

Like a Brick House: Grading Quality

by Arthur Anton Skuratowicz and Julie Nash

Too often, jewelers discover flaws in a piece of jewelry only after an item fails—a clasp hinge breaks, a stone falls from a loose setting—and usually that discovery comes at the hands of an irate customer. To help with this, jewelers can create in-house inspection systems using detailed checklists, say Arthur Anton Skuratowicz and Julie Nash of The Jewelry Training Center Inc. in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Skuratowicz and Nash are gemologist appraisers as well as jewelers. In this Tech Sheet, they offer suggestions for developing a checklist-based, in-house grading system.

The Foundation: Setting Inspection Standards

Once you have decided to develop a formal in-house grading system, make sure the terms are easy for customers and colleagues to understand. Define the words or phrases you plan to use to grade jewelry quality. Decide the characteristics that will define your quality levels, and make sure everyone in your shop understands them.



Your next step is to develop a checklist identifying all of the criteria for each level. While such lists may vary slightly from shop to shop, depending on the types of jewelry produced, below are a few suggestions that should be on everyone's list.



Are the stones secure and intact? Stones should be level and not rubbing against one another. Most important, they should be tightly set: Pavé and bead settings should have appropriate bead placement and size, and prongs should be gap-free and correctly positioned. In Figure 1, the prongs are barely touching the stone, and in Figure 2 the stone is wedged against a prong, rather than being held in place by it. Poorly crafted prongs are a strong indication of the quality of the rest of the piece.

Are stones free of cracks and chips? Be aware that even a good setting, such as a well-crafted bezel, with metals fused together nicely, may be holding in place a chipped stone (Figure 3).

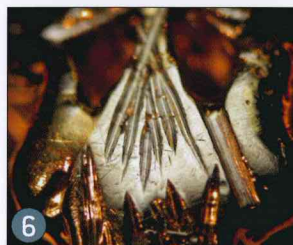
Are metal parts sturdy and working? Check to see whether metal components are sturdily



constructed and fully functional. Ring shanks and hinges should be thick enough to hold up under normal wear. Clasps and pins should be secure and functioning.



Is the metal smooth and are the solder seams clean? All metal, including bezels and channels, should be without gouges, porosity, or visible seams, and have crisp details. The cast earring in Figure 4, though textured, still has visible porosity. In Figure 5, the setter gouged the channel to tighten the stones, an indication that harmful shortcuts might have been taken throughout construction. Also note whether solder joints are clean—no globs of leftover solder—with good color match between the solder and the item. The solder used to repair the ring in Figure 6 doesn't match the color well and has porosity.



The hand engraving is messy, too.

Are all areas finished and polished? When checking for quality workmanship, inspect the back of a piece; even though it is not on display, a jeweler striving for quality will not ignore it. The underside of the ring in Figure 7, for example, shows the skill applied in fabrication. Likewise, the back of the pendant in Figure 8 is nicely finished. Not surprisingly, the front of that same pendant (Figure 9) is neatly laid out with great color matching.



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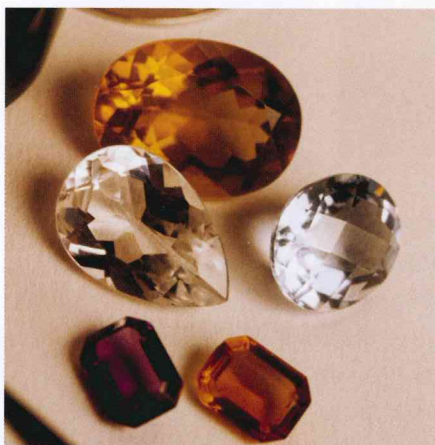
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In the Past

For generations, jewelers and manufacturers have given their customers an appraisal consisting of one page from a pad, purchased in a stationary store, which also contained a paragraph disclaiming any responsibility for any action taken on the basis of the values given in the appraisal. In fact, such appraisals have usually been complementary with an inflated value to give the impression that the customer was getting a bargain.

Who We Are: Present and Future

Times sure have changed. In the past twenty years, a number of appraisal organizations have established protocols that have taken the appraisal profession to new heights. We at The National Association of



Jewelry Appraisers (NAJA) are proud to have been one of those organizations. We are the largest appraisal organization devoted *solely* to the appraisal of gems and jewelry. Our members (now more than 700) sign on to observe a stringent Code of Ethics and we also request that they appraise to a minimum standard. We constantly try to make



them aware of legal problems which may be encountered by doing otherwise. That standard is taught in our appraisal course and is constantly updated so that they and their clients are protected with a properly researched valuation for the particular purpose needed. We feel we have made NAJA the place to achieve the knowledge necessary to make the gem and jewelry appraiser a true professional and help keep them updated on the latest techniques, equipment, and information within our constantly changing industry.

It's All about Education

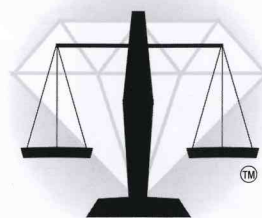
We do this through the home study appraisal course, quarterly newsletter, and discounts on books and equipment, as well as by serving as a sounding board for questions concerning our profession. The appraisal course also teaches sections of the government-sponsored Uniform Standard of Appraisal Practice as it relates to the appraisal of personal property. In addition, we hold two conferences each year with

diverse speakers who are experts in their fields and offer timely topics and information to help update the knowledge needed. At these conferences our members have the chance to network with their peers and find colleagues with whom they can share information and experiences.

Our Other Benefits

NAJA's website addresses the needs of the consumer as well as members of the jewelry industry with the "Find an Appraiser" function. Our appraisers are listed by city, state, phone, and membership status for people who need an appraiser. We also answer questions from the public and the trade to help them understand what an appraiser can offer. We have also served to help unravel problems between the appraiser and the client.

Today, the appraisal profession is a necessary part of the jewelry industry and we take great pride in the fact that we are a strong part of it.



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