

Aurora Collection is Focal Point of 'The Vault' at the Natural History Museum

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RAPAPORT... In November 2005, the Natural History Museum exhibit 'Diamonds' in London closed without any warning due to security risks. But now a major part of that exhibit, and one of the most comprehensive diamond collections in the world called the Aurora Collection, is again available for viewing in a high security gallery at the Museum.

"When [Diamonds] closed we offered the museum the opportunity to extend our loan, which they happily accepted," said diamond dealer and the collections' co-owner Alan Bronstein.

"In late 2006, inspired by the presence of the Aurora Collection and the conviction of the curator, Alan Hart, the museum received a grant to build a new state of the art gem gallery, which is now known as 'The Vault,'" Bronstein said.

The display of some 267.45 carats of diamonds from 12 color variations across the spectrum from emerald green to blood red is filled "with delightful examples of natural artwork and other treasure for the eyes to see.

"It's the perfect home for the Aurora Collection right now," he said.

Previously the Aurora Collection was on exhibit at The American Museum of Natural History in New York from 1989 to 2005, which also gave birth to an exhibit in 1998 called "The Nature of Diamonds." It toured Japan, Canada, and the United States before landing in London in 2005.

"I think the Aurora Collection is the ultimate expression of nature's beauty in diamonds -- and diamond's beauty in art. One does not see 296 different color diamonds, but a collage of pulsating lights, flickering like living stones. A powerful pyramid of energy, colors and light. It is the perfect symbol for every reason we have come to desire diamonds; love, romance, beauty, eternity, rarity, power. Then the case is bathed in fluorescent light and you go into a new dimension of the colored diamond world," said Bronstein.



Actress (Dame) Helen Mirren views the Aurora Collection at the Natural History Museum in London.

The stones vary in value between \$1,000 and \$1 million each, but as Bronstein calls it a unique work of art, there is no peer to the collection. "If one wanted to compare it to other works using diamonds like the Hirst diamond skull, you could take your pick," he said.

25 years in the making

Building the collection also kept Bronstein in the business. After he graduated from college in 1977, Bronstein became a diamond broker -- but he was preparing to leave the profession in 1980 when out the blue, so to speak, he was exposed to a magnificent yellow diamond that blew him away.

"It was the first colored diamond I had ever seen. Very few people knew anything about them and even fewer actually dealt in them. It was an underground, undesirable business except to the few connoisseurs. I had a few dealers who played with them who became my mentors and teachers. They would show me their little collections and send me out looking for colors. I had the luck and blessing to find someone who believed in me," he said. That someone was industry veteran Harry Rodman who became Bronstein's mentor and partner and supported his vision of collecting.



The Aurora Collection began with three small stones (one each of yellow, pink, and blue) that served as Bronstein's sample set for color comparison. He bought a few sample stones for color and grew his expertise to notice subtle differences in colors. "This was the genesis of my idea to collect a sample of all the different colors I could find -- and these stones became the foundation of the Aurora Collection. I did not anticipate the hunt would last 25 years or that something so magnificent would grow out of it," he said.

After viewing many stones side by side he observed that every stone could have subtle differences in hue, saturation, and the face of the stone, which was a function of the shape and faceting. "As I began to gather stones in different colors and shapes, it became like a grid or puzzle and the idea was to look for different pieces to the puzzle...an endless puzzle where nature can always present another surprise, but I think the Aurora Collection at 296 stones is representative of the diamond species," Bronstein said.

Bronstein has also observed now that many factors play into the growing popularity of natural fancy colored diamonds.

"People are always looking for something different...for something beautiful. Fashion, style, design and publicity add to the awareness. Auction sales have proven that over the last 25 years certain stones have shown great appreciation in value. And finally they are rare and unique creations of earth," he concluded.

As for what might be the most popular stone of the collection, Bronstein won't say. "There are too many captivating colors to choose just one as a favorite or standout. Everybody will find their own favorite."

(Photos by Robert Weldon)