

INTERVIEW – Exquisite gemstones can be a “passion investment” in challenging times, top dealer says

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New digital trading opportunities have emerged for established gemstone dealers to offer great value to buyers at a time when online auctions for magnificent jewellery have delivered strong results throughout the pandemic, Elke Berr, well-respected gemstone dealer of Geneva-based Berr & Partners, and now an Ambassador for trading platform Gembridge, tells Jewellery Outlook Editor David Brough.

Elke, how did you come to be involved in the world of gemstone trading? Did you study to be a gemmologist?

Gemstones are my passion. Before I was even 18 years old I travelled to Sri Lanka to buy my first gems and to write my school thesis, entitled “From the mine to the hands of a beautiful woman: ‘trading coloured stones’”.

From then on, I was addicted and, besides art, I studied gemmology in Idar-Oberstein, Germany’s gemstone cradle.

I still have friends from this time all around the world.

I also learned basic skills in cutting and goldsmithing which are very useful to me now.

At the age of 21, I was hired by the gemstones buying department of Chopard in Geneva and continued to study gemmology.

Always fascinated by the mines, I did field studies and started trading in Chanthaburi (celebrated gemstone trading centre in Thailand) and Mogok (Myanmar origin of rubies and sapphires), quite unusual for a woman in the 1980s.



Have you always been passionate about gemstones? What are your favourite gems?

For me, sapphires were love at first sight. I decided to travel to Sri Lanka because my mother came back from holiday with a large sapphire ring.

I was just fascinated by it — and so I love sapphires, especially natural unheated sapphires — in all colours.

I also appreciate fine unheated rubies.

More recently, I have come to love emeralds, and to appreciate their subtle colour differences and origins.

My new passion is Paraiba tourmaline: the [turquoise](#) colour always reminds me of holidays and the magic of the sea (I'm a diver too!)

I also find spinel an interesting stone and I use it a lot in my jewellery lines.

The pandemic has changed the ways in which people live and work – and in how they trade in gemstones. You are an Ambassador for the digital trading platform Gembridge. What does this mean? How will your new role change the way in which you trade gemstones? How important a network is the Gembridge community of traders?

Usually, we buy when we travel, sometimes at mines, or in trading centres like Bangkok, or at [trade fairs](#).

We also advise private clients worldwide.

But this is all just impossible right now, due to the pandemic.

So either we have full inventories for trading — or we change: there is no other solution.

For the younger generation, buying online is natural: digital trading is the future.

The results speak for themselves: one just has to look at the resilient results of high-value jewellery [auctions](#) staged online throughout the emergency.

So the possibility to get involved with Gembridge came exactly at the right moment.

Trade with trust, deal with selected and serious members and friends on an efficient platform. This is what we need!

Finally, I will not miss any calls, because I can check the stock and upload my requests, buy directly or take on consignment.

We take the responsibility of being a Gembridge Ambassador very seriously.

We are excited to have recently installed a new photo studio in Geneva as part of our Gembridge services, as having the right pictures is very important — to show the stones just as they are.

Your Geneva-based company Berr & Partners has listed some gemstones on the Gembridge platform. Can you describe a few highlights and say what makes them so special?

The items we upload are not only chosen as beautiful gems, but what is important to us is to give a good deal and the best prices to my colleagues worldwide.

Some might assume that, being a dealer from Geneva, we would be seen as expensive, but this is not the case. We often sell for private clients who want discreet and swift sales, or sometimes work with small auction houses.



Gembridge lot 28: 8.39-ct Van Cleef and Arpels Colombian emerald with minor oil

For example, the 8.39-ct Van Cleef and Arpels Colombian emerald with minor oil, or the 10.37-ct vintage emerald ring, are very good value and interesting options.



Gembridge lot 90: 10.37-ct vintage emerald ring



Gembridge lot 91: 12.01-ct sapphire ring

The 12.01-ct Royal Blue unheated sapphire is also from a private consignor and, in my professional opinion, a great deal.



Gembridge lot 27: 11.75-carat unheated sapphire

Personally, I prefer my designed mounted classic: a modern setting for an 11.75-ct unheated Sri Lankan sapphire.



Gembridge lot 139: 6.10-carat Mozambique ruby

There is also a pink sapphire, a Mozambique ruby and spinels: I love them all and will soon add more to this online collection. 😊

Are there any other exceptional gems that you are currently handling for Gembridge?



Gembridge lot 005: 143.33-ct colour change garnet from Tanzania

I often have requests from investors for exceptional gems. The 143.33-ct colour-change garnet that we are currently handling, is absolutely unique. I have some collectors to offer it to, another great advantage to the consignment option through Gembridge.

With the Freeport facility in Geneva and the importation facilities through our company, it is easy to initiate viewings with the Gembridge model.

Perhaps one of the readers wants to take the chance and buy? 😊

How is the trade in coloured gemstones evolving in Geneva, and what is the outlook for the coloured gemstone market during and after the pandemic, in your view?

In Geneva, like in Switzerland and the whole world, the situation is not easy, but the big auction houses have created movement and had good sales, with most of the lots sold in the recent magnificent jewels sales and buoyant prices achieved for exceptional items, including world records for some jewels sold online.

Some of the high-end jewellery brands also did very well, just as some of the lesser-known brands outperformed. It seems to be the middle market which suffered more.

We fight for every client, offer interesting prices and excellent service.

I quote one of my Swiss retailer friends: "People cannot travel, they cannot wear expensive clothes, but they can spoil themselves with jewellery and that makes them happy." They had the best December ever.

After the pandemic, I think people will take the opportunity for celebrations, weddings, parties, birthdays — and just live. Life will go on, and so will gemstone jewellery.

In my opinion, high net worth people will rethink the ways in which they view the value and safety of investing in assets such as gemstones, just as they have with gold. Something I always tell my customers and which is a truly incredible aspect to our business: you can

buy beautiful gems as a “passion investment” – now, of course, through Gembridge – and design a piece and make a custom-made jewel for a special occasion for your customers.

You can combine it all and get the best of all worlds.

And our philosophy is: just make them happy and proud of their purchase.

So again from what I said at the start: “from the mines to the hand of a beautiful woman.”

A gemstone can achieve all this: act as a bridge between all parts of the world, between buying and selling, from its beginnings as something from the earth to creating emotions in the person who possesses it.

Welcome to the Gembridge online B2B platform, currently an MVP, or ‘live’ test, of our functionality, user experience and systems.

We are now inviting members of the trade to register. Once you complete the member verification process you will join an exclusive membership with other respected industry players. You will be able to view all prices, buy from our Showcase and list your precious stones and jewellery on your own exclusive Shopfront.

We look forward to helping you Trade with Trust. You can register, find out more or collaborate by completing this form: <https://gembridge.com/register/>

For more information, please contact Anthony Brooke +66 81-854-1755 or tony@gembridge.com and Nick Marrett +65 9270 3875 or nick@gembridge.com