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Moonstone's New Day

By Lorraine DePasque, Contributing Editor

Lately, doesn't it seem like moonstone is on the fingers, necks, and wrists of Hollywood A-listers everywhere? Well, it doesn't just seem that way—it is. Like Tory Burch sandals or the Louis V. bag, a moonstone-*some* thing has become the must-have in every fashionable woman's wardrobe.

It's an interesting trend because not since the mid-1920s has moonstone been so wildly popular. Back then, legendary master goldsmiths like Tiffany and Lalique paid homage to the translucent gem, making dramatic (now historic) pieces centered around it. So why moonstone and why again now?

The answer is "why *not!*," says Los Angeles-based jewelry-designer-to-the-stars, Erica Courtney, who sells to jewelers all over the world and who also has her own shop on Beverly Boulevard, where many celebrities (from Julia Roberts to Sheryl Crow) stop in to shop. "First of all, moonstone is glamour without being overstated. It's the kind of gem that you can wear day or evening because it's exciting but still not over the top." Also, very important, she adds, "It's a stone that you can pair with a lot of different colors. The celebrity stylists that I work with really like it because they're not always sure what the celebrity they're dressing will choose to actually wear on an awards night or for a movie premiere--and they know that moonstone jewelry will go with a lot of colors." Within this past year, Courtney's moonstone jewelry accessorized stars not only on the red carpets and at premieres but also in fashion trendsetting magazines like *InStyle* and on TV shows like "Desperate Housewives."

The fact that moonstone, a member of what is known as "the feldspar family" and one of June's birthstones, is generally cabochoned—meaning, cut with a curved surface on top and a flat back on bottom—also helps. "This cut, too, makes it easy to wear. And even if it's a big stone—like we often use—it's still affordable." (By example, Courtney's typical cocktail rings run anywhere from \$18,000 to \$125,000, and one of her moonstone cocktail rings—with a big uber moonstone, of course—is typically around \$20,000.) "The bigger it is, the more you can see

its natural adularescence, which always makes it a conversation piece."

Ah, the alluring adularescence of moonstone: that elusive shimmering gleam of light moving around in the heart of the moonstone. Perhaps that is what captivates us and is also the reason few gemstones have accumulated so much legend and lore throughout the centuries. According to Hindu legend, for example, moonstone was formed from moonbeams. The early Romans, too, regarded it to be "made of moonlight" and possess healing powers. Many ancient cultures believed we could be hypnotized simply by staring at the moonstone as the light turns slightly back and forth. (There is, of course, some scientific basis for this—after all, hypnotists have used the method of concentration on a moving shining light for several hundred years!)

For 30 years, award-winning jewelry designer, Paula Crevoshay, has often used moonstone in her high-end creations. The Albuquerque, New Mexico, goldsmith who travels the world for inspiration, says, "Moonstone is in and of itself an inspiration! The adularescence of moonstone is a magnet. I've always used these gems because of their phenomenal optical effects." Crevoshay notes another very important aspect of moonstone: "It makes a wonderful carving stone, and I have done several pieces over the years that are quite special."

If you're someone who craves the unusual, try to look for carved moonstones. One thing is certain: It will be an original that no one else will have. A little over a hundred years ago, carved moonstone faces, cameos, cupids, and doves set in gold or platinum jewelry were favorites of the upper classes in both the U.S. and Europe, especially in brooches. With Michelle Obama fast becoming a contemporary style icon and someone who clearly loves fine jewelry, a moonstone brooch is something you might want to consider. Paparazzi often show the new First Lady wearing a large brooch pinned onto a dress or wrap, and some fashion insiders predict she can single-handedly bring back the brooch!

Speaking of fashion, as this year continues to unfold, the colors of blue, white, and silver moonstone are more perfect than ever. Here's what Pat Tunsky, creative director and internationally recognized fashion, color, and trend forecaster for The Doneger Group, New York City, has to say: "First of all, softer shades of white and winter whites are very important, for early and late '09." Next, we all know how all-important black is to fashion, of course, but, according to Tunsky, "Gray has become just as strong as black, from charcoal to softer shades of gray." She especially recommends wearing your lavender, blue teals, greeny teals, and many brights paired with grays. (And your silver moonstones, of course.)



Moonstone Earrings by Erica Courtney

Finally, regarding the color blue and blue moonstone . . . for spring, Palace Blue is the number one fashion color, says Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute. Called by some "the international color guru," Eiseman, too, underscores the importance of gray going forward, noting Slate Gray as number seven in the season's top ten fashion colors, calling it "a nuanced neutral."

Whether your moonstone is blue, white, or silver, you will be in fashion when wearing it this year. And chances are, you won't have a hard time finding it—not if the 2009 Spectrum Awards™ are any indication of how some of the America's best jewelry designers are looking at it. The Spectrum Awards, as you know, is the annual competition held by us, the American Gem Trade Association, to honor excellence in jewelry design and lapidary arts. "When we looked at the number of entries using moonstone this year over 2008, we saw that they more than doubled," says AGTA Marketing Manager Adam Graham. "It's easy to wear and it really looks beautiful against the skin. And designers, who naturally have such a strong aesthetic, know this."

If you, like designers, celebrities, and a fast-growing group of consumers, have made up your mind on a moonstone purchase this year, just make a mental note that, while these beautiful, mesmerizing gems aren't exactly soft, they have a far-from-rugged hardness of 6-6-1/2 (on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the hardest). Be fashion-forward and have fun in your moonstone jewelry but, that said, don't shower, skateboard, or ski while wearing it—or you could be less than moonstruck by the outcome!