

THE OPAL EXPRESS

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE AMERICAN OPAL SOCIETY

April 1990

Vol. 22 No. 4

FROM THE PREZ!

Thanks to all who voted me in as President for another year.

The coming year is going to be a hard one. We are starting late to get the SHOW on the road. I'll take over the reins as Show chairman, this year, as there were no volunteers.

There are several places we are looking at for the up coming Show. From Anaheim to Norwalk Civic Center, and even a High School Gymnasium.

We need 10,000 square feet for the show, all in one room, to be successful. **Can you help?** Please do, just call Joyce at the office (213) 869-0527.

This year I 've even thought of bringing out some Jewelers to enhance our image. If they like the revised evaluation chart, (printed in this issue for your comments), and can use it for their sales throughout the year, then we are a success.

In my experience on the fields of Coober Pedy and Lightning Ridge, the colors least liked to most sought after are; Blue in fleeting flashes to sought after sharp defined lightning brilliant flashes on the low end. Greens in low end are blah, but sought after, in clear crisp sharp contrast all over the stone. Green orange is 3/4 of the way to the most sought after in brilliant colors. The most sought after by the majority of people is red on black. The more red you have in the stone, the more valuable it becomes. Red crystals run a middle of the road in value to the black. The red mixed multi colored stone is on the low end of the top sought after opals. This low end is in the white base with 50% or more color which ranges in price from \$200 a carat to \$1 , 000 for full color. Low end red on black or dark gray start at \$500 a carat to \$7,000 or \$8,000 a carat on the field. These are the rare stones, and command some great prices. I could go on to where the charts don't show all the knowledge a lot of commercial buyers have, but this gives you an amateur's starting point.

Everyone who has used the chart over the years, usually over price the values, because no one said how much color and brilliance shows on the stone. If you deduct these values as presented in the paragraphs following the chart, you come close to the sales values you see in the stores.

If this makes the charts easier to use, please re-evaluate and see if there are any suggestions you might want to add or delete to make it even easier.

Thanks to all who give of their time to keep our Opal Society together.

Dick Koch

American Opal Society

Appraisal Form

CATEGORY	VALUE RATING					APPRAISAL VALUE RATING
	1	2	3	4	5	
BASE COLOR	JELLY/ FOGGY OR WHITE	GRAY BASE	SEMI- BLACK BASE	NEAR CRYSTAL CLEAR	CRYSTAL CLEAR	
FIRE COLOR	BLUE GREEN	GREEN	RED GREEN	MULTI- COLOR	RED MULTI- COLOR	
INTENSITY	VERY LOW	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	VERY HIGH	
APPRAISAL VALUE RATING						

APPEAL FACTOR	MARKET RATING						APPRAISAL APPEAL RATING	
	0.5 - 1	2	4	5	10	10		20
	POOR	MODERATE		HIGH		VERY HIGH		

VALUE RATING	X	APPEAL RATING	=	CARAT PRICE
CARAT RATING	X	WEIGHT (CARAT)	=	TOTAL PRICE

Minus percentage of area on face not showing total color. (If area has 90% color and 10% blank area, deduct 10%, etc.)

No top color, only, no side 10% - 45% from side flash only, deduct 30% - 65% from total value. Top color flash (where little or no color is showing on sides) deduct the total value depending on the degree of color absence.

EXPLANATION

We list three categories of characteristics. Each is divided into five factors that affect value. Base color is the background color and white base or jelly (foggy) has a value of 1. A stone with this characteristic and value would be entered as 1 in the right hand column. Stones exhibiting any other color have a numerical value for that factor.

Fire colors refers only to the color flakes or sheets when examined under incandescent light. (Note: Fluorescent light is not recommended for evaluating opal). The lowest value, 1, is used when the two colors, blue and green, are evident. When the full spectrum of colors is visible, it is multicolored. A fire color of 5 is used when all colors are there, But with a predominance of red.

Intensity is the inner glow or brilliance of the play of fire. Incandescent lighting is helpful, but to obtain a better evaluation of "intensity", use reduced lighting.

The values of these characteristics are entered at the right and totaled. The total is then multiplied by the "market rating". Market rating should include consideration of shape, symmetry ~workmanship (scratches, symmetry, bezel line, bevel) as well as fire pattern. Real gems will have obvious market appeal. The total obtained by multiplying appeal rating times the total of the value rating should be very near the retail price of opal being evaluated in dollars per carat weight.

This simplified Opal appraisal form is usable for 95% of the Australian Opal that is purchased or sold by the opal public. It does not apply to treated opal, doublets or triplets.

