



Fig. 1. Two-finger ring, chrysoprase, stg silver and 24 ct gold



Fig. 2. Earrings, variscite, stg silver and 24 ct gold

## DESIGNING WITH STONES

Regine Schwarzer collects gemstones and cuts them in unusual ways. A stone of intense colour and character lies at the heart of each piece in her latest collection.

Profile by Philippa Milroy. Photography by Grant Hancock

LAST YEAR Regine Schwarzer added a gem-cutting machine to her Adelaide Hills studio. It joined a small group of compact machines that already extend the ability of her hands to transform metal: to roll and blend; to impress shapes; to polish, grip and stretch.

Schwarzer's jewellery is characterised by clean lines and clear forms. She likes to use silver and high-carat gold together, in sculpted and geometric shapes. Her signature style incorporates engraved images, tiny set stones, carefully placed markings, and variations in the finish of the metal that together suggest associations – a story to be told. She insists that each piece be comfortable to wear, but that it also intrigues and invites examination. Now Schwarzer is focused on creating a body of new work: jewellery that exclusively features Australian gem and ornamental stones, such as chrysoprase, tourmaline, agate, amethyst, opal, variscite, prehnite and even granite. 'There's such immense variety here in Australia. The gradual, random process of rock formation has resulted in incredible colours, unpredictable variations and unexpected inclusions – each stone is unique and fascinating to work with,' says Schwarzer.

Using the new machine, she is starting with the stones in their raw form so that her designer's eye is involved right from the initial decision of how to cut them. For Schwarzer this early stage is a process of exploration and choice. She cuts each stone, selecting features that form the beginnings of the design for the whole piece. In making a choice to present a certain expression of a stone, the design process begins.

Schwarzer has used gemstones in the past, as elements in the decorative patterns she develops. However, they were no more central than an etched spiral or a gold geometric shape. In this new series she is starting with the stones that form the centre of each design, and by experimenting with various combinations of materials and shapes, she highlights the features of these stones. The shape, colour, variations and inclusions are all considered as she works outward to construct each item of jewellery. Every piece evolves as an extrapolation of the interest she finds within a stone.

Schwarzer speaks about the dual process of cutting the stone and designing the piece around it. 'Depending on the stone, I may seek colour, or alternatively, I may be



Fig. 3. Two-finger rings, opal prehnite, amethyst and chrysoprase, stg silver and 22 ct gold

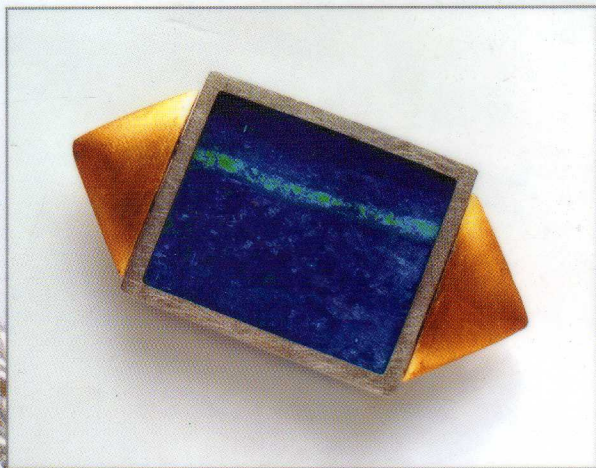


Fig. 4. Brooch, opal, stg silver, 24 ct gold



Fig. 5. Two-finger rings, pearl, prehnite, chrysoprase, stg silver, gold



Fig. 6. Necklace, boulder opal, stg silver and 24 ct gold



cutting for the pattern in the stone. In the search for colour, some stones, such as opals, may offer a shape. The cutter must go with the shape while obtaining as much colour as possible. For example, prehnite is a brilliant yellow, but I must chase the colour to get it. Some stones, such as fine quality chrysoprase, occasionally offer clear, continuous colour, which allows more freedom with the shape.

One brooch (Fig. 4) features an enormous blue opal that shines like a sunlit shallow sea. It is framed with silver, and the gold points she has sculpted at each end draw it out to create the impression that the stone extends beyond our vision inside the square frame. With this piece Schwarzer has chosen to emphasise an expanse of intense colour, framing it without much embellishment.

A curved pyramid of unusual green stands lifted at the centre of one of Schwarzer's two-finger rings (Fig. 1). Here she has framed this strong architectural form with a band of silver carrying tiny gold symbols that highlight the luxurious expanse of colour and tie in with the gold markings at each end of the ring. She loves the even green of chrysoprase and has cut several pyramids in this stone which she has set as rings and earrings.

Bright yellow prehnite and chrysoprase recur in several of the two-finger rings (Fig. 3 and 5), in combination with various other stones, where Schwarzer has chosen examples

Fig. 7. Necklace, boulder opal, stg silver and 24 ct gold

of intense colour and set them together as unadorned shapes so that the contrast of the colours is the striking feature. Worn on the hand, nothing can be seen of the ingenious band; the stones appear to float on the fingers. The cutting selection is different if pattern is to be the dominant feature. 'The shape of the final stone makes an enormous difference to the presentation of pattern. Variscite can be cut in different ways to produce various effects. For example, in some variscite there is almost a grain so that a flatter piece can appear striped. Turning it at right angles is like cutting across the grain. Or a high rounded shape can produce floating islands of darker colour.' For a pair of cufflinks, Schwarzer has cut smooth squares of softly striped variscite and bordered them with gold so that the reverse sides feature repeating squares of gold upon silver.

