

# paraiba

## The story of the Paraiba tourmaline is as fascinating as its incomparable colour

By Claire Roberts

In just a few decades, Paraiba tourmalines have taken on an almost mystical quality. First discovered in the 1980s by Heitor Dimas Barbosa, who spent years digging in the hills of the Brazilian state of Paraiba on little more than a hunch that he was going to find something special, these incandescent stones have quickly become among the rarest and most sought-after gems in the world.

Almost every shade of tourmaline can be found in Brazil, but none has the vivid glow that distinguishes the Paraiba tourmaline, also known as cuprian elbaite. A product of the trace element copper, colours range from startling turquoise to majestic blue-green, but it is the neon-bright glow that appears to light up the stone from within that makes the Paraiba tourmaline incomparable to any other gem.

To put their rarity into perspective, there is only one Paraiba tourmaline mined for every 10,000 diamonds, and a good quality Paraiba tourmaline from Brazil weighing over three carats is virtually unheard of. So rare are authentic Brazilian Paraiba tourmalines that it is not unusual for them to achieve five figures per carat.

In a surprising twist in the Paraiba tale, in 2003, a new wave of luminous green-blue tourmalines entered the market, mined by hand in the copper-rich mountains of Mozambique and Nigeria. Paraiba-like in every way, with only minute chemical differences to those unearthed in Brazil, they are often found weighing five carats or more and have caused an ongoing debate as to what can and can't by definition be called a "Paraiba" tourmaline. Some insist that only tourmalines from the Brazilians state of Paraiba are, indeed, Paraibas, while others are more inclusive.

Whichever side of the fence you sit, if you consider why this unique gemstone has turned up in two very different parts of the world, things get very interesting. If you look at the outline of the continent of South America and compare it to the coast of Africa, the shape of



Nourbel & Le Cavelier ring in white gold, set with a 19.25ct Paraiba tourmaline and diamonds (Nourbel & Le Cavelier, 23 Burlington Arcade, London).



Nourbel & Le Cavelier Paraiba tourmaline ring in white gold with diamonds (Nourbel & Le Cavelier, 23 Burlington Arcade, London).