

# Not All Lapidary Involves Cutting Gems or Rocks: Imagination Holds Sway

## Many Creative Uses For Gem Crystals Allow Artistic Expression Absent Reshaping

You don't need to cut or reshape every gemstone in order to produce lovely projects or to create gem articles that have commercial value. Indeed, a number of techniques exist that lend themselves to a mental or assembly approach. A rather silly - but incredibly successful - example of this premise lies with the "Pet Rock" fad. Proving that imagination can work in wondrous ways, this still popular fad hurtled into national consciousness as soon as a creative individual used inexpensive "dress up" items including plastic eyes and mouths to produce a human-like rock. People still flock to buy the Pet Rocks - at a substantial markup.

As facetiously profitable as the Pet Rock example appears, it does speak a great truth. No individual working with rocks and gemstones should overlook the myriad of creative opportunities that exist.



(Note: "A" and "B" show how you can graft a charm or figure to a rough piece of mineral to achieve an artistic end, while "C" demonstrates how wax and wick filling of hollows in jasper and fire agate can produce marvelous candles.)

## Grafting Techniques . . .

Find a small metal, plastic or wooden boat and use glue to attach it to a sea blue rock slab and you have a good grasp on grafting. Grafting involves a combination of items or articles which conform to the color and/or texture of a stone's surface. The illustrations show a small shark swimming - on the surface

of a section of blue Oregon agate. In this case, the agate's color is natural but dyeing a piece of stone to that color doesn't break the rules. I once saw a lovely graft consisting of a small metal alloy model of a mountain goat perched precariously on a section of natural rock that looked amazingly like a mountain side.

## The Japanese Practice of "Suseki" . . .

Addressing the issue of natural rock shapes, please be aware that the world boasts of a rather large community of men and women who practice the ageless practice of Japanese Suseki. Suseki can be defined as an appreciation process wherein the natural shape of a rock or stone is exalted. The objective of this ancient form is to find a representational stone, one that symbolizes or equates with a natural form or shape such as an animal, organic element, mountain or glacier, etc. Strict Suseki followers are aghast at touching or altering the stone in any way. Some westerners plane off the bottom so stones will fit flat and more conveniently in the finished wood or metal bases.



(The author's Suseki examples shown above represent a mountain goat, a dinosaur and the Matterhorn mountain. The ultimate in this rock artistry form is finding a representational rock and then mounting it.)

## Glyptography . . .

If you have drawing or similar artistic inclinations, you might enjoy glyptography. This multi-syllable word is a sort of all-embrasive term which describes the disciplines of artists who sculpt as well as apply lovely - and appropriate - designs, templates, paintings, etc. to the face or surface of rocks and minerals. A number of artists specialize in oil painting the face of a mineral slab (as demonstrated at the top of the page, combining the two elements into a single whole).

## **Fabricating Gem Materials . . .**

Glue together stones or pieces of crystal, fashioned or rough, into a single entity and you have a good example of the time-honored art of fabrication. The small - expensive-- - quartz houses that you see in the curio shops represent fabrication carried to its current extreme. Yes, these pretty creations are constructed of faceted pieces but the same treatment can be carried out with stones that are only rough in shape. See stone and gem fabrication for what it really is, though. The discipline takes in the exquisite Roman and Florentine and Byzantine mosaics, the art of creating doublet and triplets (two and three-layer assemblies with thin patches of opal or other phenomenal gem materials sandwiched under a clear quartz top). In St. Petersburg, Russia, the great museum there boasts some of the most majestic - and huge - vases created out of a mosaic of thousands of small, matching pieces of lapis lazuli and malachite. The tiny pieces were cut and matched, jig saw style, to cover a base construction, giving the distinct impression that the vase was cut from a single piece.



Yes, the assemblies above are unique and imaginative. The next time you have a chance, though, take a careful look sometime at a stone wall built by an Italian or Irish craftsmen and you'll appreciate that irregular pieces of rock can be fabricated into an interesting and beautiful whole. Often, the stones fit only approximately and mortar fills in the spaces.

The same technique is easily accomplished on a microscale. That's how a number of Renaissance artists created wall frescoes and elaborate scenes that challenge the finest oil paintings. With rock artistry, the process can be as simple as gluing some sea shells into a pleasing seaside scene or faceting intricate pieces to create a valuable gem object such as a car, human statue, flower, etc. Because imagination has no limits, the artistry involved with rocks and gems likewise is without a horizon.