to separate it.

The end results are shown in "Reworked Do and Reworked Don't". You wind up with a smaller but better stone if you follow this bit of basic advice.



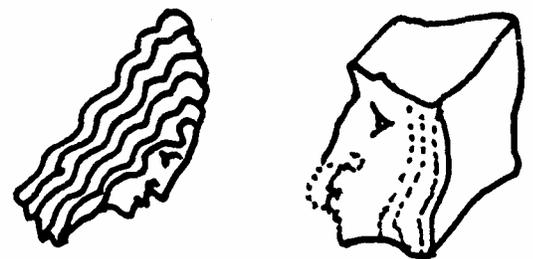
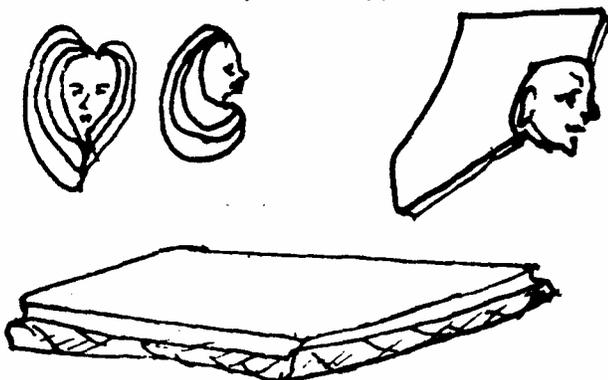
If, after cutting a stone which is generally good but has an area at one end that doesn't measure up, then it is up to you to re-cut it to the highest quality possible. It probably wouldn't sell as it is and discounting it wouldn't help much. The smaller but better stone brings a better price and will move while the other gets pushed back repeatedly. That's the way it is.

Ask yourself if you would be proud to wear a stone that you had to make excuses for. Or would you be glad to spend the money for a gold mounting for that stone. If you have to think it over, then that stone needs working over.

Below are a few examples of natural patterns to be found in rocks other than opal that I feel can be helpful to the beginner in selecting subject matter for carving. If the material can be inexpensive, then you will be less intimidated, and you must start somewhere. You really must. You see, there are a million rocks out there — and I can't carve them all. — I've got to have help. — The cab cutters are gaining on us every day.

Swirls in agate offer endless possibilities

Angular patterns with contrasting color can provide opportunities.



Use a prominence caused by the natural fractures in some rocks. Use your imagination, even fantasize a little. Mentally project your subject matter into and/or onto the material.

Look for two layers of color that contrast sharply when planning for a cameo.

Marvin Wilson



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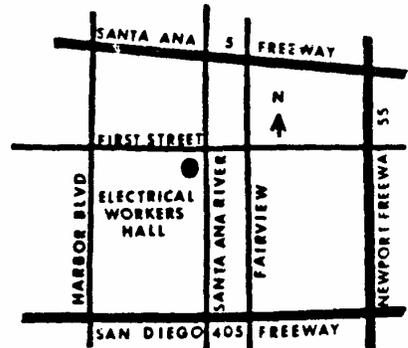
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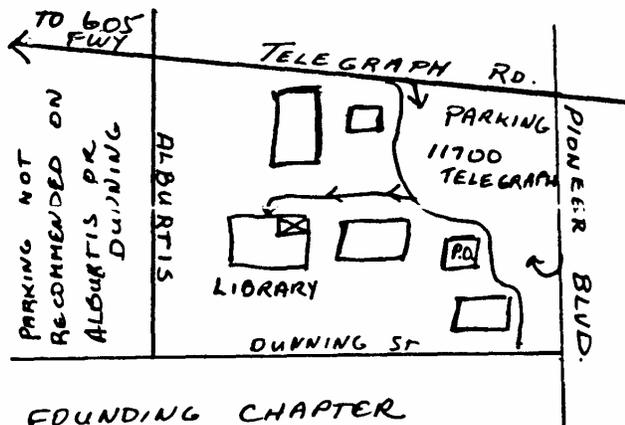
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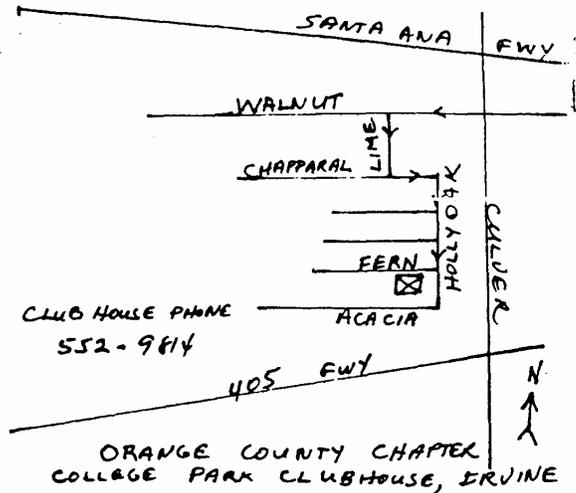
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