

DIKRA GEM



BEAUTIFUL SELECTION OF OPAQUE STONES carried by Dikra; all are cabachons except the standing Dalmation stone tapered half-rod and the adjacent oval shape. These pieces range from 2.44 to 6.7 centimeters wide. *Clockwise from about the two o'clock position are: Gila Monster Marble, Royal Savannah Jasper, Chinese Picture Jasper and ending with Polish Flint at six o'clock on the bottom of the image. The jeweler of today benefits from a dizzying array of shapes, sizes and colors, all cut to accurate dimensions. Photographs by Robert K. Liu/Ornament.*

It has been some six years since we wrote about Dikra Gem and their business [*Ornament* Spring 1999]. During this time, technological and global factors have had massive impact on the gem industry. The Internet has changed virtually every business, so that every economic entity has to have a Web presence; Dikra has their catalog or a wish-list type of website, which does no selling.

The February Tucson gem and mineral shows have now grown enormously, so that over forty shows and more than thirty-five hundred exhibitors provide a one-stop shopping venture for anyone in the gem and jewelry businesses. Customers tend to save their money for this winter event. Those in the trade have to be there (Dikra is at River Park Inn), but increased booth costs and having to compete with selling against their own and other suppliers means decreasing profits. The Chinese factories or suppliers also come to Tucson to buy rough; but in a form of protectionism, some countries like Brazil are reserving a percentage of rough for their own industries and raising prices for outsiders. Dikra also buys opaque rough at Tucson and overseas, which are sent to their mainland Chinese factory. Globalization and the chasing of the lowest prices, or the walmartization of the world, has meant that much of the gem and jewelry business has outsourced to Asia. More and more jewelry design and manufacturing are occurring overseas (Bali and Bangkok), so that many design houses merely buy abroad and import the jewelry here for sale. This has affected the United States by shrinking our industry and decreasing chances for newcomers to apprentice, as well as forcing some traditional Western jewelrymaking countries such as Italy to close jewelry factories (as exemplified by their Vincenza industries). Even Asia chases lower costs, moving from Thailand to Cambodia, because of price competition from India and China. In addition, after 9/11, clients in the gem business no longer buy extra inventory, but order from businesses like Dikra for ontime delivery, much like



DIANE DIENGOTT, co-owner of Dikra Gem with David Kramer, at the counter of their office in New York City.



MATCHED CLASPS of Imperial Jasper pair (2.7 centimeters high each) having a chain extender. These well-made findings are from Asian manufacturers.




DIANE DIENGOTT, wearing Opti-Visor, serving her jewelry designer clients; note profusion of trays and drawers, necessary for their extensive inventory.

automobile manufacturers' practice. This essentially forces the dealer to take the risk of maintaining inventory.

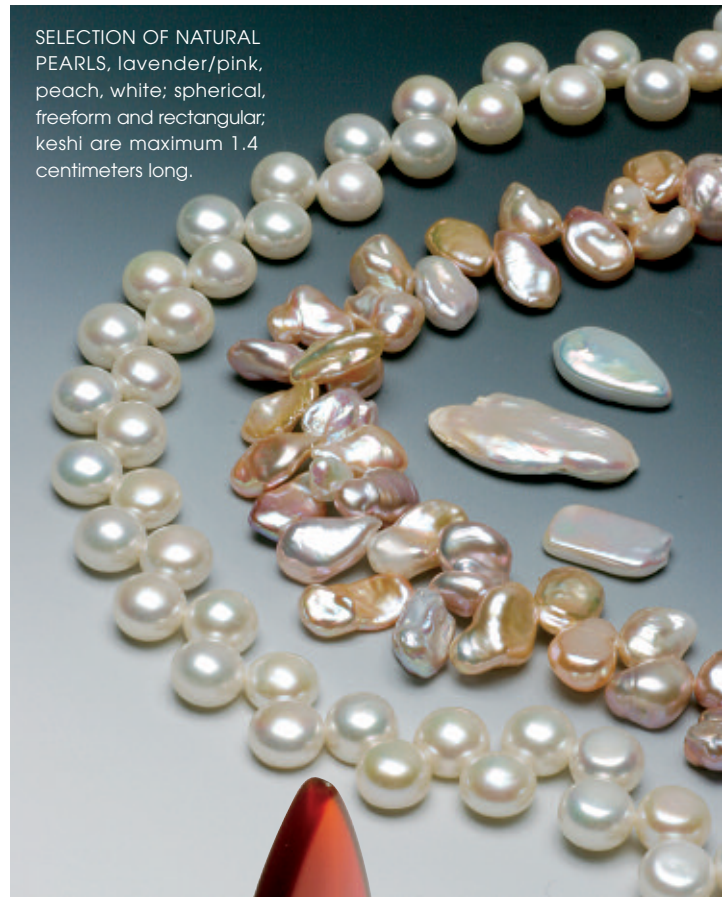
How does anyone in the gem business survive? Dikra is located in the center of New York City's jewelry business, so this aggregation brings in clients, as does word of mouth. With an excellent reputation, outgoing co-owners Diane Diengott and David Kramer and their staff treat their customers more like family. One benefit of this close relationship is feedback from clients, invaluable in any industry. With a background as jeweler and model-maker, Diengott takes care of buying, designing and quality control. She even collects the work of many of their jewelry designers. Kramer, with long experience as a gem dealer, handles the financial side, as well as most outside sales. They service schools, universities, craft organizations and the Ys. Only a small fraction of their customers buy from them at Tucson; New Yorkers prefer to buy directly and out-of-towners are sent care packages.

Part of their reaction to these tidal changes has been a shift to finished products employing stones, such as findings, clasps, toggles, and toggle or clasp pendants. They had bid some of these finding designs to a Vicenza firm, but it could not compete with Asian prices. One of the areas of growth is in the hobby-side of jewelry, especially among women who string their own necklaces. Well-made and well-designed findings, like those they carry, will greatly aid designers who want their work to both wear well and look good. The huge increase in how-to bead magazines is a reflection of the growing number of hobbyist jewelers. But Diengott senses there is a desire on the part of these women to learn more and acquire real metal skills. This may bode well for schools and Ys that teach jewelry courses. In recent years, a number of such private schools/workshops, which we wrote about [*Ornament* Autumn 1999] have closed, especially in New York City.

Their suppliers are overwhelmingly Asian (Peoples Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Taiwan), with the balance from India, Thailand, Bali and Brazil. They rate the PRC cutters as the best, especially in quality of cutting and being able to provide matched pairs of stones.

Globalization and the demand for ever lower prices are now unrelenting market forces. We wish Dikra well in the challenging world of gems. Consumers need to realize that they play a role in the future of the gemstone industry by how they value quality, service and the possible fate of their own future careers. 

Author Robert K. Liu is Coeditor of *Ornament*.



SELECTION OF NATURAL PEARLS, lavender/pink, peach, white; spherical, freeform and rectangular; keshi are maximum 1.4 centimeters long.



CONES, DROP AND POINTED TONGUE SHAPES of green serpentine, red jasper, red aventurine and carnelian, 1.6-3.5 centimeters.