



# Glittering destinations

**Emily Handford** takes a tour of the best places in the world to purchase one-of-a-kind pieces – from glistening diamonds to innovative Venetian vases

## OPULENT OPALS

Considering that Australia holds approximately 97 per cent of the world's supply of opals, it is fitting that the luminescent stones are the national gemstone of the country. The town of Coober Pedy, in South Australia, is a major source of the stone, and in 1956 was the discovery

site for the largest and most valuable gem opal ever found, the 'Olympic Australis'.

Precious opals range from the common clear whites and greens through to black, the most rare. The Mintabie Opal field produces large quantities of crystal opals while the Lightning Ridge in New South Wales is famous for its large supply of black opals, as well as boulder opals, which consists of fractures of opal in a sandstone matrix. Those seeking to purchase the precious stone should

visit Johnston Opals (<http://www.johnstonopals.com.au>), a family-run business since 1901, or Opals Down Under (<http://www.opalsdownunder.com.au/>), a Queensland store that offers worldwide shipping and a money-back guarantee.

To ensure you are buying 'the real thing' first decide whether you are looking for a doublet, triplet or solid opal. While doublets and triplets consist of a very thin slice of opal that is cemented onto a black backing, solid opals are considered a much better quality, long-term investment.

Additionally, always request a signed certificate of authenticity to make your dealer accountable; a respected opal vendor should also state any faults within a stone. If you are buying the stone in person, try holding the opal up against a lamp to inspect it for cracks, or if buying online, ensure you are buying from a reputed dealer.

## DAZZLING DIAMONDS

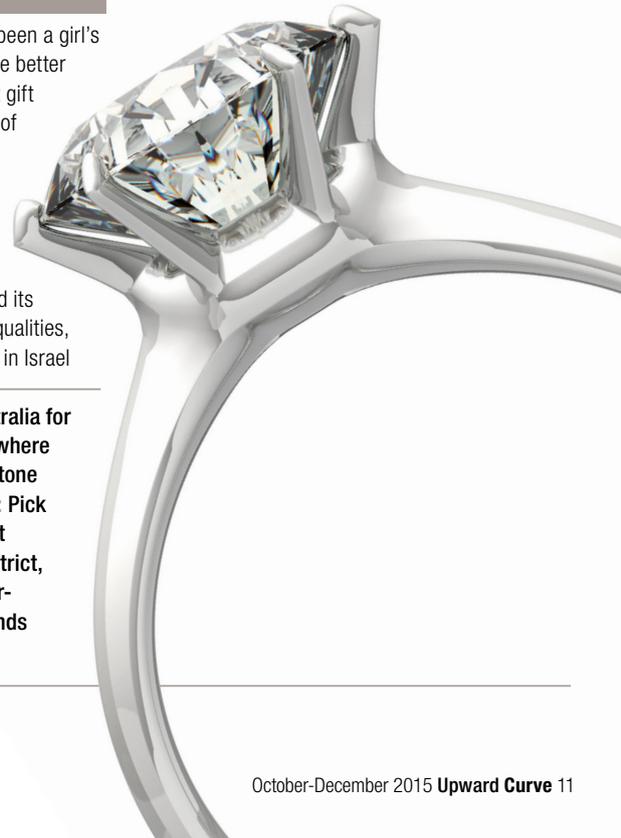
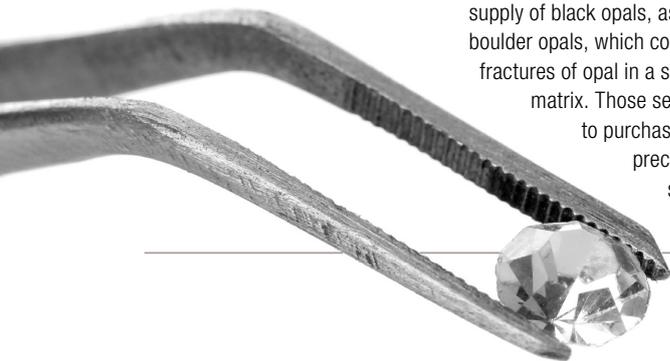
Diamonds have long been a girl's best friend, and where better to pick up the perfect gift than at the epicentre of the industry, Israel. Ever since a Jewish diamond cutter invented the scaif, a polishing wheel that gave the diamond its perfect symmetrical qualities, the diamond industry in Israel