In a different piece of variscite Schwarzer has chosen to follow a thread of white that runs through the green. Already imagining these shapes on the ear, she has cut slices so that the bowed white line through them highlights their curve. The top of each piece is capped with a crown of points that lifts the whole earring, leading away from the visual weight of the stone (*Fig. 2*).

Utilising the natural setting sometimes enhances the interest of a stone. Holding a thin slice of opal-bearing rock, Schwarzer explains how she searches for colour, cutting across the veins that swell and recede through the rock: 'Here the cut has produced a shape that hints at a meaning. Some of these markings where the opal peeks through the surrounding stone resemble the shapes seen in ancient cave paintings – abstract, primitive and simple.' In a link with much of her previous work, she has turned this slice into a neckpiece that uses abstract symbols to suggest narrative. Schwarzer has built up the shape of the piece by adding a shield of silver below. To balance the asymmetrical stone above, she has shifted a mass of matte gold in the middle of the shield slightly to one side so that markings along its edge lead the eye to the figure in the rock (*Fig. 7*).

In another neckpiece layers of coloured opal sliced with its own bedrock produce a landscape effect. A gem cutter would usually remove and use a slip of the pure opal: Schwarzer finds it beautiful and suggestive against its surrounding stone. The setting (navette or "boat-shaped" – a favourite of Schwarzer) points outward as though it frames a fragment of something larger. She has balanced the large stone like a pendulum with a smaller shape above the fulcrum. This is crowned with three points that "lift" the visual weight from the stone below. Schwarzer always strives for a sense of visual balance, with the colour and features of the stone as the starting point. She employs an imaginary scale, exploring the forms that can be added to achieve this balance. Contrasting metals, etched designs and variations in finish, all contribute visual weight (*Fig. 9*).

Her exacting training as a goldsmith, at the Staatliche Zeichenakademie in her native Germany, shows consistently in the precision and clear lines of Schwarzer's work. Living in Australia since 1993 has also influenced her profoundly. Most particularly it has sharpened her awareness of colour, texture and the intensity of light.

Regine Schwarzer (pictured left) has worked her unusually cut stones into neckpieces; earrings where the sections of stone form paired landscapes; bracelets; cufflinks; set rings; and rings that clasp two fingers and display



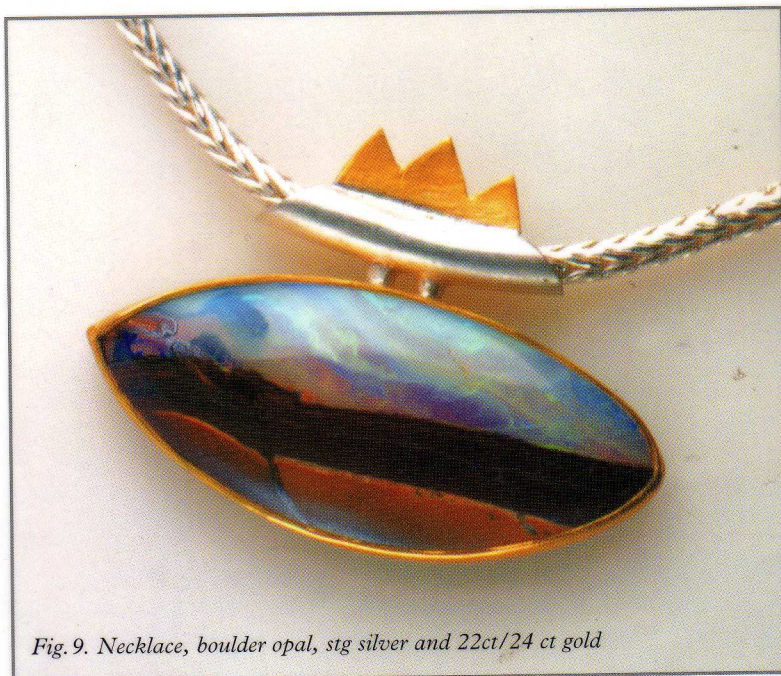
*Fig. 8. Earrings & necklace, gold in quartz, silver, 18 ct/24 ct gold*

three contrasting gems. Previously, her jewellery has been designed and built up from beginnings in basic gold and silver, but her new ability to slice through rock has initiated a revised focus in her most recent work. The jewellery pieces in Regine Schwarzer's collection, "Design Within", are the intriguing result.

### Philippa Milroy

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*Regine Schwarzer's collection of set stones in decorative pieces, "Design Within", has been exhibited at Zu Design in Adelaide and at Maker's Mark in Melbourne and Sydney. Shortly it will travel to Germany. For further information, phone/fax: (08) 8339 4229, or email: schwarzer@picknowl.com.au*



*Fig. 9. Necklace, boulder opal, stg silver and 22ct/24 ct gold*