Value Factors for Fine Mineral Specimens

Accurately determining a mineral specimen's value has two elements:

- Assessing the QUALITY of the specimen.
- Determining the MARKET DESIRABILITY of the specimen.

QUALITY

The mineral specimen quality characteristics are in some ways similar to the generic "yardsticks" applied to the evaluation of cut diamond gemstones: "color, cut, clarity and carat weight". The following is a set of straight forward characteristics I utilize to evaluate quality in mineral specimens.

The several characteristics which define a SUPERB quality mineral specimen will include:

- **Strong Aesthetic Appeal**
  - Beautiful "arrangement" of the individual mineral crystals composing the specimen <or> an attractive, sculptural "form" in botryoidal, reniform, or stalactiform mineral specimens.
  - Specimen possesses a strong focal point, that is:
    - It has a dominant, central crystal or group of crystals (as opposed to being a "druse" of small crystals)
    - It has a strong color contrast between the primary mineral species composing the specimen (i.e. the bright blue on grass green of a Azurite on Malachite specimen)
    - It has a spectacular or unusual overall crystal form. (i.e. Amethyst crystal "flowers" from Brazil, Calcite "bird-baths" from China, Azurite "roses" from many worldwide locales)
  - The specimens overall height and width proportions roughly adhere to the "Golden Ratio" proportions of: 1.618 by 1.0
  - Crystals on a natural rock or mineral matrix (whenever possible). However, the amount of matrix material should NOT overwhelm the size and number of crystals present.
  - Ideally, the matrix is composed of a well-crystallized secondary mineral exhibiting a contrasting color (i.e. green Tourmaline on lavender-color Lepidolite < or > amber-colored Barite on yellowish Calcite).
  - While Thumbnail-size, Toenail-size, and extremely large mineral specimens are "collectible" … The current mineral market has a

strong preference for specimens ranging in diameter from a small Lime to a large Cantaloupe.

- **<u>Possesses Tangible High-Quality Characteristics</u>**
  - Relative freedom from external damage (i.e. nicks or dings)
  - Freedom from repairs or restorations
  - Good transparency or translucency (exclusive of opaque, metallic species like: gold, silver, copper, etc.)
  - Relative freedom from internal cleavage planes or distracting internal inclusions
  - Strong surface luster (as opposed to "dull" surfaces)
  - Vibrant colors (as opposed to light hues)
  - Individual crystal size above average for the species/locality
  - Crystal form is razor-sharp example for the species
  - Single gem crystals are not sawed at the bottom
  - Durability of the specimen is important. Suggest incorporating the fragility of each mineral species into your purchase making decisions. Brittle, soft, or chemically unstable minerals (no matter how beautiful) may not remain "quality specimens" for the life of your collection.
  - The specimen does not have any artificial color enhancement from irradiation or heat treatment.
  - The use of "Luster Enhancement Techniques" is growing in the mineral marketplace today … this is controversial … each collector must be aware of the laboratory methods being used today (including: the application of surface coatings, micro-polishing, and filling of internal cleavages/fractures with epoxy resin). Collector's must ask mineral dealers, at-point-of-sale, what has been done to enhance the natural mineral specimen. These laboratory enhancements can have an impact upon the correct market value. It is highly recommended to examine a potential new addition to your mineral collection with a hand lens and UV flashlight prior to making a purchase decision.
- **<u>Has Scientific or Historical Significance</u>**
  - Rarity of the mineral species, its mineral associations, and its locality of occurrence.
  - Interesting "discovery story".
  - Interesting provenance (i.e. ex-Public Museum or major Private Collection specimen).
  - Specimen comes with interesting "old" collection labels.
  - Photographically featured in a book or magazine.

