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by Sandra Nygaard



Recent Posts

- 1 Flying High
- 2 One Hundred Shades of Blue
- 3 The Purest Art
- 4 Crazy Rich Collectors
- 5 Eyes on the Road



There's a glistening metallic sculpture displayed on a stand that grabs my attention the minute I walk into the Wilensky Gallery in Manhattan. The Cubist style piece contains striated light gold boxes of varying size and direction so nuanced, I'm beguiled by its complex structure. The work, perhaps done by a contemporary sculptor, looks like a glam rock asteroid that's fallen to earth.

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In his Chelsea gallery, Stuart Wilensky unearths some of nature's most exquisite minerals from all over the world.

"People will walk in here and ask, 'So who's the artist?'" explains Stuart Wilensky, president of Wilensky Fine Minerals and owner of the gallery. "They always look perplexed when we say, 'Well, nature is the artist.'"

Indeed, the piece is really not a modern sculpture made with human hands, but a fine example of Pyrite, otherwise known as "Fools Gold," a

mineral that formed deep in the earth for thousands, perhaps millions of years.

The mistake is an easy one to make, says Wilensky. “After all, great artists have always been inspired by nature.” For 35 years, the dealer of the finest stone minerals on earth has been a proponent of recognizing their rightful place in the art world. His specialty is aesthetic minerals, meaning that they are attractive, colorful, and sculptural, like this one.



Chrysocolla on malachite stalactite; Katanga, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Like fine art, the beauty of these works please the eye and ignite the senses. Sometimes their allure is obvious, like a rose-red Rhodochrosite or an aqua green Indicolite Tourmaline. For others, the attributes are more subtle, and advanced collectors admire its rarity or crystal quality, form, and definition.

“We feel like we fit in here as an art gallery, we just sell a different kind of art.”

Stuart Wilensky

Not surprisingly, collecting these natural masterpieces requires a significant financial commitment. Wilensky’s pieces start at \$10,000 and ascend into the six-figure range. His most expensive specimen sold for about \$6 million—though he demurs at sharing any specifics, as details may easily identify the piece or compromise the privacy of his clients. He takes these relationships seriously, as almost all of these clients are dedicated collectors who have worked with Wilensky for decades. They trust him to guide them towards exceptional acquisitions.



From the current exhibition on the natural formation of emeralds, quartz with emerald inclusion; Muzo Mine, Columbia. 7.3 cm tall x 3.1 cm wide. Private collection.

“We don’t sell things that people are going to use for decoration in their homes,” says Wilensky.

“People are not going to come here and spend a million dollars on a mineral to put it on their dining room table.” His work involves locating the specimen, negotiating the deal, and then helping the buyer curate and display the prized pieces, often in showcases.

The dealer’s own appreciation for rare art and beautiful objects began at a young age, as his parents owned an art and antique business. At around age eight, he started helping his father gather pieces, visiting museums, castles, and ancient sites in Spain, the former Yugoslavia, and the Netherlands for weeks at a time. “I think back on it and I think, ‘My God,

if my mother knew what we were doing, she would not have approved sometimes of where my father was taking me,” he says with a laugh.

The Brooklyn native worked in his father’s business until he and his wife Donna discovered an Arkansas Quartz specimen at a flea market in Long Island. He was instantly captivated. Soon, the couple built their collection by scouring the Yellow Pages for dealers in New York City. “What is often the case with collectors, and it doesn’t matter what you collect, you start out as a collector and you become a dealer to support your habit,” Wilensky notes with a smile.

For more than three decades Wilensky operated his rare and fine mineral business out of his Hudson Valley home before his sons Troy and Connor joined him. They decided to venture to Manhattan two years ago to reach new audiences. Wilensky also wanted to offer a place other than a museum where people could see sublime minerals and better appreciate them.



Wilensky Exquisite Minerals located in New York City's Chelsea Gallery District.

By design, they chose a prime downtown spot in Chelsea’s Gallery District, perched on the corner of 20th Street and 10th Avenue. The 2,200 square-foot space is nestled amid contemporary art heavies like David Zwirner Gallery, Gagosian Gallery, and Pace Gallery.

Like many of the galleries in the area, Wilensky curates new shows every 60-90 days. The current one, *Magnificent Emeralds: Fura’s Tears*, showcases 30 of the most spectacular emeralds from around the world in one place, like a masterworks exhibition. It is named after an ancient Colombian origin myth that describes the birth of the gemstone from the goddess Fura’s tears of mourning.

“How else would you explain such beauty and perfection?” he asks.

“Magnificent Emeralds: Fura’s Tears” is the current exhibition featured at [Wilensky Gallery](#) through December 30, 2019.

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[WILENSKY GALLERY](#) [WILENSKY MINERALS](#)

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Watch Journal is a luxury lifestyle publication for the modern collector. Founded in 1997, the magazine has evolved to reflect the changing landscape of fine timepieces. Published six times per year, the large-format print edition puts incisive and entertaining writing alongside compelling original photography, looking at the watch industry through the lenses of fashion, design, and culture.

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Recent Posts

- 1 [Flying High](#)
December 5, 2019
- 2 [One Hundred Shades of Blue](#)
December 3, 2019
- 3 [The Purest Art](#)
November 20, 2019
- 4 [Crazy Rich Collectors](#)
November 20, 2019
- 5 [Eyes on the Road](#)
November 19, 2019

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