

Treatments

Lab detects treatments in Ethiopian black opal

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Jefferson City, Mo.—Stone Group Laboratories (SGL), a Missouri-based gemological testing facility, recently identified several black opals from Wollo, Ethiopia, that were enhanced using the smoke treatment method but submitted as natural.

Multi-media retailer Jewelry Television submitted the opals to SGL for testing before purchasing, with the lab noting that Jewelry Television has one of the “most strenuous” protocols in the industry for identifying treatments in any colored gemstones they sell.

SGL Laboratory Director Bear Williams said the smoke treatment, which is used to enhance the color of the opal, is an older method but new for the Ethiopian hydrophane material. He said the durability of opals from Wollo specifically, as well as the nature of the hydrophane opal in general, allows for the smoke treatment.

“Not seen in quite some time, this color enhancement initially proved to be a difficult identification,” he said. “By duplicating the treatment in our laboratories, and making close observations both visually as well as with Raman and infrared testing, we are now able to positively identify the treatment.”

He adds that most gemologists should be able to spot this treatment through careful examination.

Williams said the smoke treatment is the second type of technique used to create the look of black opal identified by SGL this year. The first was a black coating.

“To date, we have seen no natural black opal from Ethiopia, although the material from Shewa, Ethiopia, often will exhibit a dark brown body color,” he said.