

Gemology Goes “Naked” in the French Countryside



By Marie Chabrol

Several small villages in France, with amusing names and double meanings, have forged their own identity. Among these, the village of Poil, in the department of Nièvre, has become a center for international gemology where—for the last 20 years—dozens of gemologists from all over Europe come to meet during the first weekend of July.

At the origin of this droll and yet now very serious gathering are three gemologists who all have family ties in neighboring Morvan: Emmanuel Fritsch (GG, DUG, University of Nantes), Jean-Pierre Chalain (Head of Diamond Department & Deputy Director SSEF) and Franck Notari (GGTL Managing Director).

Two decades ago, it all started with a joke: take advantage of this small village with an evocative name “to undress gemology” and take stock of the latest advances in the sector in a friendlier and more informal context than traditional congresses. [Editor’s Note: in a play on words, *poil* in French means *hair*, but à *poil* is translated as *naked*.]

There are requirements for coming to this weekend: you must be a student in a gemology university degree program in Nantes, or have obtained a DUG, or be involved in gemological research or in a gem-related field. Thus, each year in Poil, we find laboratory directors, stone buyers, gemologists from global brands such as Cartier, Rolex and Piaget, gemological professors, experts, creative jewelers and even some ultra specialized gem traders. The goal is to meet for a few hours in this bucolic setting that is conducive to reflection. It is also an opportunity to do some sightseeing because the region is beautiful. And, lest we forgot, we certainly can enjoy some fine meals. To deprive oneself of the local gastronomy and its excellent wines would be a shame.

Gemologists gathering during the first weekend in July in Poil.



Delicious meals and camaraderie during the Poil event.

Poil is also a story of friendship.
From left: Françoise Delaunay (gemology teacher at LFG), Emmanuel Fritsch and jewelry expert Claire Salanne.



The famous “Quiz” where contestants had to identify gems using only the light of a simple lamp and a magnifying glass.



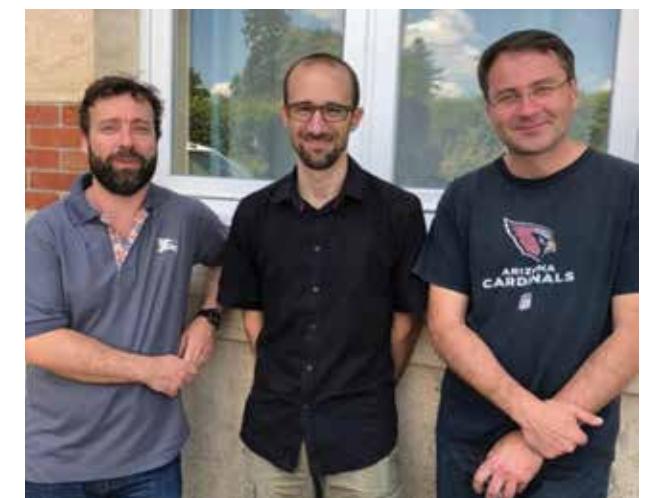
French jeweler Hélène Courtaigne was the Quiz winner this year, and receives her award from Emmanuel Fritsch.



Examples of impressive natural lapis lazuli from Afghanistan.



Speaking to the group is Dr. Emmanuel Fritsch, co-founder and organizer of the yearly meeting, Director of the DUG (University Degree in Gemmology) at Nantes University.)



Poil brings people together from all aspects of the gem world. From left: Dominique Dufermont (gem dealer), Aurélien Delaunay (LFG) and Emanuel Thoreux (gem dealer and cutter).

Talking about Poil without mentioning the “Quiz” would be a major oversight. Every Saturday night—often very late—the organizers propose a small competition. The objective? Guess the names of ten stones (natural, treated or synthetic) using only the simple light of a small lamp and a simple magnifying glass. Often concocted by Franck Notari, we may see a variety of unusual gems such as jeremejevites, danburites, atypical garnets and improbable synthetic stones. This is definitely not the time to forget the basics...

Among the topics at this edition were: the application of the Hodgkinson method by Jean-Claude Frediani; the rose channels in sapphires by Emmanuel Fritsch; the second World Emerald Symposium in Bogota by Jean Claude Michelou; enameling techniques by Cecile Chancerel; and atypical diamonds seen at the French Laboratory of Gemology (LFG) by Aurélien Delaunay.

In this month of July 2018, the “Gemmologie à Poil” celebrated its 20th anniversary. Twenty years of laughter, debate, friendship and sharing. Hopefully, it will have many, many more 20th anniversaries!