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# Color Stories

## Designing around a dynamic opal

By Tina Wojtkielo Snyder



“I show you an opal. You show me a design.”

That was the deal I struck with the three willing designers whose imaginative jewelry pieces you’ll see on the following pages. Once they accepted the challenge to design around this fabulous opal from DuftyWeis Opals Inc. in Maysville, Kentucky, there was no turning back.

Mined in the Coober Pedy region of Australia, the opal has a dynamic play of color and a rather traditional shape—a combination that proved both challenging and eye opening for the designers. Measuring 13 mm long by 12 mm wide by 3.7 mm deep, this 4.43 carat gemstone inspired three unique jewelry pieces that command attention. The stories behind their creation follow.

# Elizabeth Gaultieri's Curiosity

Like the other designers who participated in this project, Elizabeth Gaultieri of Zaffiro in Portland, Oregon, was enchanted by the opal's play of color. But what really struck her, and thus served as the inspiration for her design, was the veining in the stone.

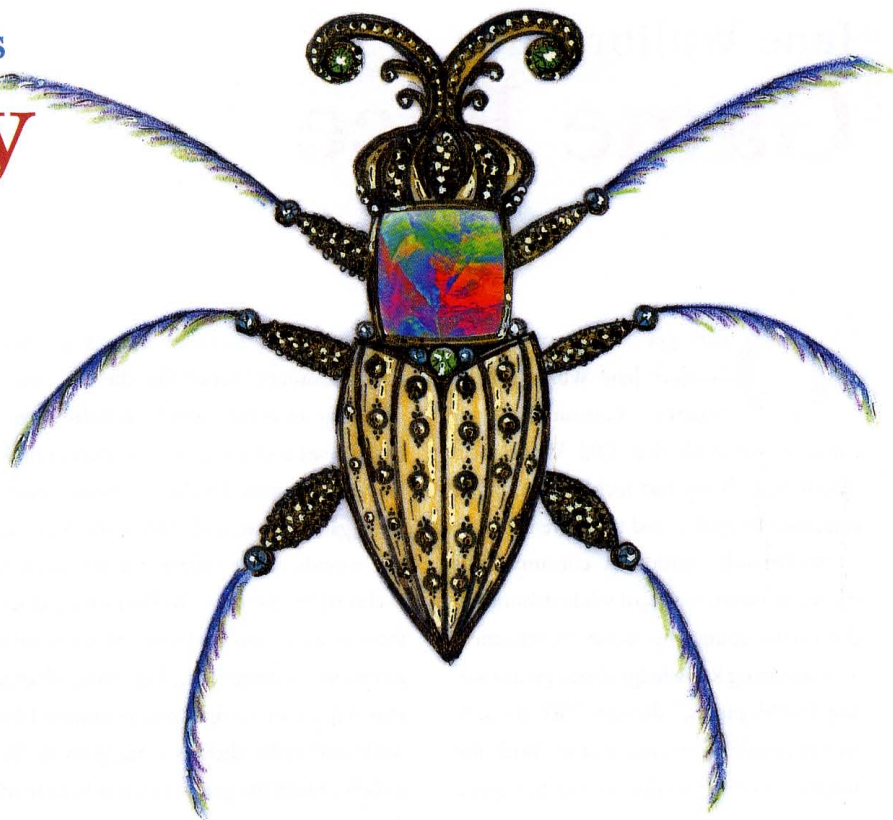
"Initially, it suggested a leaf form, but the shape of the stone doesn't lend itself to that, so I didn't want to force the design," says Gaultieri. After some contemplation, she made the leap from flora to fauna, settling on a beetle.

"The colors and the veining in the stone reminded me of an iridescent beetle," she says. "I wanted to construct an elaborate 22k beetle pin using the opal as the focal point on the body."

Her first priority was to create an anatomically correct bug. To do so, she consulted her reference library, which includes *Cabinet of Natural Curiosities* by Albertus Seba, a mid-18th century book filled with drawings of insects, including a number of beetles.

"I decided to construct the piece in several parts: the head, the central body part (where the stone is), the back, and the legs," she says. "Each section has a different scale, wirework, and granulation pattern, so each would require a different amount of heat to fuse properly."

The opal is bezel set, and each remaining component part is repoussé (the process of raising metal by hammering on the reverse side) and granulated, the latter of which is Zaffiro's signature style. The back and the head feature decorative wirework, a design element that Gaultieri chose



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for two reasons. "The wirework is important because it not only echoes the striking veining in the opal but also pays homage to John Paul Miller." Miller is credited as being the first American granulation artist and is well known for his line of beetles, moths, and snails, which feature a similar combination of wirework and granulation.

In the granulation on this piece, Gaultieri wanted to create a mix of random and ordered patterns. The granulation on the beetle's back is very purposely patterned, whereas the granulation on its head and legs is random, featuring a mix of granules in different sizes and in no defined pattern. "Seba's illustrations are beautiful, but they represent an Enlightenment-era naturalist's desire to impose order in the natural world. I loved the idea of translat-

ing that sensibility into a highly decorative form and having it juxtaposed with the random beauty of the opal and small areas of deliberately random granules."

As she usually does in her work, Gaultieri added a few subtle bursts of color into the design to carry through the dynamic play of color in the central stone. She set a tsavorite garnet flanked by two blue zircons where the opal bezel meets the back, as well as two tsavorite garnets in the beetle's antennae. As a final touch, she chose to accent the entire piece with peacock feathers set inside small tubes that are hidden behind the beetle's legs. She used the iridescent parts of the peacock feathers, which are predominantly blue and green with flashes of purple, to add an unexpected element to this bejeweled curiosity. ♦