

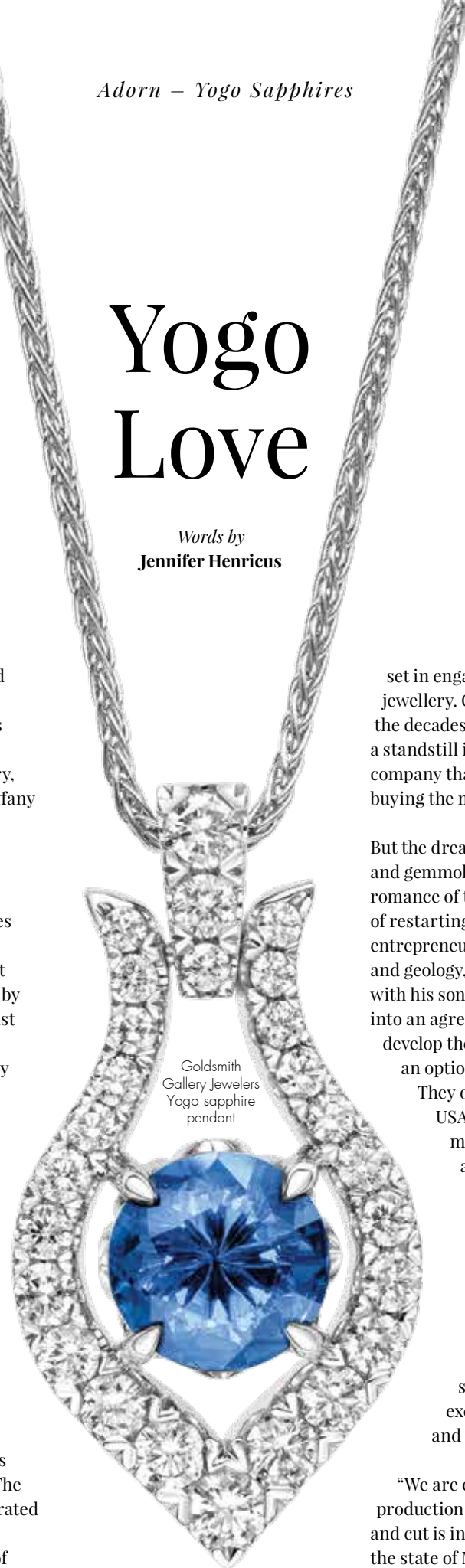
# Yogo Love

Words by  
**Jennifer Henricus**

Jewellery lovers outside the United States may not be familiar with Yogo sapphires, but these beauties have been cherished by American consumers for more than a century, with their popularity fueled by Tiffany & Co's penchant for the stones.

At the dawn of the 20th century, Tiffany's celebrated designer, Paulding Farnham, created a series of floral brooches, including an extravagant Iris corsage ornament featuring Yogo sapphires selected by Tiffany's geologist and gemmologist at the time, the renowned George Frederick Kunz. The extraordinary piece was exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle (World's Fair) in 1900 as part of a display intended to highlight the mineral wealth of the United States. It is now showcased at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore and has inadvertently become the standard bearer for Yogo sapphires and its cousin, Montana sapphires.

The source of these celebrated blues was a mine in Yogo Gulch near Utica, discovered in the 1800s during the gold rush of the time. The British mining syndicate that operated the igneous dyke at Yogo Gulch is said to have recovered hundreds of thousands of carats and many were



Goldsmith  
Gallery Jewelers  
Yogo sapphire  
pendant

set in engagement rings and bridal jewellery. Ownership changed over the decades and mining came to a standstill in the 1980s when the company that was in the process of buying the mine filed for bankruptcy.

But the dream lived on and geologists and gemmologists smitten with the romance of these stones nursed a hope of restarting production. In 2019, an entrepreneur with a passion for mining and geology, Jay Edington, together with his sons Jerod and Ryan, entered into an agreement to explore and develop the historic Yogo mine with an option to purchase the mine.

They organised and set up Yogold USA Corporation, put the mine back into production, and established their own cutting facility to produce and market natural sapphires.

Now, the highly sought-after cornflower blues, as well as colour-change purples and violets are slowly emerging, causing excitement among designers and consumers alike.

