

## Factors determining the value of all types of Opals

**The Brilliance** of colours is of paramount importance – the brightness of an opal is directly related to price.

**The Patterns** of colours when combined with brilliance may increase value many times.

**Colours:** the number of different colours affects price, although this rule should be used with great care. An opal with all the colours of the spectrum is not always more valuable than one displaying red/blue or green/blue alone, because the major determination of value is brilliance and pattern.

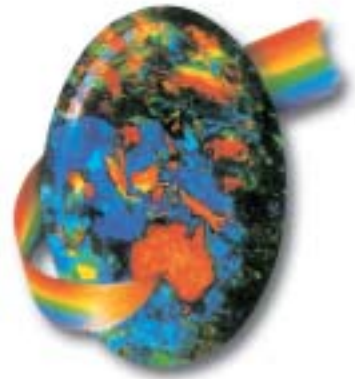
**Shape:** usually cut *en cabochon*; a stone with a domed surface will be more valuable than a similar stone with a flat surface. Opal which is too thin could fracture on impact. While oval stones may show a great demand, boulder opals often cut in free shapes can lend themselves to more distinctive designs.

**Marks:** most opals, particularly black, have sand in the back of the stones. This usually does not affect value. However, marks or cracks that are fairly noticeable in the face of the stone will drastically affect value.

## Looking after your opal

Although opals are a magnificent and unique gem, they do not have the resistance to breaking or scratching that diamonds or sapphires have. If you protect the stone from heavy blows, and abrasive materials, and don't subject it to extreme sudden heat changes, your opal should last forever.

If you have an opal doublet or triplet, never immerse it in detergent (and preferably not even water), as this may break down the adhesive quality of the glues that have been used and cause separation (or 'lifting').



## Opal – an investment

Opal production has decreased over the last decade. Demand has risen. More people are working the opal fields with greater mechanisation. Opal is like other resources – we are exhausting the existing known supplies and hoping new strikes will be found. The mining of opal is done by individuals or syndicates – no large companies are mining at any of the fields. Stockpiling of the gem therefore cannot occur; this means that prices are a true reflection of market demand.

### Why you should buy your opals from a JAA jeweller

- ◆ Knowledge of the opal industry and the nature of opals requires years of extensive study. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that you purchase your opal from a reputable jeweller, one that you can trust.
- ◆ Established jewellers prize their good reputation.
- ◆ It is important to know the company you are dealing with. Ask questions. Be confident of returning for advice and service in the future.
- ◆ A JAA jeweller can explain why opals vary in price and advise you on the best stone to suit your needs.
- ◆ You can be assured of professional service and specialist honest advice.



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With compliments from your JAA jeweller

This brochure has been prepared by the Jewellers Association of Australia (JAA) with the assistance of Andrew Cody, Tony Smallwood and Dr. Grahame Browne.

Photographs courtesy of Cody Opal (Australia) Pty Ltd, Ruby Weber and the Australian Opal and Gem Industry Association.

Your JAA jeweller is pleased to make this brochure available to you as a service and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

What you should know  
about buying

# Opal



## Australia's National Gemstone



JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

What you should know about buying

# Opal

*Jewellery is special. It can last a lifetime. It can be an emotional and sentimental experience that evokes wonderful memories while still giving pleasure for years ahead. When buying for yourself or for others, it helps to have an understanding of the qualities and characteristics of jewellery, which is why the Jewellers Association of Australia (JAA) has produced this brochure.*

*If you need more information or advice, talk to a JAA Jeweller – look for our logo in the store window.*

## A Guide to Opal

Nature has captured all the colours of the spectrum, displaying them in an infinite variety of shades, patterns and brilliance and locked them into this rare stone. Opals lie dormant in the earth until a miner clips the edge and light reaches the gem exposing the most beautiful dancing display of colour.

Since ancient times opal has been sought after by many famous collectors including Mark Antony, Pliny and Queen Victoria. This precious gem was even included in the crown of the Holy Roman Emperor. Australia produces at least 95% of the world's precious opal which, with its increasing scarcity, is amongst the most sought after and precious of all gems. Quality black opals can fetch prices equivalent to a good diamond on a per carat basis.

History states that Ancient Romans cherished opals above all other gemstones – not just because they were rare and beautiful gems – but because they were thought to bring good fortune. Indeed, fortunes were paid for these gems. Mark Antony offered Senator Nonius 100,000 sesterces for a brilliant opal (AUD\$1,000,000 in today's value). Nonius, however, would not part with his talisman, his own personal rainbow ensuring his lucky future.

