

## COLLECTABLES JEWELLERY

Coronavirus travel restrictions were top of mind when Hamish Sharma began to source jewels for his debut auction at Leonard Joel.

"I was very conscious of the fact that the current restrictions are preventing our clients from going shopping in the northern hemisphere," says Sharma, installed at the auction house last month as head of important jewels after he was poached from rival firm Smith & Singer.

"I decided to create an auction that would offer what many of my clients are pining for: a curated selection of highly fashionable and desirable jewels of a quality usually only found on Bond Street or 5th Avenue."

Tapping his contacts in the United States and Europe, as well as a select few agents in Australia, Sharma has assembled a 134-lot Important Jewels auction with a combined guide value of \$5 million.

The highlight is a 9.02-carat internally flawless yellow diamond – the most valuable ever to be offered at auction in Australia. The gem, which has a guide price of \$750,000 to \$900,000, is mounted on a gold ring and surrounded by micro pavé diamonds.

"It's a hugely special stone," says Sharma. "Not only have we got size, we've got a vivid-quality diamond. That's the pinnacle: a diamond of vivid quality, of intense saturation. Coupled with that, it's flawless."

While the provenance of the ring is a tightly held secret, Sharma says the current owner is not just exceedingly affluent but also exceptionally discerning. "The wealthy often acquire or invest in colourless diamonds, but it is usually only those who have done their research, who really know jewellery, who opt for rare and uniquely coloured diamonds such as this," he says.

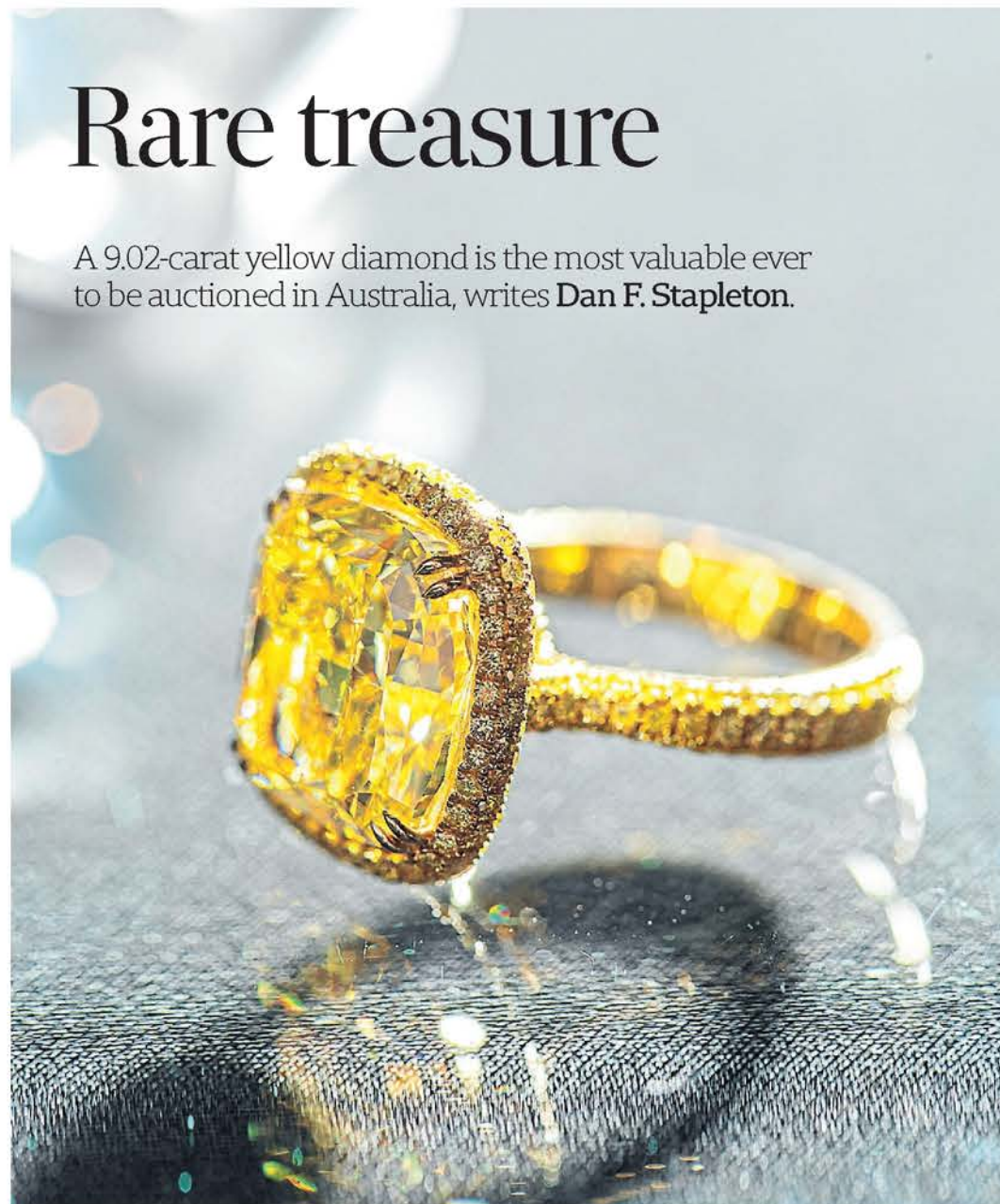
Curiously, there are two Argyle pink diamonds set unseen on the underside of the ring. "It's such a personal touch, and it leads me to believe this was a personally commissioned piece," says Sharma.

