



*Peruvian opal with Montana moss agate in 14KT gold*

## Peruvian Blue Opal

### Sacred Gem of the Incas found high in the Andes

Considered a gift from Pachamama, the goddess of fertility, good fortune, and nature, rich blue-green Peruvian opal has been used by native Inca in ritual and jewelry since 1000 BC or earlier. Peruvian blue opal is relatively rare and is only found in the Andes mountains near San Patricio, Peru. Unlike its opal cousins in Australia and Mexico, Peruvian opal does not exhibit the spectral fire known as “play of color”, relying instead on intense blue and green body color for its beauty. Copper is the essential trace element present in blue opal giving it a distinctive range of blue-green colors. Mined as thick veins in host rock, Peruvian opal often has natural crystalline seams present. Depending on how the stone is cut it can be either clear like a piece of candy, or scenic with black dendritic inclusions or varying degrees of color.

Blue opal is the national stone of Peru and minerals like Peruvian opal are still treated with respect by the local Quechua Indians as they are considered to be under Pachamama’s protective domain. The Quechua Indians are descendants of the Inca.

Peruvian opals of beautiful blue green shades are very often associated with elements of bliss and reverie. Despite their gentle and fragile appearance Peruvian opals are quite hard and earthy. Opal ranges between 5.5 and 6.5 on the Mohs scale of hardness, making it ideal for pendants and earrings or for rings worn on special occasions.



According to the mining report published in the magazine Colored Stone December 2005, production of blue opal is down and pink is up. An estimated 10 tons of pink opal is produced per year, compared to only 4 tons of blue opal (This number has continued to drop over the last two years). Only 10 percent or less of this blue opal is suitable for jewelry. The pink opal in general is of better quality, but is in less demand than the blue.

Due to drastic decrease in supply, there has been an explosion in the number of treated and imitation stones. Mine-run material showing little or no color is being dyed and sold as natural. There are even examples of dyed chalcedony being sold as blue opal. Given the price of rough blue opal in Peru, it is impossible to sell strands of natural aqua-blue colored opal beads for \$20 or \$30 a strand.

We have recently purchased a kilo of rough blue opal direct from Peru that we are cutting ourselves so we can say confidently that it is untreated in any way. Prices of gems cut from this material range from \$50 to \$600 per cabachon.



*Peruvian opal ring with diamond and palladium wire accents*

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