Note: 1/2 values may be used in the value rating scale as well as in the market rating scale.

Form designed by The American Opal Society, 3-25-71 (rev.) for the guidance of Opal Society members. Revised 7-15-82. Revised 3-3-90.

**FROM: OPAL ADVENTURES, by Paul B Downing, Ph.D.
The "ART" OF FINDING OPAL**

In our visits to the various Australian opal fields, we have met many miners who have found a lot of opal. The subject always arises as to how it came about that they decided to mine where they did. The answers vary. It is common that the successful miner has been mining for a number of years. Usually they have mined on several fields within a mining district and often they have mined in more than one district. Each has his pet theory as to why the opal is where they found it and there is little consistency among these theories. Yet there is one consistent opinion among these successful miners. Most miners who have made a big find freely admit that finding opal takes a lot of hard work and especially a lot of luck! Les Taylor in Struck by Lightning tells of a man who just arrived on the field and asked Lea how to find opal. Now Les at this time had been mining for a number of years and had never found anything. So he told the man to go out in the field, toss his hat in the air, and dig where it landed, which is exactly what the man did. He bottomed his shaft on a huge pile of gem opal. Pure luck.

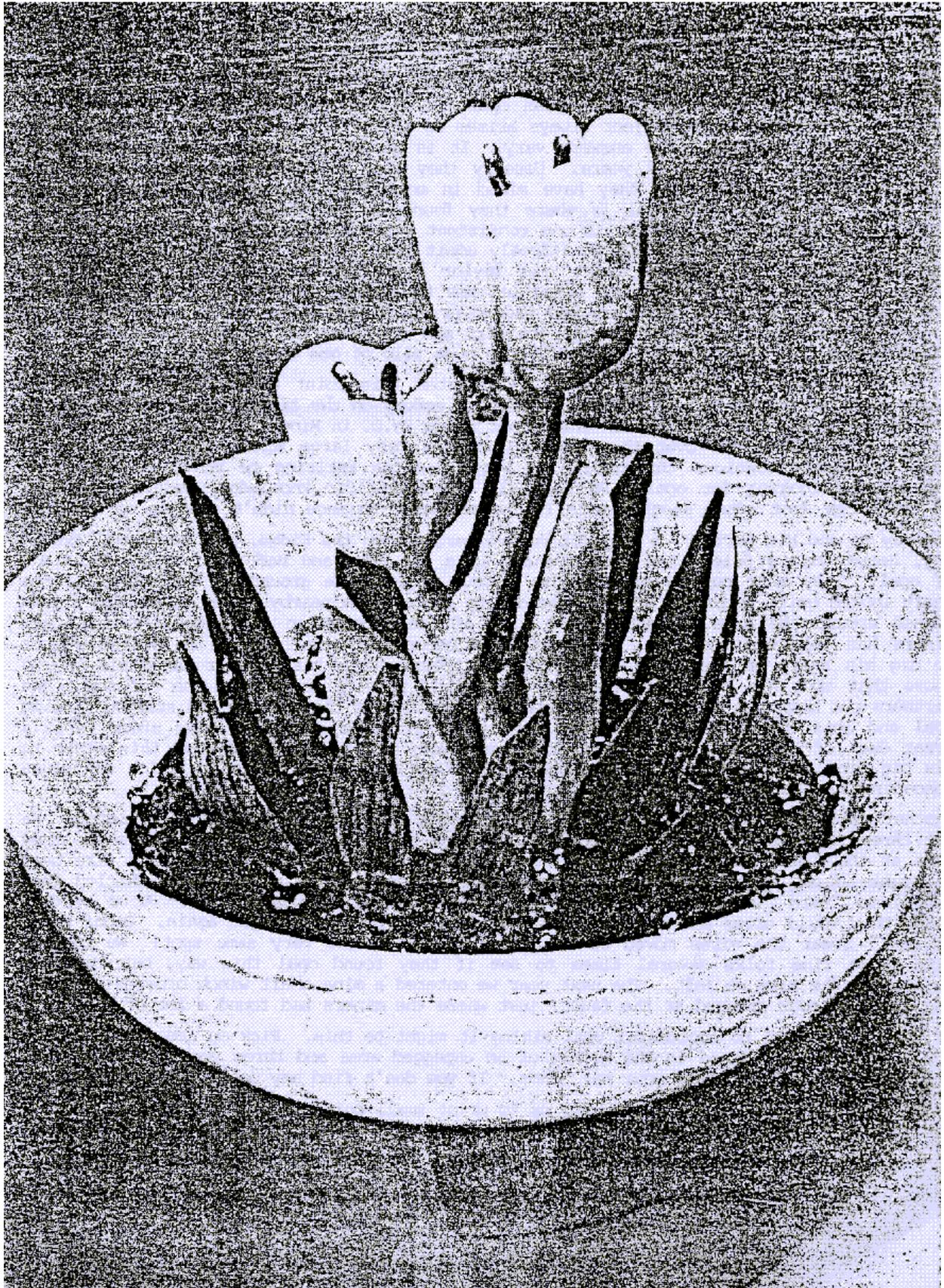
There is perhaps no case which better illustrates this point than that of a Lightning Ridge miner we met on this first trip. There is nobody on the fields who is better equipped to use science to find opal. This miner has a Ph. D. in Mineral Geology from Harvard. He has been successful over the years in finding many large mineral concentrations in many different locations throughout the world. After retiring he moved to the Ridge and started looking for opal. He used all the scientific knowledge available to him. He tried one spot after another with little success. Science didn't seem to be working.

