



Milky White, Fancy White or Opalescent?

By Renée Newman GG,
author of the *Diamond
Ring Buying Guide*

"I disagree that we should consider milky white diamonds in a similar way as yellow diamonds because the difference is mainly one of transparency, not of color."

When I used to sort parcels of poor-quality diamonds, it was not uncommon to see milky diamonds. A general rule of pricing was the lower the transparency, the less valuable the diamond. Because of my background with junk diamonds, I was surprised to see three milky stones identified as Fancy White diamonds in the GIA Gem Trade Lab Notes of the summer 2000 issue of *Gems & Gemology*.

I mentioned this in a letter to Tom Moses and Dr. Ilene Reinitz, the authors of the write-up; and I asked them how they would grade the clarity of these diamonds. Moses wrote back: "As a point of clarification, one should consider white diamonds in a similar way as yellow diamonds: at least with regard to the color, light yellow diamonds are generally less desirable than those that are intensely colored. Likewise diamonds that are 'cloudy white' are not unusual or as desirable as a translucent white diamond displaying opalescent colors resulting from scattering within the stone. The diamonds we described were translucent with an opalescent effect."

In the next paragraph, Moses states: "Most white diamonds, those that are translucent or semi-translucent, are



usually not graded for clarity when they are submitted to our Laboratory. In some instances they would be off the GIA clarity grading scale. Clients are most interested in the color grade, Fancy White, and establishing that it is a natural color. The diamonds described in the lab notes section were not graded for clarity."

I disagree that we should consider milky white diamonds in a similar way as yellow diamonds because the difference is mainly one of transparency, not of color. The whiteness results from a concentration of submicroscopic inclusions. There's also a major price difference between yellow and milky white diamonds. The highest price paid at auction for a white diamond is \$2,933 per

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Editor: Douglas Kearney
Minneapolis, MN

For information regarding
Cornerstone Contact:
International Headquarters
3309 Juanita Street,
San Diego, CA 92105
<http://aga.polygon.net>

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

AGA Conference Updates and More...

There is a change in the schedule for the annual AGA Tucson Conference. For personal reasons, Sarah Hue Williams (*The Jewels of 1945-1965*) has had to cancel her presentation (maybe next year). However, Greg Sherman and Branko Deljanin of European Gemological Laboratory USA have stepped into the breach with what once again appears to be even more fast-breaking news of gemological import.

I'll bet you thought that you had heard your last presentation of HPHT, nitrogen centers, type IIa diamonds and the enhanced fancy colors that have a future glowing in the dark at chic Halloween parties. Wasn't that *you* I saw dozing off during last year's discussion of atomic level crystallography and spectrographic analysis of treated diamonds (or did I just dream that)?

Well, EGL USA didn't fall asleep, and they continued with their HPHT research over the past year. They have traveled to Russia, spoken on the subject around the world and have visited De Beers in London. Most importantly, they are researching before/after conditions of various diamond types. But there's even more news—such as new and appealing enhanced colors, and SURPRISE (or are we really surprised?)...HPHT treatment of type Ia diamonds.

That's right, your mind is functioning correctly and you need not touch that dial. Type Ia diamonds represent approximately 98% of the diamond crystals that come out of the ground. So now I bet you want to hear more about HPHT at the upcoming AGA Tucson Symposium where this information will be presented in full for the first time.

And that's only one of the exciting

presentations for that day. Even the *Wall Street Journal* ("Marketplace" section, Wednesday, December 6, 2000) is wondering how Chinese freshwater pearls are going to affect the cultured pearl market in the coming years. What are you telling your clients? Once again there is so much for the professional gemologist to catch up with—so get off your duff and get registered for the Symposium to be held on Thursday, February 1st 2001!

My congratulations go to David Harris and the other incoming officers and board members of the AGA. Surely, we remain in capable hands.

This is my last President's Message in the *Cornerstone*. I considered the obligatory "going away" message but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I'm not going anywhere. Thanks to everyone's efforts over the years, the AGA still serves as the unbiased and independent voice of professional gemologists worldwide. Why would an anarchist want to leave that? I'll be seeing you around.

Thom Underwood, President – AGA

Schedule of Events for AGA – Tucson

February 1, 2001

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Conference

5:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
*Membership Meeting

7:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.
Dinner Dance

February 2, 2001

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
*Board Meeting

*All AGA members welcome

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carat (3.92 cts). The highest price for a yellow diamond was \$238,792 per carat (13.83 cts) (from *Coloured Diamonds* by Hofer (p. 122-3). Four-carat yellow diamonds have fetched prices as high as \$51,000 per carat.

Let's consider another gemstone: sapphire. Transparent yellow sapphire is desirable; translucent sapphire is not desirable and neither is translucent diamond, except to collectors and designers in need of white stones.

I don't see an opal-like play of color in the three diamonds pictured in *Gems & Gemology*. It seems like a disservice to the Australian opal to attach the term "opalescent" to milky stones like these when they have little or no play of color. But I've just learned that other people use this term in the same manner.

