

COLORED GEMSTONE

# CELEBRATING BROWN

*Once the rejects of the industry, brown diamonds are now adored.*

BY DIANA JARRETT

A brown diamond by any other name might be chocolate, cognac, coffee or champagne; all indulgent and delectable metaphors. But it wasn't always that way. Once viewed as lower grade, natural brown diamonds are enjoying newfound adulation in tandem with a recent fondness for all things earth toned.

The cause of coloration in natural brown diamonds is likely the result of lattice misalignments within the crystal structure. Less frequently, defects associated with hydrogen, or isolated nitrogen atoms, and color centers could contribute to the brown tint. Natural brown diamonds may occur in all types, while treated brown diamonds begin with type Ia material.

Consumers familiar with brown diamonds often learn about them from red-carpet events, where russet-toned diamonds are favored by style mavens. The 2007 Oscar winner Jennifer Hudson donned Fred Leighton's

brown diamond right-hand ring. But she hardly broke ground. Before that, star watchers glimpsed Cameron Diaz' 20-carat cognac-colored diamond ring, only to be trumped by E! reporter Maria Menounos, who wowed the crowd in her champagne-colored diamond dress — 3,000 carats and \$2.5 million dollars worth of serious glam.

## GAINING FAME

It has taken eons for brown diamonds to bask in this limelight. These colored gems have been plentiful for as long as mines have existed. Roman

*This page: Necklace by Kashikey. Opposite page, top: Brown diamond pendant earrings by Rosy Blue. Photos courtesy Natural Color Diamond Association. Opposite page, center: Chocolate diamond rings by LeVian.*

rings from the first to third centuries were set with brown diamonds, but they never enjoyed the public's preference for bright, colorless diamonds. In fact, most people never heard of them prior to the massive campaigning from Argyle mines in the 1980s. Brown diamonds also turn up in Africa, Siberia and elsewhere, including the U.S. But its enormous ratio of brown and pink diamonds made Western Australia's Argyle mine the world's largest supplier of these toast-colored goods. Argyle's seven-level scale communicates the saturation of hues in their brown diamond production. "C1," the lightest, is also called champagne; "C7" represents the darkest brown, or cognac on their grade.

The largest-faceted diamond in the world, the Golden Jubilee, happens to be naturally brown. This 545.67-carat gem, graded fancy yellow-brown, acquired its name when it was presented to the King of Thailand in 1997, commemorating his fiftieth anniversary on the throne. Celebrated cutter Gabi Tolikowsky designed the mammoth gem, which outweighs the famed Cullinan I diamond by over 15 carats. The Incomparable diamond holds a close second, weighing 890 carats when discovered in the Congo in the 1980s. The largest of several stones cut from this internally flawless fancy brownish-yellow stone yielded a 407.48-carat brown gem whose shape resembles the bowl of a spoon.

## MODIFIERS

Most colored diamonds exhibit more than one spectral hue. The predominant color is accompanied by modifiers, one or more additional colors that contribute to its overall impression. The combination of modifying colors contributing to a brown diamond's final appearance are legion and factor into a gem's final

per-carat price. The brown diamond inventory of online merchant Fancy Diamond ranges from under \$2,000 per carat for some orangy brown diamonds to more than \$22,000 per carat for a 12.01-carat fancy pink-brown marquise diamond, illustrating the effect of modifying colors on the final value of brown diamonds.

Thirty-five-year veteran Joseph Murawski, Joden World Resources, Grove City, Pennsylvania, sells antique estate and modern jewelry. Murawski recalls an incident involving the purchase of a suite of loose brown diamonds in a range of colors.

Some stones were quite valuable.

Pink, red, or purple modifiers, for example, drive up the per-carat price for natural brown diamonds due to their rarity in occurrence. The lot was offered to Murawski without respect to the variance in the brown stones; each was offered at the identical per-carat price. As a more informed diamond dealer, Murawski points out that they should have been sold at the sorted price with regard to their worth. "One should sell by market value, not by the purchase price," he underscores.

Eddie LeVian, LeVian, coined the term "Chocolate Diamonds™" years ago and markets jewelry and timepieces with his proprietary brown stones to specialty and



independent retailers as well as other channels of distribution. LeVian went on to coin other terms, “Sweet Chocolate™,” “Chunky Chocolate Diamonds™” and “Chocolate Truffle™,” combining the brown goods with fancy-shaped larger diamonds and a proprietary setting technique. They are a source of inspiration to him and he reflects that

“Just like an artist’s palette has an appreciation for all hues of brown, so do we at LeVian.” He stays with diamonds that are eye clean or better, focusing on various shades of chocolate colors rather than using the pinkish browns or yellowish or orangish browns that actually command a higher market price.

Since 1989, the name Australian Diamond Supply, Ltd. has been linked to fine natural color diamonds and finished colored-diamond goods. Customers rely on them to

furnish the myriad of delicate brown tones found only in nature. “We sell all these hues and variations in natural brown color diamonds on a constant basis,” reports company founder Lajb Blatman. For top brown sellers, Blatman says, “the most popular price level we sell seems to begin from \$2,600 per carat.”

In business for 20 years, Brenda Reichel of Carats and Karats Fine Jewelry, Honolulu, thinks some of her customers’ enthusiasm for brown diamonds springs from her. “I have always been interested in the fancy colors. The shades of brown with secondary hues are even more interesting.” Reichel adds, “Years ago I started buying brown diamonds, adding different colored diamonds around a 1.06-carat round brilliant brownish-red orange diamond. It is a conversation piece and a big stepping-stone for my customers to discover the world of colored diamonds.”

The increased demand for brown diamonds resonates with Briza Color Diamonds Ltd., producer of enhanced color diamonds in vivid hues, and meets the exacting expectations of imitating nature. Using industrial electronic beams under conditions of high pressure have produced an opulently saturated enhanced cognac diamond. Briza’s president Amnon Barak sums it up perfectly. With colored diamonds, you have the best of both worlds. “The life reflected from colored gemstones is seen more clearly under strong lights. Diamonds reflect their brilliance even under a low source of light.” ♦



*This page, top: Chocolate diamond pendant necklaces by LeVian; bottom left: Watches from LeVian Time® Sahara Collection.*