Module B. Colour from the Cosmos

Lesson 14: Beryl Mineralogy and Gemology

How is Beryl Valued?

In the gemological realm, all common non-emerald gem beryl is considered to be a Type I gem, as defined by the [Gemological Institute of America](http://www.gia.edu/) (GIA). The GIA defines Type I gems as being essentially free of inclusions and are therefore "eye-clean". Emeralds are classified as Type III gems, indicating that inclusions within cut stones are common and typically visible by the unaided eye. Non-emerald beryl of the finest quality can reach up to ~1500 $CDN per carat (1 gram = 5 carats), with the exception of red beryl, which is much more rare and therefore much more expensive.

As a Type III gem, emerald is rarely clean from inclusions. In fact, the characteristic inclusions found within emerald are sometimes affectionately called "le jardin", which is French for 'garden'. Valuation of emerald is primarily related to the intensity and saturation of colour it exhibits. Emeralds from Colombia, South America, often display brilliant, almost fluorescent green colours and demand a hefty price. Not surprisingly, simply establishing the Colombian origin of a stone will result in a premium being applied to the piece.

Emerald is one of the most valuable gemstones on a per carat basis and the finest emeralds are rarer than the finest diamonds. However, due to the relatively unregulated nature of emerald mining and production (as compared to diamond), the value of emerald is much more volatile. For exceptional stones above 10 carats, it is not uncommon for valuation to be in excess of $10,000 USD per carat. For good stones typical of decent jewellery stores (i.e., up to 2 carats and of good quality), prices are commonly in the $1,000 USD per carat range.

Of course, prices do fluctuate greatly depending on the specifics of cut, clarity, hue, colour, brilliance, polish, origin, and treatment for a given stone. In 2000, one of the highest prices ever paid for an emerald was $1,149,850 for an exceptional 10.11 ct Colombian stone. A recent sale from a Christie's auction for a ring described as "...set with a cut-cornered square-shaped emerald weighing 8.81 carats, with baguette-cut diamond shoulders, and mounted in platinum" fetched $619,000 USD. Sotheby's reports that a sale of a 47 carat square step cut emerald set in a platinum antique necklace sold for approximately $2,600,000 USD alongside a step cut 10.22 carat emerald and platinum ring that sold for ~$600,000 USD.