

Rough emeralds from the KGK Group.

Jaipur- The Bejeweled City of India

By Preeta Agarwal

Jaipur, a land with a vast cultural heritage and a spirited lifestyle, is also a very important city in the India gems and jewelry industry. Named after the ruler Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, and literally meaning 'city of victory', it is fondly called the 'pink city' due to the pink painted architecture and as a mark of hospitality. But Jaipur did not become the bejeweled city that it is today by coincidence. It was a dream of the founding ruler, to establish business in his city as the land was not very fertile for agriculture. He planned the entire city and its architecture after consulting with various scholars and this resulted in one of India's first examples of urban planning, with a walled city along a grid system with the massive City Palace and an extraordinary 18th century observatory at its heart.

It was because of the Maharaja's penchant for all things fine that he dreamt of making Jaipur the biggest trade and gem cutting center in the world. He invited jewelers and artisans from all over India who came to live in Jaipur and impart their knowledge to the local residents. Talented artisans famous for many of Jaipur's iconic arts started during this period, such as Bandhani, block printing, stone carving, sculpture, Tarkashi, Zari, Gota, Kinari and Zardozi, silver jewelry, gems, Kundan,



Top: An artisan setting an emerald in jewelry at KGK Group factory.

Right: Amrapali kada with gold repousse technique and diamonds.



Meenakari and jewelry, miniature paintings, blue pottery, ivory carving, Shellac work and leatherware.

With a special preference for jewelry set by the ruler, a variety of artisans within the jewelry industry settled in Jaipur. The first ones to settle were craftsmen from Lahore who brought the art of enameling. Also invited were the royal jewelers to the Mughals, the Mookin family, renowned for their enameling in the Taj Mahal of Agra, the fabled 'takht-e-taoos' or the peacock throne and the Red Fort of Delhi with all its engravings and frescos. The Mookin family arrived with their inlay specialists and pachchikars and helped to make the architecture of the city of Jaipur more elegant with their talent. Currently, the 16th generation of the family still resides in Jaipur.

Jewelers of various royal families, like the Nizams of Hyderabad, ruling families of Gwalior, Bikaner, Jamnagar, Jodhpur, Jhalawar and Baroda were invited to either reside in Jaipur to help artisans or to take jewelry from Jaipur and establish a sales network across the country in order to help the upcoming industry flourish. From the art of thewra and enameling to kundan polki and jadau,

gemstone cutting and polishing, all were cultivated with the help of resources and favorable laws set by the ruler.

The colorful fabrics, tie and dye, and multi-colored turbans of Jaipur, make everyday a celebration in Jaipur. The vibrant lifestyle of Jaipur also influenced



Gem Palace brooch with a central emerald, polki diamonds, pearls and rubies.

these new crafts and made it a part of its own by infusing colors in all the arts. Thus, today, we see jewelry laden with various colored gemstones, gorgeous bandhani sarees, exquisite block printed home furnishings and fabrics. While jewelry was worn by both men and women in the times of Maharajas and Maharanis, today it only an adornment for women and occasionally for men on weddings. Even the Rajputana and Marwari culture present across Rajasthan calls for adorning jewelry by married women as a status symbol and somewhere it came synonymous with the size of the jewelry piece and the stones set in it – the larger the better. The tradition may not be present in daily wear anymore, but women are often spotted at weddings going all out when it comes to jewelry.

