Turquoise – Birthstone for December

Persian turquoise was transported to Europe through Turkey, consequently the name turquoise comes from the French tourques, meaning 'Turkey stone'.

It is the birthstone for December and the anniversary gemstone for the 11th year of marriage.

General information

Turquoise ranges in colour from palest light blue to green and is usually opaque. The best quality turquoise is the pure turquoise colour and quality decreases with the increase of green colour and spots. Spider web turquoise is a very popular variation; these stones display veins of matrix in spider-web patterns. Persian (Iranian) turquoise is considered the finest quality – it is usually of intense light to medium blue, without matrix and can take a very glossy polish.

The blue colour is cause by copper and the green colour is caused by iron or chromium.

History

Turquoise is one of the oldest known gemstones. It was found in the Sinai Peninsular before the 4th millennium BC and used in jewellery by ancient Egyptians before 4000 BC. It has been thought of as a holy or good luck stone for thousands of years. In the ancient Persian empire turquoise was worn around the neck to ward off unnatural death. If the stones changed colour, it was a warning to the wearer that there was imminent danger. In the 13th century, it was thought to protect the wearer from falling, especially from a horse.

The ancient Aztecs in Mexico used to decorate their ceremonial masks with it and many North American Indian tribes considered Turquoise a sacred stone and used it in various types of jewellery.

Location

The finest turquoise comes from northern Iran and deposits in the south western United States have been worked for centuries by the American Indians. It also occurs in northern Africa, Australia,

Siberia and Europe.

Physical Properties

Mineral Special:	**The mineral turquoise (hydrated copper and aluminium phosphate)**
Specific Gravity:	2.60 - 2.90
Hardness:	5½
Refractive Index:	(Poly)1.610 – 1.650

Durability

Turquoise is a relatively soft gemstone and quite sensitive. Its colour and lustre tend to deteriorate with exposure to sunlight, heat or various weak acids. It should be protected from cosmetics, hot water and household chemicals.

Enhancements

Today, almost all turquoise is treated to improve durability and preserve beauty, however these treatments differ considerably. Even with good quality material, it is common to impregnate turquoise with plastic or wax. Some stones are dipped in colour before sealing and this enhancement must be disclosed. There is also re-constructed turquoise which is made from crushed natural material. Consequently, fine turquoise which have only been waxed or hardened, will fetch a much higher price.

Synthetics and Simulants

A synthetic turquoise has been produced by Gilson since 1972.

There are many turquoise simulants which include: stained compressed powders, glass, stained chalcedony, porcelain, stained howlite and stained chysocolla.