

WINNING COMBINATIONS

Tourmalines, sapphires and morganite are among the stars of the AGTA Spectrum Awards for jewelry design. By **Barbara Moss**

Every year since 1984, the American Gem Trade Association (AGTA) has held its Spectrum Awards to honor the best in colored-gemstone jewelry and cut gems. Colored-gemstone pieces have grown in popularity, and that comes through in the yearly AGTA competition, which has seen a boost in both the number and quality of its entries, according to Douglas K. Hucker, the group's CEO. With sponsorship from the Platinum Guild International, the Women's Jewelry Association and bridal media powerhouse The Knot, it is one of the most ambitious and well-regarded design contests in the world, celebrating the variety, beauty and rarity of colored gemstones, gemstone jewelry and pearls. It also salutes the top performers in lapidary art with its Cutting Edge Awards, which debuted in 1991. Read on to discover the passion behind some of this year's first-place and best-in-category winners.

Best of Show

& First Place – Cutting Edge Awards, Pairs & Suites

Mikola Kukharuk, Nomad's Lapidary Co., Inc.

A matching pair of blue tourmalines, weighing in at a hefty total of 53.56 carats, mesmerized both the Spectrum judges and the industry trade press with their electric neon blue color and artful faceting. In a competition that lauds both finished jewelry and faceted stones, you know this pair must be exceptional to win the Best of Show designation. They are. Created by Nomad's Mikola Kukharuk — a native of the Ukraine and a member of Nomad's "tribe" of traders and cutters in New York and Bangkok — the matching copper-bearing tourmalines are most likely from the Erongo region of Namibia; they came from older material that "was part of a miner's collection," according to Nomad's Tracy Lindwall. "When we saw it, we knew it was something special. Vivid, electric and clean blue tourmalines are hard not to get excited about."



Mikola Kukharuk
The neon blue tourmalines from Nomad's that won Best of Show.

First Place – Bridal Wear

& First Place – Men's Wear

Ricardo Basta, E. Eichberg, Inc.

A native of Argentina and a third-generation jeweler, Los Angeles-based Ricardo Basta created two first-place winners for this year's Spectrum Awards: a ring featuring a heart-shaped, 12.62-carat blue zircon and a 0.75-carat diamond for the Bridal Wear category, and another ring with an unusual 7.50-carat starburst trapiche sapphire for Men's Wear. Basta says he selects the gemstones for his designs, then creates the initial work in wax. After carving, CAD/CAM designers create a 3D rendering before a wax is built. Basta finishes the jewelry himself.



Ricardo Basta
The center trapiche sapphire shows bands of white forming a starburst. The Estrella ring has an 18-karat yellow gold setting accented with 0.64 carats of black diamonds and 0.52 carats of yellow sapphires.



Ricardo Basta
The Double the Love ring from E. Eichberg's Ricardo Basta contains two heart-shaped stones — a 12.62-carat blue zircon and a 0.75-carat diamond. Pavé diamonds on the 18-karat white gold setting total 1.53 carats.

**Best Use of Platinum and Color
& First Place – Evening Wear**
**Eddie Sakamoto, Somewhere
in the Rainbow**

Using what he says was almost “a pound of platinum,” Los Angeles-based designer Eddie Sakamoto’s undulating, diamond-studded Dancing Waves necklace seems the proper setting for the 57-carat Santa Maria aquamarine that sits at its center. The four-pointed stone was part of the Philadelphia Natural History Museum’s Gems and Mineral Collection before it was purchased by Somewhere in the Rainbow, a gemstone collective that aims to bring the beauty of gemstones to galleries, museums and the public at large.



Eddie Sakamoto
In addition to the center aquamarine, this necklace contains 8 carats of diamonds.