**Play of Colour:** An opal's beauty is unique and made from the amazing 'play of spectral colours' in the gemstone. This originates from the breaking up of white

light due to the three dimensional spherical shaped microstructure of the silica particles inherent in the opal (these can only be detected with an electron microscope). Similar phenomena of colour hues can be observed when oil lies on water, or in a rainbow.

**Formation:** Opal occurs where silica gel fills small fissures or voids in the earth. A large portion of Australia's inland was once covered by a sea, leaving deposits and creating an environment suitable for the formation of opal.

## Types of Opal

Natural Opal is divided into the categories of black, dark, light, boulder and matrix opal. The classification of black, dark and light is determined by the body tone ie. the degree of darkness in the background.



QLD Boulder Opal

**Black Opal** is the most valuable and comes mainly from Lightning Ridge. High quality stones are very rare; this type is easily distinguished by the blackness of the base or background 'body tone'.

**Black Crystal Opal** is mainly mined at Lightning Ridge. These black opals show a degree of transparency, the colours are often brilliant and can appear to come from within the depth of the gemstone. Good black crystal opals are very rare.

**Dark Opal** comes from all fields and is desirable because the colours are generally more brilliant, due to the dark background 'highlighting' their colours. This type of opal mainly comes from Mintabie (SA) and Lightning Ridge (NSW).

**Light Opal** is usually found at all opal fields but the bulk of the material has come from the South Australian fields of Mintabie, Coober Pedie and Andamooka, although the first material was mined at White Cliffs (1887). This opal has a light body tone.



Boulder Matrix Opal

**Crystal Opal:** This variety embraces opal which is transparent or very translucent and in the better qualities shows a distinct and very bright play-of-colour. This type of opal is found in most Australian opal fields.

**Boulder Opal:** This type, composed of opal naturally occurring on its host rock, is mined predominantly in Queensland. It is easily identified because, when cut, the host rock (a brown ironstone) is left on the back of the opal. Boulder opal may be light, dark or black. In the last twenty years this type of opal has become extremely popular as it can display the same darkness and brilliance as a high quality black opal.

**Matrix Opal:** There are two common types of Matrix Opal in Australia:

- Boulder Matrix Opal** is usually found in Queensland. The opal is intimately diffused with the host rock, (usually ironstone). The host rock is quite obvious in the presentation face of the stone.
- Matrix Opal** from Andamooka has opal intimately diffused throughout the host rock, a sandstone which is often porous and can be treated, turning the material dark resembling black opal.



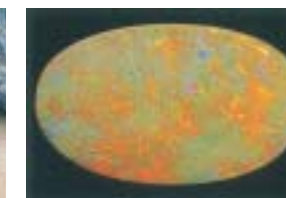
QLD Boulder Opal



Dark Opal



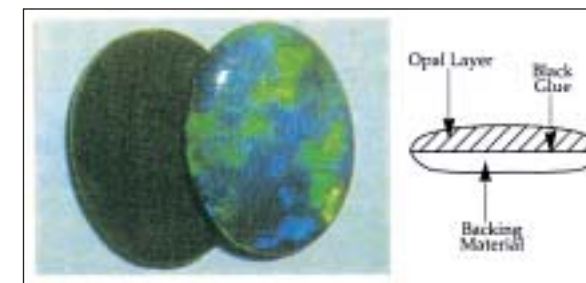
Black Opal



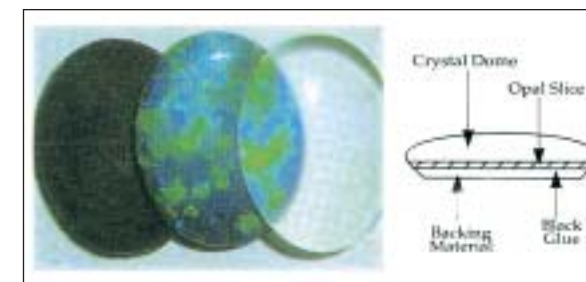
Light Opal

## Composite natural opal

Composite natural opal consists of a natural opal laminate, manually cemented or attached to another material. There are three main forms of composite opal:



**Doublet Opal:** A composition of two pieces where a slice of natural opal is cemented to a base material.



**Triplet Opal:** A composition of three pieces where a thin slice of natural opal is cemented between a dark base material and a transparent top layer (usually of quartz or glass).

**Mosaic and Chip Opal:** A composition of small flat or irregularly shaped pieces of natural opal cemented as a mosaic tile on a dark base material or encompassed in resin.

**Synthetic and Imitation Opal:** Occasionally offered for sale; however, the laws in Australia require the retailer to inform the purchaser of this fact. Most opal sellers do not handle synthetics or imitations.