The term "opalescent" is defined in Steve Hofer's book, *Collecting and Classifying Coloured Diamonds* (which, incidentally, is a beautifully produced book and an essential reference for anyone interested in colored diamonds). On page 254, Hofer states that "an opalescent diamond correctly refers to white diamonds with a milky or cloudy appearance, typical of the milky or cloudy appearance of common opal. In this instance, the term opalescent has nothing to do with the flashes of color seen in precious opal, which result from diffraction of light."

Hofer shows several examples of milky diamonds. But even though they may be of interest to collectors, they look like bargain-basement diamonds to me.

I didn't realize that dealers could instruct labs to indicate only favorable attributes on diamond grading reports.

In my opinion, clarity grades on diamond reports should not be optional if color grades are indicated. I do feel, however, that dealers and consumers should have the option of getting a basic diamond ID report that just provides identification and treatment data. Color can be stated in generic terms such as "white."

Considering the events of the past two years, it wouldn't surprise me if



some dealer started laser inscribing low-grade milky diamonds with a French-like brand name such as "Bellablanche" (beautiful white). He could even charge 5% more than transparent diamonds by promoting their rarity and claiming that less than 1% of the world's diamonds have the remarkable white opalescence of his Bellablanche Diamonds. Proving their authenticity would be a cinch with a GIA grading report identifying them as Fancy White. The dealer wouldn't even need to be concerned about a clarity grade being indicated on the report.

This past year, a Retailer-Hall-of-Fame

jeweler actually bragged to the trade press that he got customers to pay a premium for GE-POL diamonds inexpensive brown diamonds that have been treated to remove their color. GIA lab reports were probably used to help sell the diamonds.

It's understandable that the first GIA lab reports for GE-POL diamonds had to say "Pegasus Overseas Limited states that this diamond has been processed to improve its appearance." But why is the GIA lab continuing this vague disclosure statement when they know what the treatment is, and they can identify it? (Bill Boyajian's

introduction to the spring issue of *Gems & Gemology* implies the GIA lab still uses this disclosure statement and doesn't have plans to change it.) Why doesn't the GIA simply state that the diamonds have been treated with heat and pressure to improve the color grade? Their articles in *Gems & Gemology* say this very clearly. The managing director of GE-POL has even stated in a letter to *National Jeweler* that "it is to everybody's advantage for consumers to know exactly what they are buying."

In a couple of months, I'll have a new book out called the *Gem & Jewelry Pocket Guide*. It includes a chapter on lab documents with sample lab reports from five labs that I say are internationally respected and noted for their research and contributions to the field of gemology. The only diamond report shown is a sample from the GIA. The implication to readers is that the GIA GTL is a consumer-oriented lab they can trust.

But now I'm having to ask myself, "Is a lab consumer-oriented if it doesn't clearly indicate pertinent treatment information and if it makes clarity grades optional on grading reports." Hopefully the GIA already has plans

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A Message from the President Elect

As I read Thom Underwood's last article, I contemplated what I could do during my term in office. Everyone who agrees to serve an office in a volunteer organization seems to ask, "What will I be able to contribute to enhance the organization?" Tom's article made me ask myself why AGA couldn't formulate a program that would enable new students to work within our laboratories. This organization has been the forefront of educational programs; consumer awareness; new programs created for the benefit of our industry (CGL and Master Gemologist Appraiser program); and recognizing those who contribute to the betterment of the industry.

I propose in the next three years that we continue AGA's leadership role in the industry by developing an "Accredited Gemologist Intern" program. I have been offering a program like this since 1992, which allows individuals (students of GIA) to use the laboratory to improve their skills and to gain experience by performing certain tasks in the lab. Twenty-five students have gone through my program since its beginning, and the majority of them completed their studies and are now working in the industry. I believe we can develop a standardized program, which will give students experience in the gemological field prior to graduating and enable them to assimilate into the industry more quickly. Many others are providing this type of mentoring program already and you too can assist in



"Our formal education is only a basic one and it is through mentors that we increase our experience, as well as our knowledge."

standardizing a program. Our formal education is only a basic one and it is through mentors that we increase our experience, as well as our knowledge.

The first question I can anticipate is, "What's in it for my business or me personally?" To begin with, we increase our own knowledge when we teach. Teaching forces us to study and research techniques, scientific data, etc. to better answer questions. Students ask questions that many times refresh us in areas we have become mechanical in, or they question statements we continually repeat without reviewing them for accuracy. Through mentoring programs, we develop

individuals who will one day replace us. It has been stated, by whom I'm not sure, "We cannot be promoted in our jobs or retire without replacing ourselves with someone who will be better and brighter than ourselves."

Your thoughts on what I'm proposing are important to me. We will be holding our membership meeting in Tucson on February 1, 2001 after the Symposium. Our annual board meeting will also take place the following day. However, I would prefer your comments and suggestions prior to Tucson. Hopefully, we can present a format, which will help our members and future members to improve their skills and knowledge.