One day he and his partner, a man with much experience on the Ridge, but no formal training, heard that a friend had sunk a shaft in a new area and had real good indications of opal. They went out to see this new site. Indeed, the ground at the bottom of the shaft looked quite promising so they decided to peg a claim nearby. Our scientific friend looked around the area. Nearby was a line of trees going up the ridge. Several old miners had told him that opal is often found under such tree lines. He picked a spot to dig his shaft in the shade of one of the trees. When his partner asked him why he chose that spot his reply was that the tree would provide shade from the hot sun. The partners put down two shafts six feet apart to provide air circulation and started finding opal and lots of it only a few feet into their first drive. They have since taken a great deal of opal out of this mine. It was luck, not science, that led this miner to his big find. Yet the tree line probably signified a fault in the earth, which can cause concentrations of opal.

Another method, whether scientific or luck I will let others decide, is divining. We met three retired couples at the Bowling Club one night and as luck would have it, they were at the field we visited the next day. One man was holding two lengths of wire bent at right angles, which they had recently liberated from a nearby fence. He whirled them around to "warm 'um up", and walked with them pointing straight ahead. At a certain point they would cross and as he walked on they would become straight again. Bobbi tried it and I swear the wires moved of their own accord at the very same spot! We checked with these fine folks several times to see if they found opal this way, but they had no luck by the time we left. The next year we entered a mineshaft winch crossed a fault. The divining rods crossed at the fault, just where the miners had found a lot of opal.

If there is an art to successful opal mining it might be this. Pick an area where others are finding opal. Stand in the middle of an unpegged area and throw your lucky hat into the air. Dig a shaft where your hat lands. If you don't find any opal, get a new hat!

Thank you Paul for allowing us to print small portions of your book



Sometimes An Accident Can Change The Course Of Creation

In a many-sided venture (such as this turned out to be), it is best to accentuate the positive and de-emphasize what-at one point-seemed to be a calamitous end to the whole concept

The original objective was simply to do a carving out of a large piece of Coober Pedy opal I had been saving for such a purpose for almost 20 years. The opal showed good, even color throughout, and appeared to be fracture free. It could have been cut into a dozen or more cabochons, bit on second though... to find & good piece of opal as large as this is a rarity. To one with a yen for carving, here was a rare opportunity to do something unusual.

With that single purpose in mind, I chose to try my hand at making a carving intended to be of exhibition quality. But it did not quite turn out to be that. You will soon see how it was forced into the "many-sided" venture already mentioned.

As is good and proper when carving such costly material as good opal, it is important to utilize the material in hand as fully as possible. That means the form of design - whether it be a flower, animal life or inanimate object - should waste as little of the material as adequate carving allows. After considering objects that might be created, my "imagineering" brought me to a decision - it would be tulip plants. Simple, flowing lines and open surface areas would expose maximum opal colors.

The progressive photos show the - first rough design and consequent carving away that was done to progressively develop form.

I should have mentioned this before; one early factor that helped determine the decision to make only an ornamental carving: The large size of the original material dictated that, -without excessive waste, anything that would take full advantage of the most material would be too large for use as jewelry (such as a pendant).

Now back to the story: Things went well. The form developed with no slips, fractures or errors - to the point of smoothing and polishing. Here, after more than 25 hours of work, disaster struck - a slight slip of the polishing brush in by flexible shaft changed all my plans in a split second. The carving flew over my shoulder and crash-landed on the hard floor. My precious and once-solid piece had exploded into a half-dozen grotesque fragments appearing to be beyond salvation.

