Lapis Lazuli

Even to the most avid connoisseur the mere mention of the word Lapis Lazuli conjures up images of the night time desert sky filled with stars.

apis Lazuli is one of the most popular ornamental gemstones. The popularity of the gem may have derived from its ritual significance. In ancient times it was known under the term sapphire. The present name is said to have originated from the Latin lapis (stone) and the Arabic word azul or al-lazward which describes all shades of blue. There is enough archeological data to suggest that the link between man and Lapis Lazuli stretches back for more than 6500 years. They were highly valued by ancient cultures in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, China and Rome were worth almost as much as sapphires.

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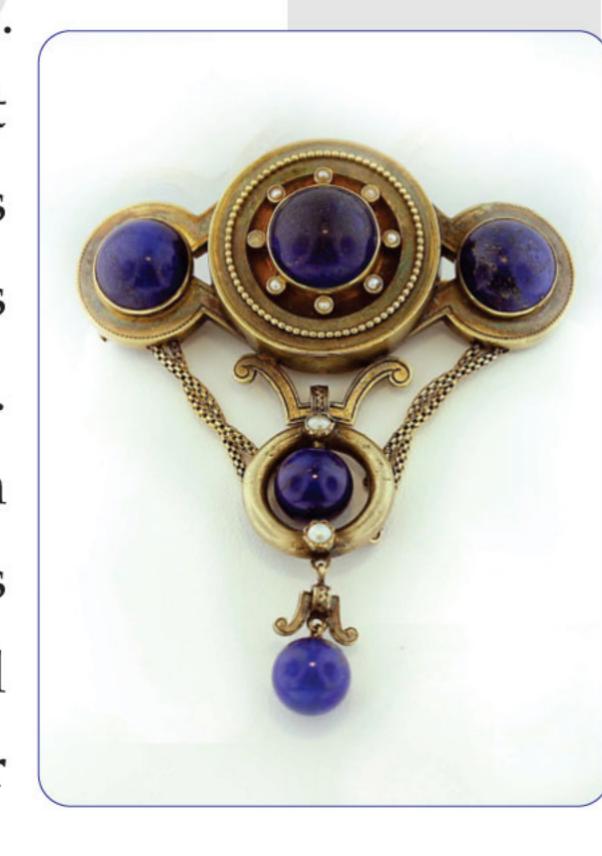
The most desirable quality of Lapis Lazuli is its pure and rich blue color, which is free of white calcite veining and pyrite (golden flecks). The stone's midnight blue is unique. It combines purity with spirituality like no other stone. The presence of calcite produces a mottled blue and white appearance; in addition, yellow metallic specks of pyrite are nearly always present, interfering with the overall texture and, hence, its value. Ancient Egyptians ground it into a powder for use in cosmetics. The color of Lapis Lazuli was popular with the grand masters of art, especially Renaissance painters, to make "ultramarine blue", an expensive pigment of unrivaled brightness and stability. Today, the blue pigment is still applied to restore and renovate colors on historic paintings.

Lapis Lazulis are typically cut into cabochons, beads, inlays and tablets, in order to show off their rich dark color. They are sold as signet stones, necklaces,

carvings, beads or cabochons.

Lapis is one of the most popular stones for men's jewelry. However its use is not limited to jewelry alone.

Due to its hardness it is a popular carving material. It is regularly carved into board games, bowls, dagger handles, amulets, combs etc.



Lapis Lazuli's deep midnight blue suggests a serene astral scene. However, its history is full of danger and hardship. Crude mining methods in perilous terrain pose a deadly combination to even the most eager Lapis miner. Afghanistan is the best known source for Lapis Lazuli of the finest quality. The recent

conflicts in Afghanistan, which is a major source of this treasure, have resulted in many locals converting their family heirlooms to weapons. Other sources like Burma, Chile, Pakistan and Russia produce less uniformly blue and lighter, less valuable varieties. Prices vary depending on color, craftsmanship and quality.

Treatments and imitation

As with any sought after gemstone, imitation is the best form of flattery. Due to the desirability and value of Lapis, its imitations are nearly as old as the discovery of Lapis itself. Ancient Egyptians created a Lapis imitation colored by copper sulphate. Glass, plastic and sodalite have also been used to imitate Lapis.

More recently a Lapis Lazuli-like material has been manufactured by Pierre Gilson and others, but most experts do not consider this a true synthetic.

Unlike Lapis, its luster is dull and its hardness is only 3, while natural Lapis falls between 5 and 6. The imitation has an even color and sometimes pyrite flakes are added to replicate the natural pyrite flakes.

A fair percentage of Lapis Lazuli is enhanced. They may be dyed to improve color but the stability of the colour depends on the type of dye. Coatings have been frequently applied to hide surface defects in order to improve color. However, these treatments are not stable. Some Lapis Lazuli may be crushed and bonded with plastic to improve color and texture.

All treatments should be disclosed at all levels of the distribution chain. If you are in doubt, consult a reputed gem testing laboratory.

IGI has been at the forefront of diamond and colored stone identification and grading since 1975. A large volume of Lapis Lazulis pass through its laboratories on a regular basis and each one is systematically checked by experienced gemologists working with advanced technological equipment. Treatments and the detection of simulants is disclosed and mentioned

on each certificate, thus ensuring that the interests of the trade are safeguarded.

Interesting facts and tips about Lapis Lazuli

- → Lapis Lazuli is valued for its ancient history, its color and as a symbol of friendship. It is also the designated stone to commemorate 9th Wedding Anniversary.
- → When buying Lapis Lazuli, always examine the stone's color and texture for consistency, using different light sources.
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- Do not put Lapis
 Lazuli in ultrasonic
 cleaners or jewelry
 cleaning fluids. The
 calcite in Lapis
 Lazuli reacts
 violently to acids.



+ Lapis Lazuli cannot be steam cleaned.

International Gemological Institute (IGI)

The International Gemological Institute, the world's largest independent laboratory for testing and evaluating gemstones and fine jewelry, was established in 1975 in Antwerp and is located in New York City, Los Angeles, Toronto, Hong Kong, Mumbai, the Seepz Zone, Kolkata, New Delhi, Tel Aviv, Dubai, Bangkok, Tokyo, Thrissur, Surat, Chennai, Ahmedabad. IGI is an ISO accredited worldwide organization. Over 5 million gems & jewels bearing the IGI report have been traded in more than 120 countries. For additional information, please visit www.igiworldwide.com.

