

" Pebbles in the Sun "

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Bright blue pebbles catch the eye. Is it turquoise?

I was sitting low in the hot tub the other day, my mind wandering and drifting about like the palm fronds in the gentle breeze above me. It is where I get some of my best thinking done. No pressure, no distracting phone calls, no emails beckoning me from the cathode ray tube that is usually in my face. As is usual on weekday afternoons, there was no one else around. The sun was intense, the dry desert air invigorating, lightly scented as it was with the warm pungency of chlorine. The bubbling of the Jacuzzi added to the stimulation, and its gentle massage coaxed me to just *relax*, and let the thoughts flow.

I am lucky enough to live in a complex with a very attractive swimming area and spa. Sometimes when I walk over to the pool, with its tiles colored like turquoise and lapis lazuli, I am taken aback by its soothing effect – the cool blue somehow so easily mitigates the fierceness of central Phoenix in the summertime. Once in a while, when I'm in the tub, someone will walk by me there and remark "how can you stand being in that thing when it's 110 degrees out?" I point out that it *is cooler* than the air, and that usually shuts them up. A small observance, yes, but significant.

So it was in that vein when I looked over my shoulder and noticed a little gathering of rocks that someone had left sitting just by the edge of the bath. There they had placed a handful of pebbles, all reddish-brown, but tinged with bright blue coatings, and they glowed intensely against the glaring ivory colored background of the pool deck. They hadn't been there long – some were still wet – and I guessed that some child had gathered them from nearby, had been playing with them in the pool, and then, as children do so easily, simply became distracted and forgot them there before leaving.

I wondered why they had not registered more in my own mind when I had arrived. After all, I had to have literally stepped over them to get into the tub. "That just goes to show you," I thought to myself, "so busy thinking, mind all cluttered up, I didn't even notice." Sitting in the bubbling waters had changed that. And then I had another thought: here is a metaphor right in front of me (or actually behind me, in this case) of the beginnings of jewelry, the very business I am in!

No one knows when humans first started using stones for decorative purposes, but we do know it was a long time ago. Drawings on cave walls showing humans with body ornamentation

are believed to be at least 20,000 years old. People used a variety of things to decorate themselves: feathers, seeds, insect wings, and stones. Far, far back into human history, someone somewhere was walking up a streambed or dry wash (most likely), and saw something pretty lying in the gravel at his or her feet. They reached down, picked up the attractive rock, and from that moment on, it was special to them. Maybe they took it home and set it on a shelf next to the hearth. Maybe they decided to drill a little hole in it, put a string through it and wear it, or maybe they just set it aside there near where it originally lay, as if to proclaim, "this is special – I'll give it its own spot."

The tradition goes on today. Kids (and lots of adults) all over the world pick up pretty rocks, for whatever reason – the main one being that that stone is *special to them*. The stone has just received a little dose of power – a power of influence on that person's life (and maybe others). You see the same thing now in jewelry all around us, in whatever form. Some people wear crystals or carved stone amulets to ward off perceived evil or gain good fortune. Some people wear gemstones as a symbol of home, or history (think: grandma's diamond ring). Lots of people wear them as a symbol of wealth and prestige (all you have to do is watch the Academy Awards on TV, with glamorous actresses decked out in diamonds galore remind yourself of that!). Even more wear them as a symbol of eternity. De Beers has been very skillful at cementing together diamonds, love, and forever.

Gemstones and their uses so surround us, and are so common in all their forms, that people tend to forget that they come from the Earth. They are creations of nature (except for those nowadays that are altered, dyed, treated, repaired, irradiated, or synthesized!). I have actually seen people look surprised when I remind them that the diamond they are looking

to purchase may not exist, or at least may not be easily found in the marketplace. Want to buy a three carat, natural, blue sapphire from Montana's Yogo Mine? Good luck.

There are only a few in existence. Don't blame the jewelry trade. Blame Mother Nature and the volcanic rocks of central Montana for being so stingy.

"Uh, oh," I thought. I was starting to feel "well-done." Time to get out of the water. All these realizations had totally absorbed my attention, and time had passed by quickly. The sky-blue and celadon-green stones assembled there in the sun were not turquoise, unfortunately. I had had my hopes high for a moment, but knew too much about the geology around Phoenix for that to be the case.

Chrysocolla is the name of the look-alike. It's a copper mineral, too, but this stuff is too soft and thin to use for jewelry. The landscaping company gets its rock from formations around the valley where slight copper mineralization occurs. Look in your backyard – maybe you have some of the same.

I climbed out, toweling myself off, and glanced at the gravel beds from which the palms around the pool grew, and there, sure enough, were other turquoise-hued fragments calling out from the reddish, chipped landscaping pebbles. As many times as I had been to the spa, I hadn't noticed them before. Hot tubs work wonders.

*For more on this subject, go to my website at www.gemland.com, click on "Gemology", and visit the some of pages linked from there. Arizona is one of America's leading gem producing states, and it produces fine quality Turquoise, Amethyst (from the Four Peaks Mine – see "Pendants Big and Small", in *Lifestyles Magazine*, May 2003), Peridot from San Carlos, and red garnets from the Four Corners Area.*

--- Richard Allen

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