Before I make my closing remarks, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the incredible job Thom Underwood has done as President. He has placed our organization on a smooth course and he has worked tirelessly promoting AGA and its programs. I hope to follow his example and maintain a steady hand on the helm. Fortunately, Thom remains on board as an advisor. I am looking forward to working with the excellent corps of Directors and Governors this next term. With Thom's advice and guidance, we have in place a solid slate of officers to move us further into the 21st century. I hope to see everyone at the Dinner Dance on February 1st.

David L. Harris
President 2001 – 2003

Wide Awake: EGL and HPHT

— Gregory E. Sherman
Branko Deljanin

Changing the color of diamonds through High Pressure High Temperature annealing was seen as something Faustian when General Electric introduced their GE-POL (now Bellataire) diamonds two years ago. Industry leaders were caught off guard and rightfully alarmed at the prospects of enhanced diamonds defying detection. Make no mistake; the consequences of this scenario can still threaten the foundation and stability of the diamond industry. It shows how sleepy we are as an industry, considering HPHT technology has been around at least since the 1970s. Apparently, lots of people knew about it and decided to keep quiet.

Fortunately, a lot of progress has been made on the HPHT battlefield. Major laboratories worldwide, including our own, have been working tirelessly to deal with HPHT diamond detection and have made considerable progress. However, the science of HPHT keeps on evolving, and our observations at European Gemological

Laboratory seem to say, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

Since the controversy began, EGL has been heavily involved in HPHT research. We have participated in color change experiments of our own design at various facilities around the world, including the U.S. and Russia. We have also sought out and consulted with top experts in the fields of high pressure diamond technology, synthetic diamonds and diamond color centers. An especially rewarding experience took place at



"...we are now encountering many more colors from a variety of previously unknown sources."

DeBeers research headquarters in Maidenhead, England, where we got a close-up look at developments in the detection of HPHT and synthetic diamond.

We dare say that we have more information and more hands-on experience in this area than any other gemological laboratory in the world. HPHT technology is simultaneously fascinating and alarming. Where at this time last year, we primarily had to worry about diamonds with bright yellow, and yellow to greenish hues (along with decolorized type IIa material; rare), we are now encountering many more colors from a variety of previously unknown sources. Additionally, in the future, we may have to consider that diamonds other than type IIa may qualify for a certain amount of color improvement.

These are all issues under current investigation by our laboratory and we will be discussing some of our recent findings at the Accredited Gemologists Association Symposium. ■

The Accredited Gemologists Association's Election Results

By Edith Underwood Serrano

As you know, elections are over (and with no Supreme Court involvement). Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity to thank those who are leaving their positions.

Specifically, we thank out-going officers Thom Underwood—President, Joseph DuMouchelle—Vice President and Melinda Adducci—Secretary. The AGA has benefited from the time and effort each of these members has extended while serving as International Officers.

Stepping into their positions are David L. Harris—President, James Naughtner—Vice President, Richard Huntington—Treasurer and Lorraine Lopezzo—Secretary. All of these new officers have been previously involved as either Directors or Governors with the AGA.

Replacing James, Lorraine and Richard as part of the Board of Governors are Karen Bonanno DeHaas, Richard Drucker and Thomas Tashey. With assistance from our remaining Governors, Craig A. Lynch, Dana Lynn Richardson and Christine York, it seems that the AGA is ready to face the new millennium.

We will install our new officers and board members during the AGA Dinner Dance at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, February 1, 2001 at the Marriott—University Park, 880 East 2nd Street in Tucson. Are you registered to attend the Dance and witness this event? If not, get registered! If so, see you there! ■



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in the works to make their lab reports better represent the interests of consumers.

Milky white, Fancy White, or opalescent? What term would you use to describe translucent white diamonds? I know how I'll be describing them in my books. I'll just be calling them milky white, translucent diamonds. This won't stop collectors from buying them; this won't keep designers from using them to create unique jewelry pieces; nor will it discourage discounters from using them in promotional jewelry. Using clear terminology will just help prevent consumers from being misled about the value of diamonds with poor transparency.

Instead of turning gem labs into marketing firms, let's encourage them to provide clear, objective, complete information. This will help them accomplish their mission of protecting consumers and upholding the integrity of the gem industry. ■

Please send me a membership application for Accredited Gemologists Association

Name: _____

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Membership with full voting privileges is available to professionals holding gemological diplomas from accepted institutions.

Associate Membership is available to students of gemology and avocational gemologists.

Supplier Membership is available to providers of goods and services to the gem & jewelry industry.

AGA will not discriminate against any applicant based upon race, creed, color, national origin, age or gender. Applicants are required to meet substantial member qualifications, and to adhere to the AGA Code of Ethics.

Application Guidelines

\$25 Processing Fee (one-time, non-refundable) will be retained by AGA.

\$100 Voting Member Dues.

\$75 Associate Member Dues.

\$50 Student Member Dues.

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Make checks payable to Accredited Gemologists Association, in U.S. funds.

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