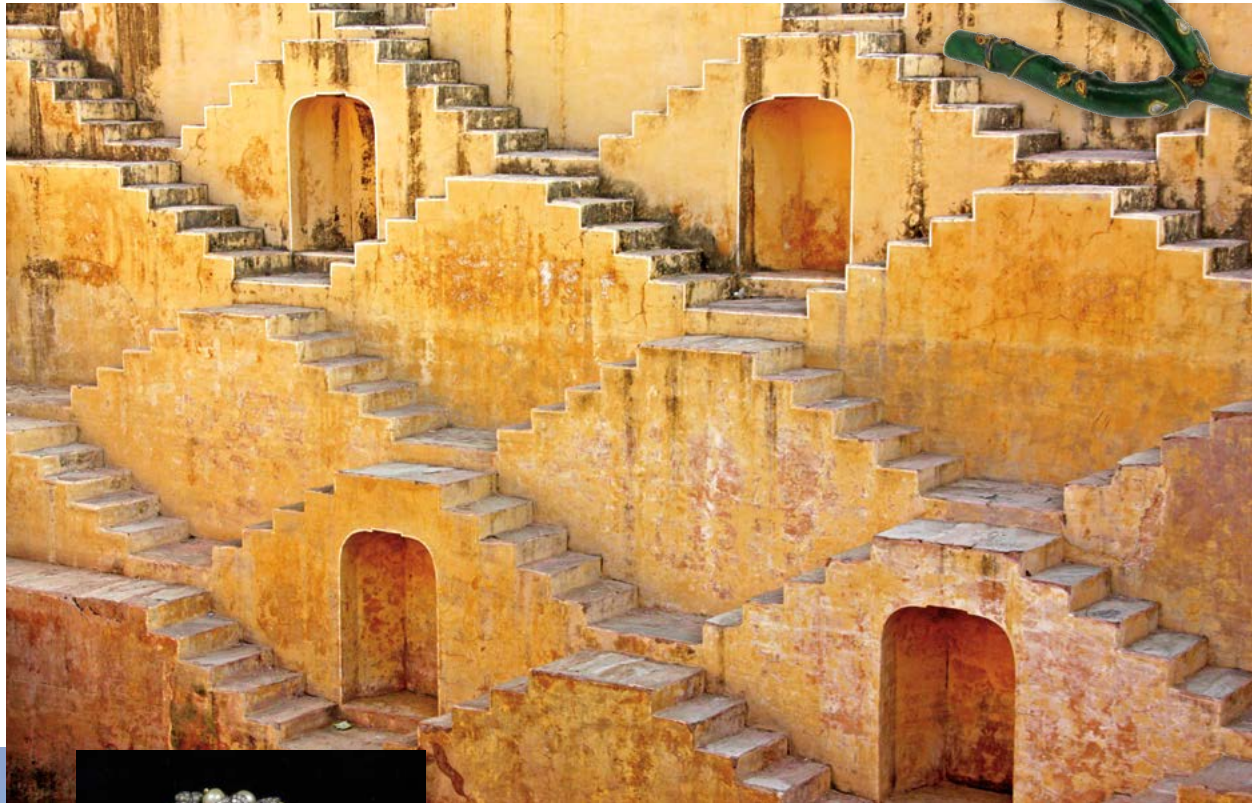
The land of Rajasthan also possesses vast resources of colored gemstones such as emeralds, aquamarine, chrysoberyl, amethyst, garnet, tourmalines, quartz and many more. This further fueled the establishment of a gemstone cutting and polishing industry in Jaipur. With the home produced emeralds that were first discovered in Rajasthan in 1973 and imports of rough put together, around 50% of the world's emeralds are cut and polished in the city, earning Jaipur a reputation as a cutter of perfection of this stone.

Today, Jaipur is one of the top cities on any tourist's list and its famous Johari Bazaar (literally meaning the 'the jewelry market') is one of the busiest streets in the city. Here you can find almost everything in gemstone and jewelry. From loose gemstones to silver jewelry to gold and kundan polka. The shops and offices of the biggest retailers, wholesalers and export houses in Jaipur can be found in the meandering lanes

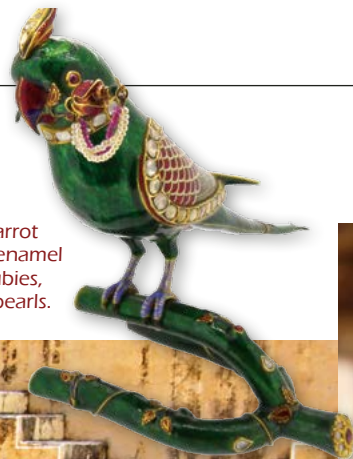


A view of the Amer Fort in Jaipur. Photo: courtesy of Gaurav Hajela

The Panna Mian Baori (Stepwell). Photo: courtesy of Gaurav Hajela



Gem Palace parrot flask with green enamel and set with rubies, diamonds and pearls.



