

Seeing Red at the World Ruby Forum 2017

The first World Ruby Forum recently concluded in Bangkok, Thailand, with great praise and a focus on rubies from around the world.

Ioannis Alexandris reports...

Following nearly two years of discussions and planning, the World Ruby Forum 2017 came to fruition on November 4, 2017 and featured world-renowned speakers on the red gems. The Forum's organizing committee was made up of delegates from Thailand's Department of Trade Promotion (DITP), the Gem & Jewelry Institute of Thailand (GIT), the Asian Institute of Gemological Sciences (AIGS), the Jewelry Trade Center (JTC) and the Association Française de Gemmologie (AFG).

The event was opened by Apiradi Tantraporn, Minister of Commerce, followed by reports on the Forum by Duangkamol Jiambutr, Director of GIT, and Henry Ho, Chairman Emeritus of AIGS.

AFG President, Didier Giard, spoke on the color red and its significance throughout history in gems and jewelry. A major ruby miner, Gemfields, was represented by CEO, Sean Gilbertson, who gave an overview of the large-scale miner's operations, including the pipeline that gems follow from mine to rough auction. He also talked about the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts in regard to the miners, their families, the communities and the environment.

Nay Win Tun, Chairman of the Dragon Ruby group, emphasized the importance and beauty of rubies in Myanmar. Ruby Dragon is one of the biggest miners in the country and the top tax-paying company in the sector. He explained how the narrow vertical shaft of 300 meters deep into the ground spreads out into a series of connecting underground tunnels, where small equipment can be used.

Moving to African rubies, Cedric Simonet, Chairman of the Kenya Chamber of Mines, discussed ruby deposits in the central and eastern regions of Africa with an overview of the present mining situation. A broad view of the amphibole deposits of rubies from nations such as Greenland, Mozambique, Malawi, Madagascar and Tanzania was presented by Vincent Pardieu. He also mentioned that the Greenland ruby deposit is believed to be the oldest on Earth.

CSR was also on the agenda in the talk by CIBJO President Gaetano Cavaliere. He insisted that the industry must take the lead in CSR and create a framework that enables artisanal miners to be legitimately involved in the industry, rather than the current situation that sometimes causes them to act in an illegal manner.



Speakers and dignitaries at the World Ruby Forum, left to right: Didier Giard (President AFG), Sean Gilbertson (CEO Gemfields), Gaetano Cavaliere (President CIBJO); Apiradi Tantraporn (Minister of Commerce), Nuntawan Sakuntanaga (Permanent Secretary); Rachane Potjanasuntorn (GIT Chairman of the Board); Pornsri Srirathakul, (CEO Beauty Gems); Henry Ho (Chairman Emeritus AIGS).



GIT Director Duangkamol Jiambutr at the World Ruby Forum.



On display at the World Ruby Forum was a selection of ruby and diamond jewelry valued at more than US\$151 million, crafted by a number of Thai manufacturers. Malca Amit kindly provided security for the jewelry exhibits.



At the conclusion of the World Ruby Forum, the gala dinner featured more spectacular ruby jewelry.



The day-long World Ruby Forum was attended by 340 people.

Visut Pisutha-Arnond, of GIT, offered details on the Thai government's plans to make Thailand the world gem and jewelry hub. The Ministry of Finance has adopted measures to make this happen for an industry that employs some 900,000 people. Some of the tax incentives are: exemption of import duties on raw materials including unprocessed pearls, diamonds and gold as well certain semi-finished and finished goods; exemption of value-added tax on raw materials and semi-finished goods; exemption of personal income tax for sales of raw materials.

Richard Hughes, author and co-founder of Lotus Gemology, offered a passionate guide to rubies, with excellent photos of the intense red stone. From a different perspective, Italian jewelry designer Alessio Boschi offered his take on the industry through the eyes of an extraordinary creator of unique jewelry.

Two informative panel discussions finished out the day. The first was moderated by Barbara Wheat, President of AIGS, and centered on the ruby trade and commerce. Panelists were Santpal Sinchawla, CEO of Sant Enterprises, Andrew Cody, of Cody Opal, and Paolo Valentini, President of the Italian Gem Association.



Known for his jewels that tell a story, Italian designer Alessio Boschi spoke on jewelry design and the universe of colored gemstones at the World Ruby Forum. Shown here is his *Tower of Pisa* ring.

The second panel discussion focused on laboratory perspectives of ruby certification and standards. Moderated by Pornsawat Wathanakul, former GIT director, the panel included Kennedy Ho, Chairman of AIGS; Boontawee Sriprasert of GIT; Lu Taijin of the National Gemstone Testing Center, China; Hpone Phyo Kan Nyunt, Head of Laboratory at Gubelin Gem Lab; and Hanco Zwaan of the Netherlands Gemmological Laboratory, who represented CIJBO at the Forum.

Because certification, standardization and nomenclature have been so much on the minds of many gem and jewelry professionals, this discussion elicited strong back-and-forth comments between several members of the audience and panel members.

Remarks from myself and others, including Alessio Boschi, were primarily directed at the CIBJO representative to the panel, Hanco Zwaan. We raised several questions, including the important question of what is happening to the credibility of labs since so many buyers are now demanding certificates from three or even four laboratories when purchasing high-end stones?

The problems of nomenclature were also heatedly raised by members of the audience, citing as examples the lack of standardization when it comes to classifying such colors as *pigeon-blood red* and *royal blue*. Some audience members wondered out loud what role CIBJO is playing in the standardization of nomenclature.

While no official presentation was made, videos and photos of Greenland rubies were present at the Forum. These red gems from Aappaluttoq are expected to be one of the future highlights of the industry. Also on display was a selection of opulent ruby and diamond jewelry worth more than US\$151 million.

The World Ruby Forum concluded with a lovely Art Deco-themed gala dinner attended by nearly 340 people. Sponsored by Gemfields and Greenland Ruby, the program included a musical and operatic performance by the Kasetsart University Wind Symphony.

After dinner, an auction was held to raise money for *SafeGuard Kids*, a Thai organization working to protect children from exploitation. A worthwhile ending to a worthwhile and informative event.

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