

Minerals of Interest at the Denver Marriott *Fine Mineral Show*

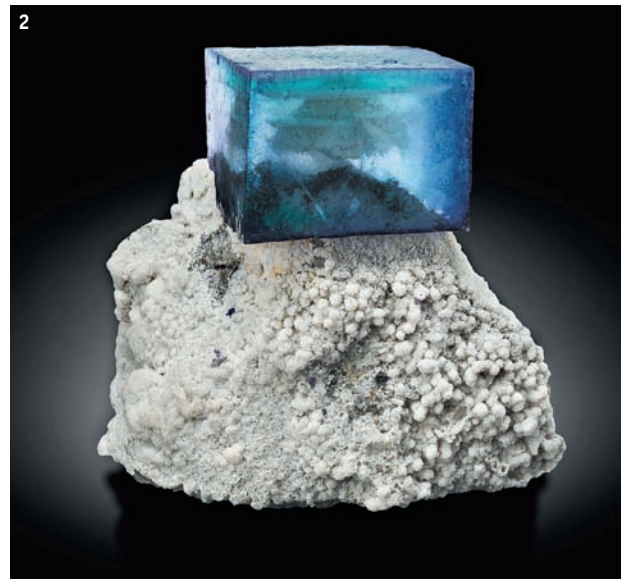
A common query while observing a display is some variant of “*What’s your favorite?*” This brief article answers such a question directed at me at the *Fine Mineral Show* in Golden this past year. My criteria are not that of typical show competitions but rather based on the vision or story a particular specimen inspired in my mind. The varied narratives related to minerals are one of the main aspects that make specimens attractive in my view.

“*What’s new?*... also commonly heard at shows. *Spirifer Minerals* had a batch of wonderful, colorful tourmaline specimens from Morocco that truly are new. Not only pegmatite minerals from Morocco, but tourmaline of the most desirable red hues. Indeed the only aspect in which these tourmalines could be “newer” is if they turned out to be a new species of the group; the exact species is not yet known. Some hundreds of crystals were discovered in the Ouarzazate area during the past summer (2016). As with many finds, the exceptional pieces are an elite few. A special aspect for me, of the mostly miniature to thumbnail size specimens (along with a few of small cabinet size), is that I was able to photograph a number of them at the Nimeral Min-Lab in Milan, Italy, before they were shipped to the United States.

Another of my hobbyhorses is a specimen with history. Over the past decades, I have also enjoyed *Kristalle’s* sense of exhibitry: ad layouts, exhibits, and feature cases in their booth. Central to one of the displays in the their room this year was a very fine specimen of Californian gold; itself a species of special interest to me but I was fascinated by the piece’s presentation and background. Here stood a 25+ centimeter quartz vein section with a central pocket from

which protrude leaves and plates of lustrous crystallized gold like fresh lettuce from a fine BLT sandwich, along with other specimens and a book that records Donald R. Dickey Jr’s passion for digging gold and his family’s history with the Oriental Mine in the Alleghany Mining District of Sierra County. The undeniable aesthetics and the detailed history of the specimen, recorded in an accompanying book make this specimen a truly world-class rarity.

In a room full of superlatives, when one suddenly encounters observes a piece that truly stands out from that crowd can be an experience unto itself, like the first bite of a meal in a fine restaurant, where expectations are already high, and having one’s mind attempt to wrap itself around unexpectedly exhilarating taste bud signals. Eyes closed, one delays...allows the tastes to linger until other parts of the brain kick in and pipe up, “*Dude...swallow! The rest of us are hungry.*” And so it was that I stood in front of a case in the room of *Fine Minerals International*, staring at a large, quasi-octahedral black monolith (it is OK to think *Space Odyssey*, minus the apes, and/or Strauß...Richard). I shall be the first to admit that I have not seen every single, untwinned crystal of cassiterite in existence, but I do know they are comparatively rare to their twinned brethren and that I had never seen such a large, or fine, example in all of my days. Such a creation of the universe: the perfection of the faces, the edges, the luster — the size of this black beauty from the heights of Mt. Xuebaodiang — generated an endorphin-rich phantasmagoria. For me, the stark simplicity of shape and (lack of) color, attended by a facial surface punctuated by otherworldly growth-hillocks, brought to mind “*scarred, desolate planets, deep space, the primordial, Space Odyssey, monolith and, yes, all with a mental soundtrack of “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.”*





3. **Cassiterite**; 4.7 cm across.
Pingwu W-Sn-Be Deposit, Huya, Mount Xuebaoding,
Pingwu County, Mianyang Prefecture, Sichuan Prov.,
China. Specimen: Fine Minerals International.
Photo: James Elliot.

1. **Tourmaline** (The Accident Piece);
11 cm across. Ouarzazate, Souss-Massa-Drab.
Specimen: Spirifer Minerals.
Photo: Mark Mauthner.

2. **Fluorite, Calcite**; 13 cm across.
Yaogangxian Mine, Yizhang County, Chenzhou
Prefecture, Hunan Province, China.
Specimen: Fine Minerals International.
Photo: James Elliot.

4. A portion of a display on **gold** from the Oriental
Mine (Alleghany Mining District of Sierra County,
California, USA) in the Kristalle room at the Denver
Fine Mineral Show, Golden, Colorado, USA.
The specimen is approximately 25 cm tall.
Photo: Mark Mauthner.

Another specimen, also from China, though from the Yaogangxian mine, caused a similar reaction. A sharp, limpid, color-zoned fluorite crystal perched on the apex of matrix coated with sub-hemispherical clusters of off-white (assumed) calcite crystals. How often does one see a cube — or rectangular cuboid, in this case — where six of eight corners are showing and sharp, and the remaining two are merely modified rather than non-existent or “buried” in the matrix? An octahedral phantom in the center of the fluorite recorded an interesting growth history. This latter feature also initiated in me another mental reverie in which the somewhat nebulous phantom took on the nature of a Fata Morgana hovering in a troposphere of sky-blue and purple-twilight (check out your copy of Tennyson), and subsequent visual association. Also, when viewed from the side, the crystal’s seemingly precarious connection to the little white mountain (cloud?) also reminded me of a house I know in southern California, likewise impossibly clinging to a steep mountainside, the absolute breath-taking view from that perch, and some memorable evenings spent there.

Like everything in life — every moment, in fact — this affliction we call the “collecting bug” affords us many opportunities learn, or simply to savor the experience. Some of the stories surrounding a specimen, such as mineralogical details or history, are inherent. Others are created and come to life when a piece, like a work of art, stimulates imagination, thoughts and memories. These are the enriching stories that help make a life worth living.

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