**Above: Head to Australia for high-quality opals, where black is the rarest stone**  
**Below left and right: Pick up the perfect gift at Israel's diamond district, Ramat Gan, for clear-cut, dazzling diamonds**



has continued to grow. The diamond district in Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv, is your best bet for getting your hands on quality diamonds; the area is home to The Diamond Tower, the world's largest diamond trading floor. Head to respected traders such as The Israel Diamond Center (IDC) (<http://www.idc-diamond.com/>), a family-run business with one of the largest showrooms in Israel. Alternatively, Israel Diamonds ([www.Israel-Diamonds.com](http://www.Israel-Diamonds.com)) is another good choice; the diamond manufacturer has more than 40 years in the industry.

Whether buying a diamond in person or online, make sure to look out for the four C's: colour, clarity, cut and carat. The colour of a diamond affects both look and value, with D being absolutely colourless and Z being





light yellow. The carat weight also has a large impact on value, but the cut is considered to be the most important 'C', and determines beauty as well as value. Lastly, no matter how small or large a stone you decide to opt for, ensure that the dealer you buy from issues a diamond certificate from one of the independent laboratories, GIA, EGL, IGI or HRD, which examine each minute characteristic and authenticate the value of the diamond.

#### GORGEOUS GLASS

Those in search of fine Italian glass should look no further than Venice and its adjacent island of Murano. Renowned for their vibrant colours and elaborate designs, the glass creations are highly sought after and have become collectable items for investors across the world. The tradition goes back to the 13th century, when skilled artists had to move their workshops from Venice to nearby Murano, for fear of setting the city alight. Today, several workshops and small shops still exist around Venice and Murano, although unfortunately over the years many less skilled artists are

falsely claiming their designs as authentic Venetian pieces.

Avoid tourist traps in St Marks Square for poor imitations; instead, scour the side streets of Venice to find authentic Murano glass. Also, look out for the official Murano trademark that appears on some authentic pieces.

Premier glass merchants, Pauly ([www.pauly.it](http://www.pauly.it)) and Venini ([www.venini.it](http://www.venini.it)) both have showrooms in downtown Venice where they can be found on Piazza San Marco. But there's nowhere better to find authentic Murano glass than on the island, where shoppers can head directly to the outlet stores and even watch many of the glassblowers create one-of-a-kind items for you on the spot. Tommasi (<http://www.tommasi.it/>) and Atelier glass are great places to pick up quality Murano pieces, while international buyers who can't make it to the island can head to Glass Murano Light (<http://www.glassmuranolight.com/>) or Original Murano Glass (<http://originalmuranoglass.com/>) websites, which both offer quality Murano pieces that can be shipped worldwide.

#### WONDROUS WATCHES

Home to some of the most exclusive watch brands including, Patek Philippe, Omega, Rolex and Tag Heuer, Switzerland boasts one of the largest – and long-running – watch industries in the world. Describing a watch as 'Swiss-made' is so indicative of high quality that the official watch body has proposed strict laws for manufacturers wanting to brand their product as such. Potential buyers should look out for foreign manufacturers who claim that their product is 'Swiss Quartz', when merely the movement is of Swiss origin.

International buyers should take a look at Watches of Switzerland, which has been trading watches since 1924 ([www.watches-of-switzerland.co.uk/](http://www.watches-of-switzerland.co.uk/)) and represents the top brands of the watch industry across their network of showrooms.

Those wanting to make their purchase in person should head to Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse, where almost all of the top watch boutiques reside. Starting from the intersection of Paradeplatz

and Bahnhofstrasse, you'll find Türler and Blancpain, both of which stock a large range of big name brands, and close by, Montblanc and Bulgari. Heading north, Beyer ([www.beyer-ch.com](http://www.beyer-ch.com)) is an authorised dealer for Rolex, Breguet, Chopard, Tudor and IWC, among many others, and is next door to the Patek Philippe Boutique (<http://www.patek.com/>).

The legendary Gübelin, (<http://www.guebelin.ch/>), one of Switzerland's oldest watch shops, is a short walk away, as are Meister, Piaget, Chopard, Cartier and Zett-Meyer. ■