"We are currently in phase one of production and everything we mine and cut is instantly purchased in the state of Montana," reveals Jerod Edington, Yogold's president. "We



Tiffany Montana sapphire Iris  
corsage ornament currently  
on display at The Walters Art  
Museum Baltimore

have a three-phase mining plan for controlled and orderly expansion that will be implemented over the next five years. Mining will be dictated by demand,” he adds.

About 85 percent of production is in typical cornflower blue colours and two percent is lavender or purple shades. “The special inherent feature of these Yogo sapphires is that colour is evenly distributed, there is no zoning within the stones, and hence they do not require heating to improve colour or clarity,” Jerod enthuses.

Most sapphires from traditional sources like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Madagascar often have a silky appearance that is removed with heat. Even sapphires from other areas in Montana have their colour and clarity improved with heat.

Jerod explains that Yogo is the only deposit in the US where the sapphires are found within igneous dykes and are in the typical natural rhombohedral or tabular crystal form.

Other areas in Montana produce sapphires, but these are what geologists describe as alluvial sapphire – broken free from mother rock and washed down streams and hence, found mostly in flood plains. These are mainly small sized and are found in a variety of colours like teals, greens, yellows, oranges, and bi-colours, explains Natasha Braunwart, brand and CSR manager at Columbia Gem House in Washington State. “In general, for us, when someone requests a Montana sapphire, they’re looking for a blue with a green overtone, described as a teal colour,” she says. These are from the alluvial deposits. Yogos too are a Montana sapphire, but not all Montana sapphires are Yogos, she asserts.

For Jerod and Yogold, the excitement is rising and it’s not just because of natural colour: The discovery of some larger sizes of rough, many between 5 and 7 carats, and a few 8 carats, is their cause for celebration. These translate into polished sizes of 2 and 3 carats. But Jerod is quick to add that most of the production is still below 1 carat.

The rough is being cut exclusively at a Yogold partnership lapidary in Colombo, Sri Lanka under the supervision of expert cutter, Amitha Gamage. “This is an extraordinary project, and we are so inspired to work with these natural-colour cornflower blue, as well as royal blue stones,” he enthuses. Production is mainly in precise calibrated sizes with a mirror polish from 2mm to 5mm, for setting in jewels with multiple sapphires. Main production is round brilliants cut to ideal proportions, as well as princess cuts and some ovals, depending on the requirements of Yogold customers,” Amitha reveals. The



Goldsmith Gallery Jewelers Yogo Sapphire ring in white gold with diamonds



Mining for Yogo sapphires

Photo credit: George Lind

**DESIGNERS' DARLINGS**

Montana sapphires are the darlings of US designers. Dana Bronfman in New York, whose ardent passion for these stones has even taken her panning for sapphires, says she loves working with them because of the rich range of colour and high durability.



Dana Bronfman eternity ring with Montana sapphires

“I have a particular fondness for the cornflower blue Yogo sapphires and blue-green ‘teal’ Montana sapphires.” She adds that responsible and traceable sourcing of gemstones is very important for her. “I love that these sapphires are sourced here in the US.”

lapidary has started to produce fantasy cuts and some carvings to fill designer requirements, he adds.

Jerod says currently all the polished production is sold in Montana: “The demand in Montana is high and we currently work to fill standing purchase orders from high-end retail jewellers.”

As production slowly increases there is a plan to brand “Yogo” sapphires so that consumers around the world will be able to enjoy them too. Two consultants are working on a branding strategy, one for the United States and one for the wider global market, he reveals.

If their efforts are successful, “Yogo” sapphires may, over time, find their way into the hearts and jewel chests of sapphire lovers all over the world, the beginning of a new romance with a highly aspirational gemstone. ✨

Emily Hirsch of Talon in California agrees. “I love the breadth of colours they come in, specifically the beautiful blue-green teal,” she says. She sources from Columbia Gem House and uses their highest certified Fair Trade level 1 stones that are traced to a specific mine. “Not only are these sapphires stunningly beautiful, they are also mined and cut in a way my customers can feel good about them,” she concludes.



Talon Lucienna Montana sapphire ring