

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

KAZANJIAN JEWELRY CEO ON THE IMPACT OF STONES

Text by Shelley Akins + Photographs from Kazanjian

From a fall harvest of sprouting greens and hardy potatoes to gorgeous red tomatoes and succulent peaches in the summer, the earth is not greedy with its gifts of nourishment. But deep below its surface, the earth toils away, creating another kind of gift for its stewards: shiny objects that come in all colors of the rainbow and look scrumptious enough to eat – gemstones. Their function is not intended for the biological survival of humans but, like all beautiful things, they serve a much deeper purpose for the human spirit. This purpose transcends materialism and connects centuries of generations to the earth.

"The best artwork throughout history comes from the earth," says Douglas Kazanjian, CEO of renowned Beverly Hills jewelry firm, Kazanjian Jewelry. "Gemstones are Mother Nature's artwork."

A Legacy Begins

Kazanjian became head of the esteemed jewelry company in 2007 but has been a student of Mother Nature's artistry since childhood. For Kazanjian, jewelry is a symbol of his family's legacy, which dates back to the early 1900s, when his grandfather, James, and uncle, Harry, found themselves in Paris after escaping the Armenian genocide in Turkey. When attempting to migrate to the United States, the brothers' plans were derailed when Harry was forced to stay behind in Paris because of an eye infection – a setback that, according to Kazanjian, set in motion a butterfly effect that changed the course of his family's history. Because of the infection, Harry stayed behind and seized the opportunity to train in Paris to become a world-class gem cutter. A few years later, he joined his brother in the United States to begin creating an empire.

"James was the dealer, and Harry was the cutter, and they traveled around the world finding the earth's rarest gems," Kazanjian said.

With their remarkable lapidary skills and sales ability, the gems they discovered found themselves around the necks of celebrities and even inside the Oval Office, when the family donated presidential busts carved out of rare black sapphires depicting Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Eisenhower. A donation that resulted in Kazanjian meeting President Reagan at only 10 years old.

A Feast for the Eyes

Kazanjian continued his family's legacy of pursuing rare gems when, in 2007, he got the opportunity of a lifetime to purchase one of the most rare gemstones in the world – a five-carat red diamond – an occurrence that Kazanjian jokes would be a story he would tell every day for the rest of his life.

The scarlet gemstone is a natural phenomenon with an illustrious past that includes being on display at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair to then being stolen by the Nazis in Amsterdam in 1944. The stone was eventually recovered, and in 1968, Professor Ian Balfour published a book titled *Famous Diamonds* to honor the diamond's rediscovery. When a private seller contacted Kazanjian about the diamond, he knew it was fate.

"I said, we have to buy this and make it the symbol of our company. Grandpa and his brother up in heaven are looking down and saying, 'Look at this. We've sent you a diamond that looks like a ruby.'" He remembers with a laugh.

The diamond, now known as the Kazanjian Red Diamond, is on display at the American Museum of Natural History and remains a symbol of the Kazanjian family legacy.

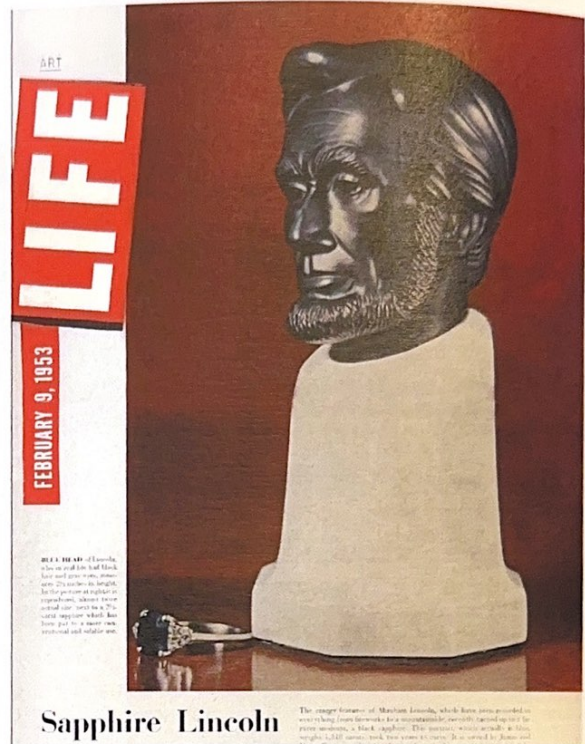
Food for the Soul

Jewelry may not be a necessity for the human condition, but there is something to be said for its power throughout time. For centuries, jewelry has been regarded as more than just adornment. Ancient Romans believed they could restore their vision simply by gazing into an emerald. Burmese soldiers believed they were made invincible by inserting rubies into their skin. In the Middle Ages, the diamond was called the "miracle stone" and was believed to cure any ailment with its touch.

While the practice of inserting rubies into one's skin is no longer in existence, jewelry's significance continues to make its mark in cultures around the world. It can symbolize two lives becoming one, a reminder of a past loved one, or a link between the past and present. Whether it is an heirloom passed on from mother to daughter or a famous colored diamond admired by millions, jewels are delicacies for the human soul – eye candy that sustains the heart rather than the stomach.

"Gemstones have been given as gifts since the beginning of humanity and it is one of the oldest industries in every culture," Kazanjian said. "There is a lot of meaning behind jewelry, and people forget that. You can pass on memories to someone else with a jewelry piece, and it is a special thing."

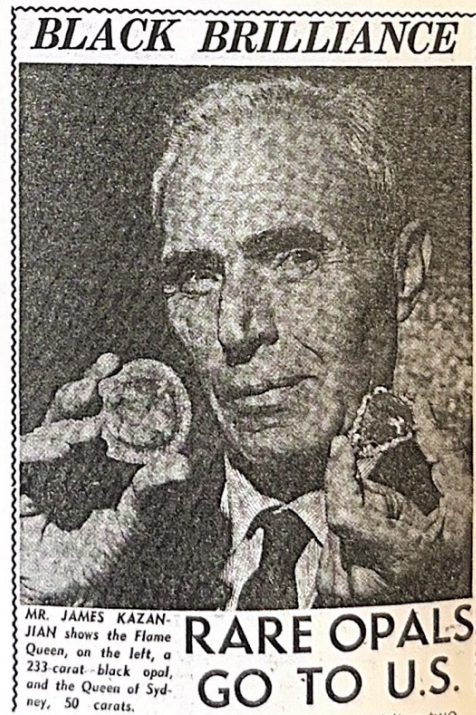
"My father always used to say he liked to buy gemstones that looked like candy," Kazanjian said. "If the stone was the color of candy, it was like, okay, that's a good color; that's the one we wanted to buy."



Sapphire Lincoln



Cher holding the 733 carat Star of Queensland Sapphire – Black Star Sapphire.



James Kazanjian, Doug's grandfather, holding two of the most important opals in history, "The Flame Queen" and "The Sydney Queen".