Amrapali model wearing two traditional temple style necklaces, hair ornament, waist best, hair accessory, nose ring and earrings.



The Johri Bazaar. Photo: courtesy of Gaurav Hajela



The doorway of the Amer Fort. Photo: courtesy of Gaurav Hajela



Amrapali Navratna choker with nine gemstones and diamonds.



The Gem Palace diamond and pearl brooch created using Gemfields emeralds.

The Hawa Mahal Palace. Photo: courtesy of Gaurav Hajela



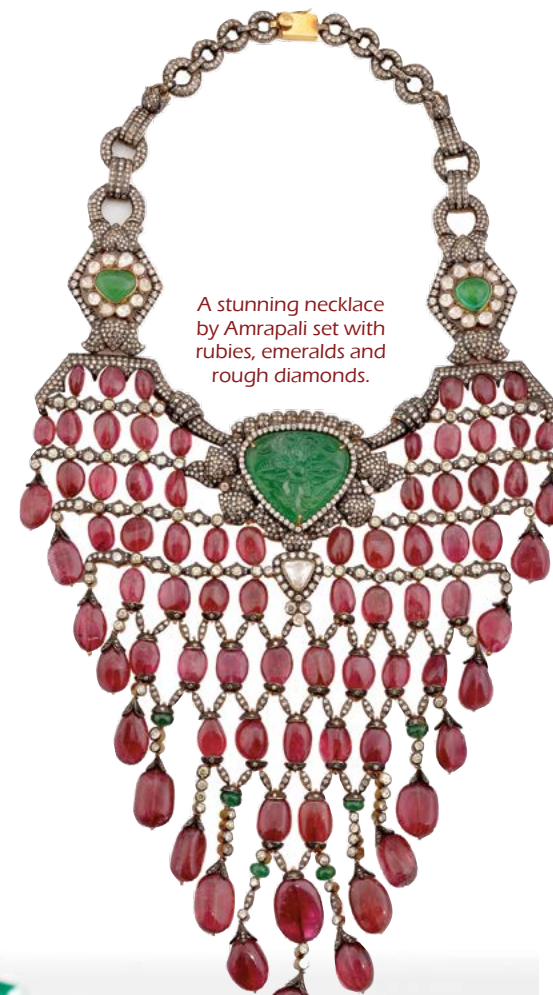
like the famous 'Gopalji ka Raasta' and 'Haldiyan ka Rassta'.

With the city growing every year, businesses have started spilling out of the walled city and today many jewelers have shifted out of the Johari Bazaar in the search for bigger spaces and the desire to create a luxurious shopping experience. The establishment of the Special Economic Zone-Export Promotion Industrial Park (EPIP) at Sitapura, has also been a blessing for the booming import-export business.

Over the years, the gem and jewelry industry has seen many changes – new cuts, avant garde jewelry styles, western influences, new techniques, automation and others. These changes have been challenging as well as exciting, and only a few jewelry houses have been able to survive the pressure. The Kasliwal's Gem Palace, the Bohra family of Jewels Emporium, Suranas, Amrapali, Birdhichand Ghanshyamdas jewellers and KGK Group by the Kothari family are a few family jewels who have continued to make it by adapting and changing with time. The city has also seen talents like Sunita Shekhawat, Sonal Sawansukha, Ankit Lodha and Abhishek Ghatiwala who have adapted these age-old crafts to modern day tastes and are making jewelry pieces that have mesmerized the entire world.

With the new generation backing their work with education, along with the crafts passed on from older generations, their work shows an in-depth understanding of trends, color schemes, fashion design and the new age practices of manufacturing, creating new standards for the city.

With a ruler's dream that started taking shape in the early 18th century, it has taken over three centuries and many generations, for Jaipur, today, with its exceptional craftsmanship and attention to minute detail, to stand out among the world's most important cities in the gems and jewelry industry. ♦



A stunning necklace by Amrapali set with rubies, emeralds and rough diamonds.



Finished emeralds, rubies, tanzanites and sapphires from the KGK Group.

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