

Temple of the Cut

An Idar-Oberstein gem cutter brings a new dimension to wearable art with creations resembling an ancient Mayan temple or an Escher painting

If you've ever marveled at the mystery and optical mind-game of an M.C. Escher painting, check out Klaus Schäfer's new cutting style. The "Temple Cut" was not a conscious effort to emulate Escher, but Schäfer, of Idar-Oberstein, Germany, says viewers do compare the two.

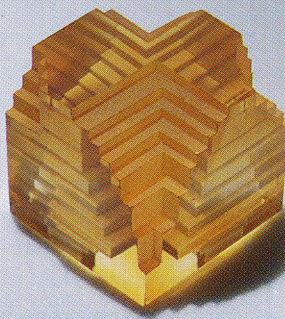
Natural crystal shapes inspire Schäfer's work – in this case, it's the cube. About a year ago, he started to use a traditional cameo tool for a fresh approach to gemstones. "I wanted to use the ultrasonic drill machine, not as a copy machine for two-dimensional cameos, but as a tool in three-dimensional sculpturing and one-of-a-kind lapidary projects. My designs are really more scientific and not so much emotional."

See It in 3-D!

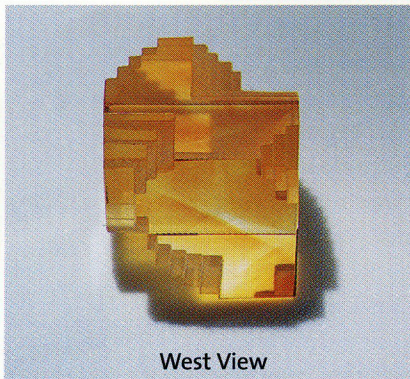
While Schäfer may look at his designs with emotional distance, viewers certainly express emotion when they see Temple Cut, often turning the gem over and over in their hands to receive the full three-dimensional effect of the carving.

Even the unflappable Schäfer recalls, "I made a cubic drill tool for the ultrasonic machine and pressed it on the corners of a roughly cut crystal cube. After finishing the excavation and polishing the cube, I was surprised at the great effect I created." (Ultrasonic drilling machines allow gem cutters to drill holes of any shape.)

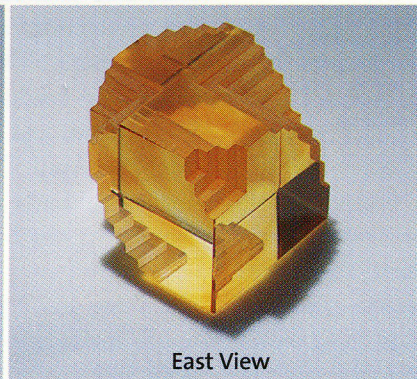
One Stone: Four Views



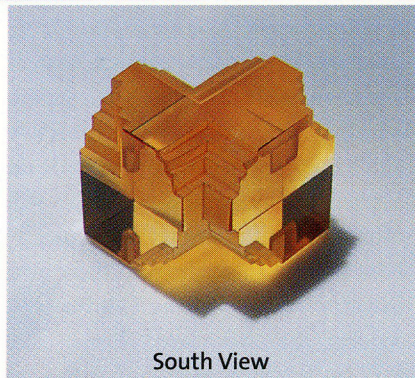
North View



West View



East View



South View

The nearly 60-ct. citrine is courtesy of Edward Boehm, JOEB Enterprises, Fallbrook, CA.

ALL PHOTOS BY ROBERT WELDON

Ancient Inspired

Another common comparison is to an ancient Mayan temple – which inspired the name Temple Cut. "The inside steps and columns give to the visitor a great impression of space and dimension," he says. "But by reflecting them at the six polished cube facets, the perspective is broken again and now disturbs the visitor," he explains. "In his mind the visitor is walking on the steps, and all at once, he's no longer walking on the floor; he's walking on the wall."

New Projects

Schäfer, whose full body of work can be seen at the Gem & Lapidary Dealers Association Show in Tucson in February, is working on similar projects with other crystal shapes, including a tetrahedron, or pyramid, for which he's using

a triangular drilling tool.

"All of my stones lend themselves to jewelry," Schäfer says, "though traditional jewelry settings are not the best way to mount them." Schäfer's work requires jewelry design that can show the three dimensionality of the cut gem. If Schäfer has thought "outside of the circle" to create this mind puzzler, so too must the jewelry designer.

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— by Robert Weldon, G.