More than monetarily, my idea, precious material and effort all seemed to be a total loss.

But not all was lost.

As strong as the temptation to give up on the whole venture was in that first awful moment, I soon realized I could, by changing my ,plans, effect sane degree of salvation. Thus, common sense and a realization of an otherwise total loss took over. By reversing a common parlance to "If it's broke, fix it," I carried on.

Tedious times were the rule~ for many hours as, with the help of instant epoxy (and patience I hardly knew I had), the broken pieces were reassembled as they had been, fractured, but complete. Barring close scrutiny, the "rebuild" looked little the worse for wear. A good feeling, sure. But what now? My precious gemstone, even with hard-to-see hairline fractures and fragility, was hardly up to my idea of a quality opal carving.

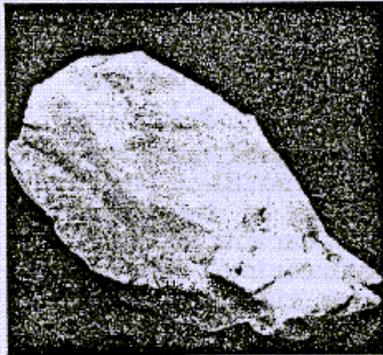
(continued on next page)

STEP-BY-STEP CARVING OPAL (continued)

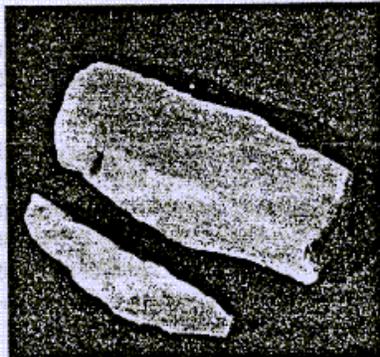
Solution: Throw away original plans, make a negative into a positive, and change my course! Fortunately, that proved not as difficult as it might have. A miniature rose quartz carved bowl bought in Idar-Oberstein a few years ago suggested a near-ideal way out.

What did develop out of the fragmented pieces, through a discreet combining of the carving with the quartz bowl and tinted sterling tulip leaves, is what you see in the progressive pictures.

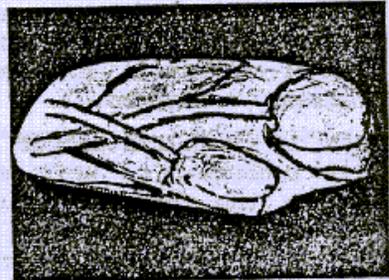
As I look back now and think how my opal calving of tulips-through a "bad break" - became the centerpiece of something that others now tell me is more beautiful and interesting than any plain carving. Perhaps they are right and it was not a bad break. After all, there is a carving there, and I now reluctantly admit that it looks better in a bowl!



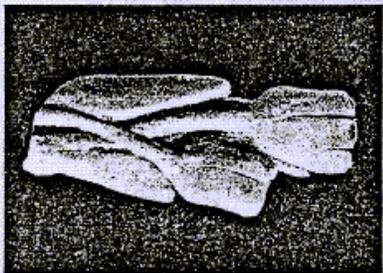
1 The original piece of Australian opal.



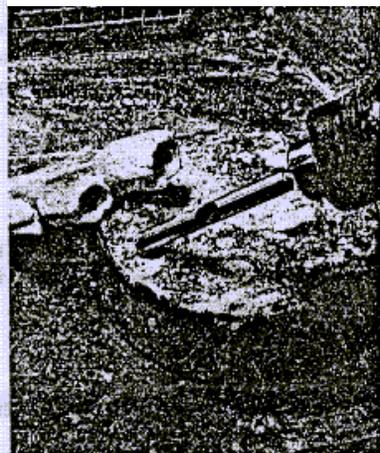
2 A fracture forced the carving to be narrow.



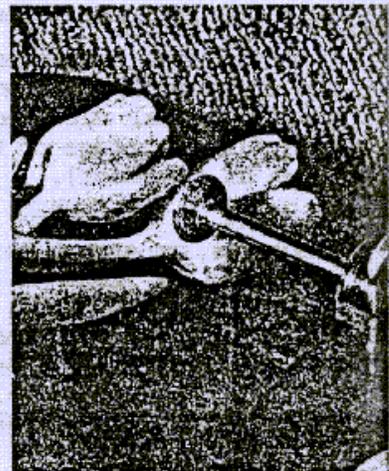
3 Carving pattern was outlined on all sides.



