

Opal

The name opal comes from the Indian (Sanskrit) word for stone. There are three types of opal: precious opal, common opal, and fire opal. For those of you acquainted with boulder opal, it is a type of precious opal. Common opal comes in a number of colors, and is also called potch.

Opal exhibits phenomena called play-of-color. It is the rainbow of flowing and flashing hues that changes with the angle of observation. In historical times they believed that opal had all the powers of all the gems, because of this phenomena.

This is caused by its chemical makeup, and it's structure.

Opal contains 3- 30% water. It is made of tint spheres of cristobalite. This is an unusual structure for a gem; most have a strict/repeating crystal structure. Opal has a Moh's hardness of 5.5 – 6.5, and it is softer. Its water content can also pose issues for the wearer. Don't clean this gem in traditional jewelry cleaner!

Opal has a density of 1.98 and a refractive index of 1.37 – 1.52.

Most of what is seen today in jewelry is called white opal. Also popular, but not as common is: black opal (precious opal with dark gray, blue, green, and an intense play-of-color), opal matrix (banded opal in matrix rock- usually limestone), boulder opal (dark base surface, embedded in pebble rock), harlequin opal (big flashes of bright color-wow!), fire opal (translucent to transparent orange gem- no play of color).

I just found pink opal beads in a variety of colors, and we are dreaming of how we want to design some necklaces with them.

Remember, opal is October's birthstone.