

# GemGenève

## A Refined New Era for Global Gem and Jewelry Fairs

*Marie Chabrol reports...*





Crowds waiting to enter GemGenève on opening day.



A beautiful hand-carved ruby bowl, displayed by Axel Henn.

For many years, major gem and jewelry shows have been losing favor with buyers. It's especially true in Europe where BaselWorld has been struggling year after year. Although 2017 was not good for the fair, 2018 was a disaster for brands and specialized dealers alike.

There are many possible explanations as to why 600 exhibitors left BaselWorld this year and why the general public isn't particularly enamored with it, so the success of the new GemGenève fair was not a foregone conclusion.

Seven months before GemGenève, trade journalists received a press kit explaining the new concept behind the Geneva-based show. In March, a special luncheon was held at the Hong Kong gem and jewelry show to personally introduce some journalists to Thomas Faerber and Ronny Totah, founders of this project. The two men have known each other for almost 40 years, and it is this longstanding professional relationship that helped them realize that GemGenève would work in this industry.

Thomas Faerber represents the fourth generation of a family business with an irreproachable international reputation. The company specializes in exceptional stones and historical jewels. One of his greatest successes was to have found—and then sold to the Louvre—the diamond and emerald ornament made by François-Regnault Nitot that was commissioned by Napoleon for his second wife, the Archduchess Marie-Louise. For this, among other achievements, Faerber received the Medal of the Order of Arts and Letters for his contribution to French culture.

Ronny Totah's travels took him through Egypt, Paris, Lausanne and finally to Geneva where he now resides and where he has worked since 1990 with Eric Horovitz. A gemstone dealer of the highest quality, Totah learned the gem trade from Teddy Horovitz, a legend in the jewelry industry. Among the fine gems carried by Horovitz & Totah are rare Kashmir sapphires and fine pearls.

Opposite page: Geneva's famed Jet d'Eau offers a backdrop for a 19th century butterfly brooch featuring diamonds and rubies, in the Faerber Collection, and seen at GemGenève.

As to how the idea of having a show in Geneva came about, Faerber explains: I had the deep conviction that Europe needed a fair that was not too big, but of the highest quality, that represents our sector." Totah adds, "All the years during which we have built relationships of trust with the players in this industry have allowed us to think about creating GemGenève and inviting these important players to participate, as well as four internationally recognized gemology laboratories—GIA, Gübelin Gem Lab, SSEF and Gem-TechLab," continuing that his passion for gemology led him to get involved with professional associations such as ICA and SSEF.

After months of waiting, we traveled to Geneva to discover the inaugural show located in Palexpo, and scheduled to coincide with Sotheby's & Christie's auctions.

My first observation: the admission price of Swiss francs (US\$51), for the non-invited public, is less expensive than BaselWorld and allows a greater audience to attend. Jewelry



GemGenève co-founders, Ronny Totah (left) and Thomas Faerber, who share more than 40 years of both a personal and professional friendship.



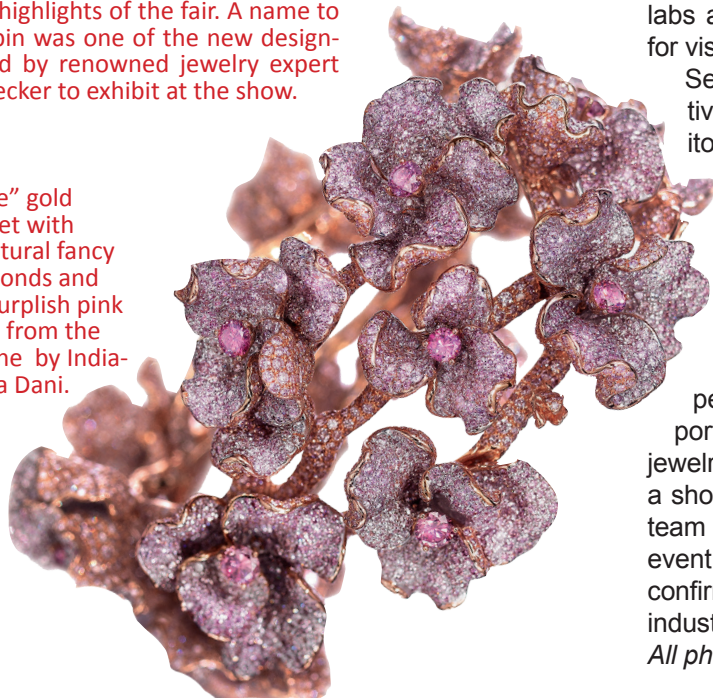
This pendant is set with a very rare gemstone, a Swiss limestone concretion. It was first described in 1995 and is naturally rich in cobalt. The Pierre d'Alexis jewelry house is the only one to set this stone in this one-of-a-kind jewel.



Natural pearls and Kashmir sapphires, offered by the Ronny Totah collection.



This "Hortensia" brooch—with yellow, red and green gold, aluminum, Burmese rubies and spinels by Emmanuel Tarpin—was one of the highlights of the fair. A name to watch, Tarpin was one of the new designers selected by renowned jewelry expert Vivienne Becker to exhibit at the show.



"Amarante" gold bracelet set with 12,000 natural fancy pink diamonds and 18 vivid purplish pink diamonds from the Argyle mine by India-born Neha Dani.

design students were given free admission, indicating how important the founders feel about bringing new blood into the industry.

Entering GemGenève is like going into a fabulous strong box that holds the most gorgeous and rare gemstones. Unlike Baselworld, it is a small show with less than 150 exhibitors who came to showcase top-quality gems and highly curated jewelry collections, both new and antique. Among the magnificent gems were some large extraordinary Kashmir sapphires at the Horovitz & Totah booth; incredible vivid tourmalines and garnets offered by Nomad's; amazing jewels from the Sarah Cronan, Pat Salling and Faerber Collection booths. Also impressive was a pink gold ring featuring a 6+-carat milky pear-shape diamond.

The Big Four—diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds—were the stars of the show, but other colored gemstones and pearls (natural and cultured) held their own, which likely accounted for the great success of the event.

GemGenève had a perfect balance between gemstones and jewelry, both antique and contemporary. The four gem labs and a bookstore offered additional useful information for visitors.

Sentiment among buyers and exhibitors seemed positive. "We were pleasantly surprised by the number of visitors. We saw all of our customers from the high-end jewelry in-house gem departments and connoisseurs.

The show was perfectly organized and booths were simple, but truly elegant. It was a very positive event with a friendly state-of-mind. We are now waiting for the 2019 edition," stated Sebastien Bahri from Nomad's.

Show planners anticipated 2500 visitors, but 4500 people from all around the world showed up. Many important designers, such as JAR and CEO's of high-end jewelry houses, were present for the opening. By offering a show by the trade for the trade, Totah, Faerber and their team have proved that the industry doesn't need a huge event to make a good event. The success of GemGenève confirms the importance of Geneva in the worldwide jewelry industry. The next edition will be held May 9 - 12, 2019.

*All photos are courtesy of GemGenève.*