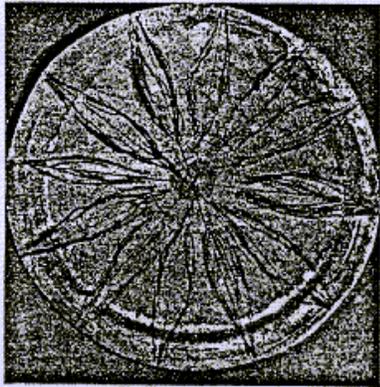
4 Carving is increasingly deepened into opal.



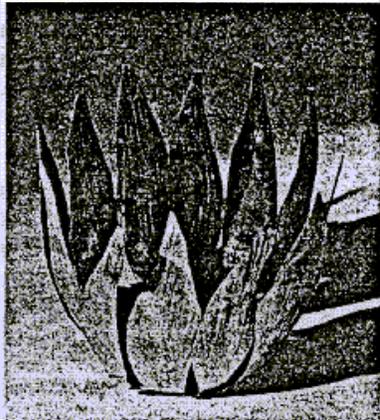
5 A diamond core drill hollows blossoms.



6 Knife-edged diamond wheel was also used.



7 Tulip leaves are drawn on sterling silver.



8 Silver leaves, stained green are ready.



9 Stamen used epoxy and dark blue enamel.

GENERAL MEETING

March 8, 1990

As planned, we started off with our St. Patrick's Pot-Luck Dinner, boy was there a lot of good stuff there' Sorry some of you missed it.

Following was the election of Officers and Board Members. Your new Officials are: President, Dick Koch - 1st Vice President, Harold Umberson - 2nd Vice President, Bobbie Gledhill - Treasurer, Bill Means - Secretary, Joyce Funk* - Directors; Bobbie Gledhill, Catherine Dotten, Bill Means, Richard Harvey**, Harold Anderson**, Ross Stambler, Nancy Means, Edith Ostrander, Harold Umberson, Dick Koch and Joyce Funk.

* Due to Jeanne Gay dropping from the Society, Joyce will be recording secretary as well as executive secretary.

** Pending notification.

Attending this meeting were two of the Society's long time members, one of which was Pat Smallwood, glad to see you wou Pat. The other just happened to be the man who got all this started in the first place, Bill Judd It was really nice to see Bill there. As we all know Bill has had his share arid then some of problems over the past years. Hope to see more of you Bill. Bill said that if there is anyone close, that he could use a little help from time to time in getting to the doctor or other errands, and it would be deeply appreciated.

Bill then told us a story of when he was a boy and helped another child that was very ill, with medication an care. Just recently, he went to an eye doctor and discovered that this doctor was the brother of the little boy he had helped as a child. Now this doctor is going to try to help Bill.

.

Thank you Bill, for sharing that with us.

And a special thanks to all who donated to the raffle table and then bought tickets too.

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

April 12, 1990

7:00 PM

Santa Fe Springs Library

The program for this meeting will be a slide show and documentary by Dick Koch on his visit to Coober Pedy and back.

This time lets see how many people we can fit into the meeting room of the Library. There will be refreshments and a raffle. See you there?

FROM THE WORKSHOP

Edith Ostrander tells us that the attendance at the workshop has been slim to none. Where is everyone? Edith says, "when no one shows up, I get very lonely."

Has everyone run out of rough? Have all of the projects started been completed?

S U P P O R T Y O U R L O C A L W O R K S H O P

(Chapter members, see you there.)

AMERICAN OPAL SOCIETY
OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

DICK KOCH, PRESIDENT (213) 869-0041
HAROLD UMBERSON, 1ST VP (213) 693-7380
ROBERTA GLEDHILL, 2ND VP (714) 828-6850
BILL MEANS, TREAS. (213) 560-3965
JOYCE FUNK, SECRETARY (213) 869-0527
ROSS STAMBLER (213) 693-6898

NANCY MEANS (213) 560-3965
EDITH OSTRANDER (213) 698-3985
HAROLD ANDERSON (213) 388-7425
CATHERINE DOTEN (714) 220-5891
RICHARD HARVEY (PEND.)

RETURN TO:



AMERICAN OPAL, INC.
P.O. BOX 1384
South Gate, CA 90280

FIRST CLASS



AMERICAN OPAL SOCIETY MEETS
HERE ON THE SECOND THURSDAY OF
EACH MONTH...AT 7:00 PM