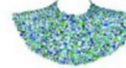




Ring of round-cut green tourmaline with round and marquise diamonds, marquise green tourmalines, aquamarines, and blue sapphires.



THE TIFFANY BLUE BOOK 2016

The Art of Transformation.

Writer **Adrienne Matei**

When Tiffany & Co. design director **Francesca Amfitheatrof** selected the theme “the Art of Transformation” for 2016’s **Tiffany Blue Book**, she envisioned capturing something subtle and poetic—a moment of metamorphosis—in the treasures she crafted from glittering jewels. Released annually since 1845, the Blue Book is the apogee of the house’s creative achievement, where the most beautiful geological specimens unearthed throughout the year go to shine. Since Amfitheatrof joined Tiffany in 2013 (becoming the house’s first female design director), the Blue Book has also become a narrative, a continued conversation that addresses modern tastes, luxurious whimsy, and jewellery’s relationship to art.

On the fifth floor of Manhattan’s Tiffany flagship store, Amfitheatrof presides over display cases of the 250 unique designs she and her team have spent the last year perfecting. Crafting such a vast and exquisite collection is a complicated and labour-intensive undertaking, the likes of which no other jewellery company attempts. Yet Amfitheatrof clearly thrives on the challenge. “This is not machine made,” she says, fingering a necklace of custom marquise-cut tanzanites, tourmalines, aquamarines, and diamonds, every green-blue stone graduated and linked by pavé diamonds, supple as a snake. “This is not cookie cutter. We’re not doing it for the money. It is a labour of love, and hopefully it’s transmitted to whoever has the luck to own one of these pieces,” Amfitheatrof admits. “Blue Book really is something that is borne from within us. We create something that’s going to become an heirloom. These are going to become treasures.”

Last year’s Blue Book was inspired by the sea—a stormy, wave-crashingly dramatic collection perhaps epitomized by the frothy turquoise statement necklace actress Cate Blanchett wore on the Oscar’s red carpet (“People went bananas over that necklace,” laughs Amfitheatrof). This year, however, the waters have calmed, and though the aquatic theme still persists, the works belie a sense of emergence from, rather than an exploration into, the sea—think Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* arising calmly from a tranquil blue. “Creating the concept, the feeling around these pieces, is an incredible time, because we have freedom, we have total freedom,” enthuses Amfitheatrof. While downstairs on the shop’s main floor, visitors peruse cases of the company’s signature solitaire engagement rings and sterling silver charm bracelets, in the realm of the Tiffany Blue Book, “We have the ability and the luck to create something as close as we could probably get to creating artworks,” she says. “We’re jewellers, don’t get me wrong; art is art. But if we can do something that’s as close as we can get to art—that makes me really happy.”

Of course, Tiffany works only in the finest mediums. “In this collection, we really do have some of the most remarkable coloured gemstones that we’ve had in any of our coloured collections. We’ve worked for several years to build the inventory to be able to create these pieces,” says Tiffany head gemologist Melvyn Kirtley. Proudly displaying a starfish-shaped brooch with a juicy fruit cluster of tourmalines that gleam like raspberry jelly at its centre, Kirtley explains an international trend towards coloured gemstones. “Clients are looking for quality, colour, [and] unusual gemstones that they’re not as familiar with, like spessartite or demantoid garnet. The whole notion of precious and semi-precious, it really doesn’t exist anymore,” he says. “We can find some beautiful stones that cost more than diamond, that cost more than sapphire ... There’s a great demand for collectability.”

“IT IS A LABOUR OF LOVE, AND HOPEFULLY IT’S TRANSMITTED TO WHOEVER HAS THE LUCK TO OWN ONE OF THESE PIECES.”

When it comes to conceptualizing a piece, Kirtley and Amfitheatrof work in unison. “When I look at [a stone], I see the size, the shape,” Kirtley explains, “But when Francesca looks at it she thinks, well that’s interesting because maybe it could be a wonderful... whatever, an octopus! So it stimulates her in the design strategy and concept.” Amfitheatrof also approaches each raw jewel with a sense of intuition: “Before, when you travelled, you’d take a St. Christopher or a four-leaf clover to bring you luck,” she says. “What are those pieces in the future? I personally wear things I think protect me ...I get a vibe from stones. I think some stones are moody, some are happy, and I think that a stone has a character and it can come across.” (The 2016 Blue Book’s most enigmatic gem may be the gobstopper-sized Baroque pearl Amfitheatrof outfitted with eight diamond and sapphire arms to create an octopus brooch she named “Stinky”).

Such untraditional, whimsical designs represent a new direction for Tiffany. “We’re in a moment of evolution for the brand,” says Amfitheatrof. “I think women don’t want to buy jewellery that sits in a safe or feels old. Women want to enjoy their jewellery—they are also buying their own jewellery and choosing their own jewellery.” This has resulted in changing consumer demands. “I think that now that women are making their own choices they’re choosing more varying, interesting colour combinations and styling themselves. I think there’s more style around jewellery, there’s more design around jewellery. I think it’s something that’s evolving. When you offer people something interesting and new what I find is even some of our most loyal customers who are 90 years old, they want something new and funky. So, okay, you might buy your beautiful diamond solitaire and a yellow diamond... but after that? You want something you can wear during the day, and you can pass on to your children.”

On the day after the Blue Book is revealed, Tiffany’s private appointment room is fully booked with clients vying for coveted pieces, and celebrities call to reserve creations to wear at red carpet events. Later in the evening, at Tiffany’s celebratory Blue Book Ball at New York’s Cunard Building, actress Reese Witherspoon will wear a \$10-million diamond necklace from the collection, while Diane Kruger and Jessica Biel sport similarly precious gems. Amfitheatrof, attending the gala in a pair of diamond starfish cuffs, personifies an observation she herself made earlier in the day, back at the blue-accented Tiffany office: “Jewellery has a power that is not just from the stones themselves but also from the people who wear them.” With quality, elegance, and artistic intuition, the Tiffany Blue Book captures the intangible, poignant element that transforms jewellery from inanimate stone into a cherished part of human life.

All photos courtesy of Tiffany & Co.

The Tiffany Blue Book 2016 collection will be presented in Toronto at the Tiffany & Co. Bloor Street West location from May 5–May 8, 2016.