

Idar-Oberstein

Will visits the gemstone capitol of Europe

Many of you have met one of our goldsmiths, Will Breczinski. This summer he visited Germany and while there he stopped in Idar-Oberstein to find some faceting rough for us. He knew a lot about its history in the gemstone industry, but very little about where to look for rough, or who to talk to! Here is his report –

My first day there I went into the old town center of Oberstein, where I found the tourist shops selling stone carvings, beads, mineral specimens, and other trinkets. I asked a few shops about faceting rough, but the shop keepers either did not know or did not want to tell me where I could find it. The answers to my enquiries ranged from, “you might want to try this guy” to, “no one in this town sells rough stone, only cut stones.” The second day, on the advice of the owner of my hotel, I walked to the other town, Idar. I found a number of more industry oriented shops, yet still not much for faceting rough. While in town I also toured the German gemstone museum where I definitely got inspiration for some gemstone cuts to try when I return! After visiting the museum, I found a few pieces of rough to buy from a couple of store owners, but it was not until I found the African gemstone dealers in a small park outside the gem exchange that I was able to find any real selection or good pricing.

The whole exchange took place out of the trunk of the gem dealer’s car. As the parcels were larger than I wanted and he initially wanted significantly more money than I had on me, there was a fair amount of haggling over price. He

was eventually willing to split his parcel of smoky quartz in half and add it to a parcel of citrine. That cleaned me out of cash, and I ended the day having purchased a good sized parcel of smoky quartz and citrine, as well as a few pieces of peridot and amethyst.

Idar-Oberstein is actually two separate villages located in a scenic mountain valley on the western edge of Germany. The two villages were joined politically by the Nazis in 1933, but each has its traditional specialties. Oberstein is known for its jewelry manufacturing and Idar is known for gem cutting and carving. Residents claim that stone cutting has been a part of the local scene since Roman times. What is known for sure is that miners in the late 14th century found agates and amethyst in the nearby basalt formations. Local sandstone was used for grinding wheels, and water from the river provided power. The result was a thriving gem cutting industry.

Idar-Oberstein has adapted over the years to accommodate global influences. One of their early successes was the ability to treat gray agates to various colors. When the treatment was done to layers of agate and carved, the result was durable agate cameos. In the 19th century when the industry was in decline, many locals emigrated to Brazil. There they discovered huge deposits of agate and amethyst in the south near Uruguay, which they exported back to Germany. By the latter half of the 1800’s, Idar had more than 150 shops cutting gemstones. To this day Idar-Oberstein is considered the gemstone capitol of Europe. The local museum has a public display of crystals, gems, jewelry and carvings that is considered to be one of the finest in the world.

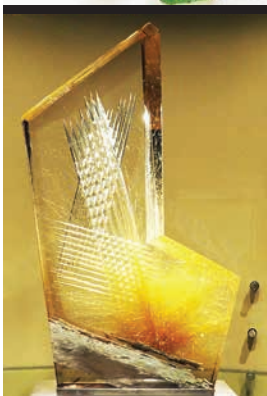
Idar-Oberstein in the Hunsrück mountains

Pastel Citrine faceted by Will

Peridot Rough

Rutilated Quartz Carving in museum

Smoky Quartz and Citrine Rough



Summer Bead Sale

We've added a summer bead sale!
Come in August 6-9
and all strands of beads will be

50% OFF

the single strand price
regardless of quantity!

*Buy 5 strands at once, anytime before
the sale and get 40% OFF!*



Reserve Gem Auction

Gemstone auction featuring
higher quality gemstones.

Total of 25 gemstones available.
Minimum bids range from \$30 to \$1000.
Bidding starts Monday, August 18 and
ends Saturday, August 23 at 2PM
Rules and more pictures available online.

Idar - Oberstein

Come and talk with Will about his experiences
in Idar-Oberstein and check out the new faceting
rough he brought back including kunzite,
golden beryl, peridot, citrine and smoky
quartz. If you like, he can guide you in the
purchase of a piece of rough and then cut it!

Event takes place Thursday evening, August
14 at 7PM. There will be pictures for viewing
along with light snacks.