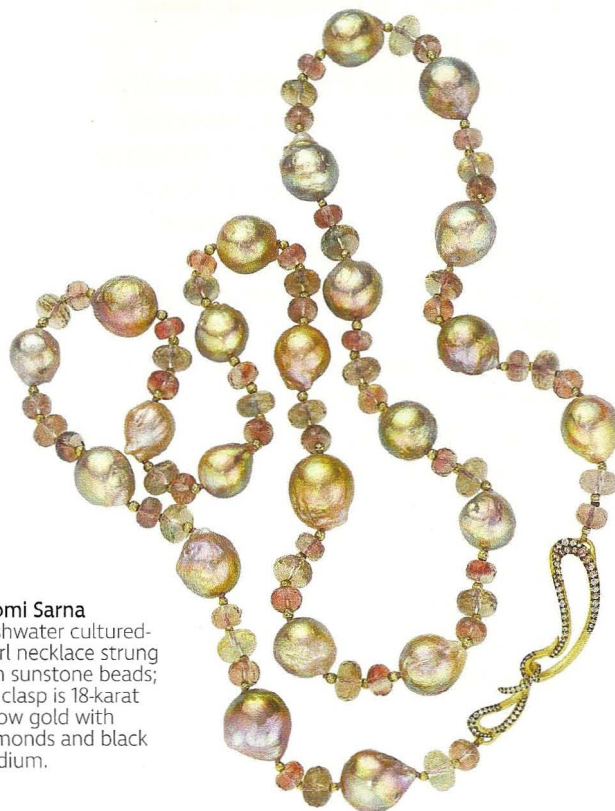
**Best Use of Color
& Best Use of Pearls**

Naomi Sarna, Naomi Sarna Designs

She’s worked as a psychoanalyst, a doula and a marble sculptor, and was once the owner of the largest rooftop garden in New York City. But over the past seven years, Naomi Sarna has mastered the craft of jewelry design. Driven by passion and a high-octane level of curiosity, Sarna won two “best of” categories at this year’s Spectrum Awards: One for a glorious pair of maple leaf earrings set with an array of multicolored diamonds, sapphires and garnets; the other for a simple yet elegant color-shifting strand of bronze-hued freshwater pearls and sunstone beads. ►



Naomi Sarna
Sarna’s maple leaf earrings in 18- and 24-karat yellow and 18-karat white gold with multicolored diamonds, sapphires and garnets.



Naomi Sarna
Freshwater cultured-pearl necklace strung with sunstone beads; the clasp is 18-karat yellow gold with diamonds and black rhodium.

First Place – Classical

Allen Kleiman, A. Kleiman & Co.

These earrings with two extraordinary unheated oval sapphires won first prize for Classical design. But their back story is as fascinating as the pair of matching stones that dominate them. A geologist by profession and a gem dealer by trade, San Francisco-based Allen Kleiman purchased the gemstones separately from two different sellers on a single buying trip to Sri Lanka. Each of the sapphires, untreated and with a deep pink color, had a different cut, and each weighed over 20 carats. Kleiman showed the gems — together — to both dealers, who were as stunned as he was. Kleiman had the gems recut as ovals with a total carat weight of 36.65, and the result, set in platinum with over 5 carats of diamonds, is breathtaking.

"I don't cut a pair unless it's as close to perfect as possible," he says. "To find this pair from two different sources was close to miraculous."



Allen Kleiman

Brothers from another mother: Earrings featuring two spectacular untreated, recut pink sapphires (36.65 carats in total) in platinum with 5.09 carats of diamonds.

First Place – Business/Day Wear

Adam Neeley,

Adam Neeley Fine Art Jewelry

Take a closer look at this stunning geometric pendant and you'll notice a sense of movement. Part of it is in the amazing basketweave-cut morganite, weighing in at a hefty 24.06 carats. And part of it is the exceptional engineering behind the ombré-hued sections of rose and white 18-karat gold that form the pendant's setting.

Such color play is a specialty of Adam Neeley, a Laguna Beach, California-based designer and graduate gemologist who trained at Florence's Le Arti Orafe Jewellery School. Neeley compares the construction of the piece — which included casting, pre-finishing and laser assembly — with "putting together a puzzle." ■



Adam Neeley

The rose and white 18-karat gold Cosmos pendant features 3.14 carats of channel-set diamonds and a center basketweave-cut, 24.06-carat morganite.