MARKET DESIRABILITY

- Mineral specimens are not like mass produced collectibles such as: coins, postage stamps, sports cards. These mass produced items have well established and published market values based upon the **quality**, **quantity available**, and **market desirability**.
- Each mineral specimen is unique in its: aesthetic composition, associated mineral species, crystal/specimen size, overall quality.
- And further, for most mineral occurrences there is precious little known about the quantity of specimens recovered from a given discovery and/or the "look" of the very best pieces. This leads to the question … "Am I considering a specimen in the top 5 pieces from the find or the 10,000th best piece?" (i.e. Moroccan Vanadinite).
- Finally, the "mineral market is a fickle beast" … there are trends in the marketplace which can change from year-to-year or decade-to-decade … a mineral species, locality, or crystal characteristic can be "HOT" in the market at one point in time and "COLD" at another period. (i.e. Japan-Law Twinning in Quartz crystals)
- While determining the "quality" of a specimen is somewhat straight-forward … determining the "market desirability" and therefore the correct market value for a given mineral specimen is complex.
- **The collector and/or the collector's advisors need to study "fashion" trends in the mineral marketplace and be aware of the specimen production quantities from important discoveries in order to accurately assess a given specimen's desirability and value.**
- For instance, Zeolite minerals from India are some of the most beautifully crystallized, high-quality mineral specimens in the world, however, these minerals are very abundant throughout India's Deccan Plateau, an area of over 300,000 square miles. These zeolite specimens will NEVER be rare, so their value will always be depressed in the marketplace relative to their quality.
- A good example of a market "fashion trend" is the current production of world-class, gemmy, blue Aquamarine specimens from Pakistan. The Nagar locality produces large, lustrous, translucent blue aquamarine crystals on a nicely color-contrasting, steel-gray, well-crystallized muscovite mica matrix. The Shigar locality produces somewhat smaller, lustrous, transparent and therefore slightly less blue-colored aquamarine crystals on a stark white albite feldspar and colorless quartz matrix. The mineral market has clearly spoken … The smaller crystal sized, more gemmy, but, lighter blue aquamarine specimens from the Shigar locality are 2 to 3 times higher priced than overall similar sized Nagar specimens.

- Collectors *(and miners and dealers)* have a very difficult time establishing fair market values on brand new mineral discoveries. Generally, collectors take a "wait and see" additude on new finds … it can often take several years before the marketplace can put a new mineral discovery in its proper context with previously found comparables. In the case of Azurite specimens which began to hit the market from the Milpillas Mine in Mexico in 2006, seasoned/shrewd collectors recognized that these azurites were among the finest quality they had ever seen from anywhere in the world. These collectors bought heavily at an early stage in production and have been rewarded by significant increases in value since that time.
- However, the reverse can be true, occasionally a new discovery "hits the market" with extremely strong asking prices. If specimen production remains at a high-level for a period of time the market can become saturated with these specimens. Early purchasers can see a reduction in the market value of their pieces.
- Ultimately there is some good news:
    - If one concentrates on acquiring the very finest quality of specimen they can afford, the specimen will have a better resale potential than the rest of the pieces from a find … that helps preserve value.
    - Establishing the "correct" value for a given mineral specimen is ultimately in the hands of the collectors who make up the mineral market. If the price appears to be "out of line" with **comparables** the piece will sit on the dealer's shelf. If the valuation is correct the specimen will evaporate from the dealer's inventory.
    - I believe it is fair to ask a seller how they arrived at their market value for a given piece. If you continue to be intrigued by the specimen, ask the dealer if they would "hold" the specimen for a short period .. this can give you some time to do some quick market research or speak with your advisor(s).
    - Walking away can often be the correct decision if you are unsure about the QUALITY and/or the PRICE of a given specimen.

Remember, collecting minerals should be fun! Mineral collecting is an intensely personal hobby, your collection needs to reflect **your own** sense of aesthetic beauty and quality. **I feel strongly that every collector should:**

1. Establish a clear "vision" regarding what they wish to accomplish by assembling a fine mineral collection.
2. Focus upon building a mineral collection of superb quality and importance which, over a period of time, will perform well as a "store of wealth" for you and your family.
3. Continually seek knowledge to improve one's decision making.