

- home
- about cs
- advertising
- archives
- classifieds
- inside the industry
- news & updates
- products & resources
- search products
- show calendar
- subscribe!

Search Colored-Stone.com:



This month's issue

Subscribe to **Colored Stone!**

Royal Sahara Jasper Gets Wired

By Dale "Cougar" Armstrong

Wire jewelry designer Dale Armstrong was one of the first jewelry artisans to see Royal Sahara Jasper when **Colored Stone** showed it to a select group of lapidaries and craftspeople at Tucson 2008. Her enthusiastic reception inspired the magazine to sponsor an invitation-only exhibition of cut and set stones for Tucson 2009. Running from Saturday January 31st to Sunday February 15th at the Tucson Electric Park Gem & Mineral Show, the event is to be the first annual collection commissioned by the magazine. In the following article, Armstrong discusses the challenges and joys of cutting and setting this fabulous material.

Imagine receiving a box of rocks in the mail and being asked to work them into your jewelry designs. How cool is that! Better yet, imagine receiving end chips and nodules of a spectacular new material and being asked to transform these specimens into cut stones suitable for setting in your own designs. I was among a handful of lapidaries and artisans asked to participate in creating a collection of newly-found Royal Sahara Jasper jewelry and art objects, brought to a dinner last February during the Tucson Show by David Federman, **Colored Stone's** Editor-in-Chief. Had he read my mind, I wondered, since I immediately wanted a few pieces of this quartz to 'play' with.

Suddenly I had dozens of pieces to take from rough to ready. My husband, Charlie, who is my 'resident lapidary,' studied choice stones. I watched fascinating patterns and scenes emerge as he cut off ends of nodules, then slabs. He then repositioned the nodule in the saw, and cut it lengthwise; again just one or two slabs. Deciding which way to continue cutting



"Lady in Waiting" by Dale "Cougar" Armstrong.

PUBLIC AUCTION
CLICK HERE!

[Contact Customer Service](#)

colored stone
GemMail

[Sign up for the Free Colored Stone Gem Mail Newsletter!](#)

was difficult, as this material seems to have inexhaustibly many interesting angles/views.



View of Saharan Jasper cut lengthwise.



View of Saharan Jasper endcuts.

Choosing the Rocks for Me

The Royal Sahara Jasper pieces I was privileged to work with have beautiful, high-contrast earthy tones of beige, brown, cream and ochre that form amazing scenic and geometric designs. We cabbed most of the pieces with a low dome or just a polished window, as I didn't want to lose or obscure the scene I wanted to keep by grinding deeper. (Did I mention that this material is a dream to polish and gives amazing yields?)

One piece with a smooth ochre rind that was thick enough to cut in half to make an almost-matching piece featured small shrub-like dendrite patterns—reminiscent of agate 'biscuit' nodules we've gathered at the Woodward Ranch in Alpine, Texas. I chose to have my husband cab one half to be used for a bolo tie and to leave the natural backing on the other for a matching pendant. (Occasionally I like to leave part of the outer 'rock' showing, hopefully educating folks as to where true beauty can be hidden.) By adding a few black onyx beads, the little dendrite bush became a focal point within the stone's 'desert' hills.



Dale Armstrong saw "desert hills" in this wire-wrapped Royal Sahara Jasper pendant with black onyx beads.

From Wheel to Wire

Designing wire settings for these fabulous cabochons was not as easy as

you might think. I had thought of pairing one of them with an awesome sunstone cab, or a piece of Mexican fire opal; but the more I worked trying to get the 'look' I had in mind, the more difficult it was for me to call attention away from the unique patterns of this jasper. I was caught in a bind between rockhound and designer. As a rockhound, I feel that stones should stand by themselves; as a designer, I want to enhance their looks with elaborate settings.

The two parts of me struck a truce. For some designs the rockhound guided the designer. For those pieces I decided a simple but elegant frame is all that was necessary to show off the particular scene I wanted to bring to the eye of the beholder. Take, for example, the piece I call 'Framed Oaks' because the dominant jasper patterns resemble huge white oaks in the woods outside my studio. So here I kept the frame simple.

However, the designer in me was allowed more leeway with 'Lady-in-Waiting.' This piece features a free-form cab whose 'hair' frame is made with 14k rose gold-filled, 14k yellow gold-filled and argenticum sterling wires, in a variety of tempers and gauges, flowing with the similar bands of color down the side of the stone.

All in all, working with Royal Sahara Jasper was a wonderful brain-break for me, providing the opportunity to enhance each stone by bringing each scene to life with just wire.

Dale Armstrong is a rockhound, lapidary and a wire jewelry designer-instructor who lives in Riceville, Tennessee. Her book, "[Wireworks – An illustrated Guide to the Art of Wire Wrapping](#)," will be published by Interweave Press in June 2009. To [pre-order a copy, go to the Interweave website \(clicking this link takes you there in a new window\)](#).



Dale Armstrong wire wrapped a pendant setting for this Royal Sahara Jasper.

This was also sent out to our *Colored Stone* GemMail newsletter subscribers. Want to receive the latest up-to-date information on the gemstone industry? [Sign up for our free Colored Stone GemMail newsletter.](#)

Subscribe to Colored Stone Today and Save!



colored stone

One year (6 issues)
Only \$29.95

Industry buyers and decision-makers all over the world rely on *Colored Stone's* extensive trade coverage for the latest information in the gem field. *Colored Stone* delivers up-to-the minute news on the gemstone trade, no matter where on the globe it's happening.

PLUS receive the **Tucson Show Guide** FREE! A must-have 500+ page annual guide incides all major trade show locations, exhibitor lists, and so much more. Also include is the largest directory of supplies and products that you'll want to refer to all year long. Don't go to the show without it. (**TSG** mails at the end of December).

Start a new subscription or give a gift at the same great price!

**New
Subscription**

**Gift
Subscription**

[Colored Stone Home](#)

[e-mail the editors of Colored Stone](#) | [About **Colored Stone**](#) | [Sign up for our e-newsletter](#)

[subscribe to **Colored Stone**](#) | [subscription customer service](#)

This site and all of its contents are copyright *Colored Stone* and [Interweave](#) unless otherwise noted.
All articles, photographs, graphics, logos, and trade show floorplans are owned by *Colored Stone* and may not be reproduced in any form, in print or in electronic media, without the express written permission of the publisher. Violators will be subject to legal action.

Copyright 2009. [Colored Stone/Interweave](#). All rights reserved.