

G e m s t o n e s

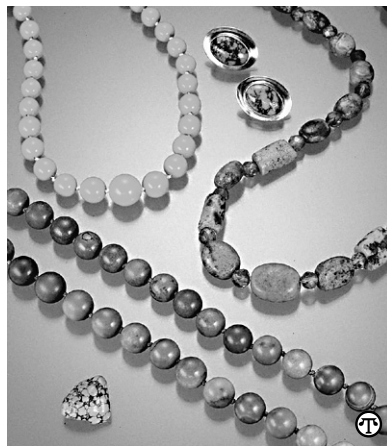
Fun Fashion Finds

Turquoise—An Ancient Gem With Modern Panache

(NAPSA)—Turquoise is one of the world's most ancient gemstones. Archaeological excavations have revealed that Egyptian royalty wore turquoise jewelry as early as 5500 B.C. Chinese artisans were carving it more than 3,000 years ago. Native American tribes have worn turquoise as a ceremonial gem and adorned their jewelry and amulets with it for thousands of years. Yet this appealing bluish gem maintains its charm, even today, as a favored accessory worldwide. Celebrities including Cher, Jennifer Lopez, Macy Gray, Jennifer Love Hewitt, and Lenny Kravitz have all been spotted wearing this timeless jewel.

The Gemological Institute of America's (GIA) world-renowned education teaches that turquoise most likely first arrived in Europe around the thirteenth century from Turkish sources. Deriving its name from the French expression *pietre turques*, or "Turkish stone," turquoise is mined worldwide, including Egypt, China, and the U.S. Turquoise is the present-day December birthstone, and is designated as the 11th wedding anniversary gift.

The Egyptians believed that turquoise possessed magical properties in that it could thwart misfortune and heal a variety of ailments. The national gem of Tibet, turquoise has long been considered to bestow health and good luck. The Apaches thought that turquoise attached to a bow or firearm increased the accuracy of a hunter or warrior.



Turquoise makes a big hit in new fashions. Photo by Robert Weldon

The gem's color ranges from light to medium blue or greenish-blue and is usually opaque. Spiderweb turquoise—a popular variation—displays veins of matrix (its host rock) in web-like patterns. Persian (Iranian) turquoise is considered the finest quality and also the most expensive, and it exhibits an intense light to medium blue, typically with no matrix. It has the ability to take on a glossy polish. Other turquoise varieties including American, Mexican, Egyptian, and Chinese are a significant source today.

Large turquoise stones are common; however the gem is also plentiful in a wide range of sizes, and is often used for beads, cabochons, carvings, and inlays. Trendy fashion designers have more recently sewn it into cloth-

ing and bejeweled purses with it. Turquoise's popularity has varied throughout time. Currently it is not only a hot item for Hollywood divas, but it's also universally liked because of its commercial abundance. Its most enduring appeal remains in the American Southwest and among those who are captivated by that region's mystery and romance, as well as by its blue skies, reminiscent of turquoise's color.

GIA's gem experts say turquoise is typically enhanced before it reaches the market and special care should be taken to maintain its vitality. For example, gem traders commonly impregnate the gem with plastic or wax to improve the color and durability, or dye it with liquid black shoe polish in a pattern imitating the matrix web. GIA recommends avoiding heat and acetone-like solvents. Perspiration, skin oils, cosmetics, and other chemicals may turn a blue turquoise to green. GIA also cautions that when purchasing the gem, one should have a qualified, GIA-trained jeweler verify that the stone is a natural, synthetic or a simulant.

GIA is internationally known as the world's foremost authority in the identification and grading of diamonds and colored gemstones. Since 1931, the Institute has worked to ensure the public's trust through its nonprofit education, research and laboratory services. For more information, visit www.gia.edu, or call 800-421-7250.