Also up for grabs at the auction is a 17.34-carat emerald-cut diamond mounted on a platinum ring (\$450,000 to \$550,000), a lot Sharma reckons will appeal to a similarly discerning individual.

"You think 17-carat is big," he says, "but being an emerald-cut, it's subtle: it doesn't have that bling-y characteristic about it. If you were walking down the street, you wouldn't feel embarrassed, like you'd want to hide your hand. Whereas if you had a

# Rare treasure

A 9.02-carat yellow diamond is the most valuable ever to be auctioned in Australia, writes Dan F. Stapleton.



round brilliant-cut diamond of that size – bling bling bling: alarm bells ring."

Other lots include a pair of 18-carat-gold earrings studded with yellow, pink and white diamonds (\$270,000 to \$320,000), a fancy grey-blue and pink diamond 'toi et moi' ring (\$150,000 to \$200,000) and a hefty art deco diamond bracelet (\$150,000 to \$200,000).

Alongside these bespoke pieces, there are

Main and top right: The yellow diamond ring has a guide price of \$750,000 to \$900,000; Hamish Sharma. PHOTOS: LOUIE DOUVIS

lots from big names including Cartier, Bulgari, Tiffany & Co, David Webb and Buccellati. Bargain hunters are well-served, too: the most affordable item, a sapphire pendant ringed with 10 brilliant-cut diamonds, has a guide of just \$1500 to \$2000.

For Sharma, the Important Jewels auction marks a strong return to form after he ended up in hospital for three nights in



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Hamish Sharma, Leonard Joel

March following an altercation with Smith & Singer's Sydney office manager, David Mackay. Mackay has been charged with assault.

It's an ambitious auction for the times, but Sharma reckons current demand for rare jewels is strong. "We're feeling confident. International auction houses have been doing extremely well with their jewellery sales. That's in contrast with the art market, which has been very turbulent."

Sharma, who spent his childhood in India, first started buying and selling antique jewellery in New Zealand, where he'd started a jewellery retail business while studying gemology.

"That led me into jewellery design," he says. "I would travel to the gem-cutting centres of Mumbai and Jaipur and Bangkok and I would source diamonds, emeralds



Under offer: from top, an art deco bracelet (\$150,000 to \$200,000), a bib necklace with 40 carats worth of diamonds (\$130,000 to \$150,000) and a ring with fancy grey-blue and pink diamonds (\$180,000 to \$220,000).



and sapphires. Then I'd bring them back to New Zealand, sit down with my jewellers and we'd design one-off pieces for my retail business."

In 2008, he was appointed head of jewels at Sotheby's Australia.

At Leonard Joel, he says he intends to face the circumstances created by the pandemic head on. "My colleagues are helping me with that," he says.

Accordingly, next week's Important Jewels auction will be open to online bidders. But unlike Bonham's latest jewellery auction – an online-only affair on August 19 with a star lot ring featuring a 0.54-carat Argyle pink diamond – Leonard Joel's Sydney showroom is also open to walk-ins (as long as bidders observe social distancing requirements).

Says Sharma: "In terms of the passion and the excitement, there is still no substitute for a live auction." **L&L**

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Need to know

The Important Jewels auction will be held online and at Leonard Joel's showroom in Woollahra, Sydney at 6pm on Wednesday.