The Brisbane Opal Museum



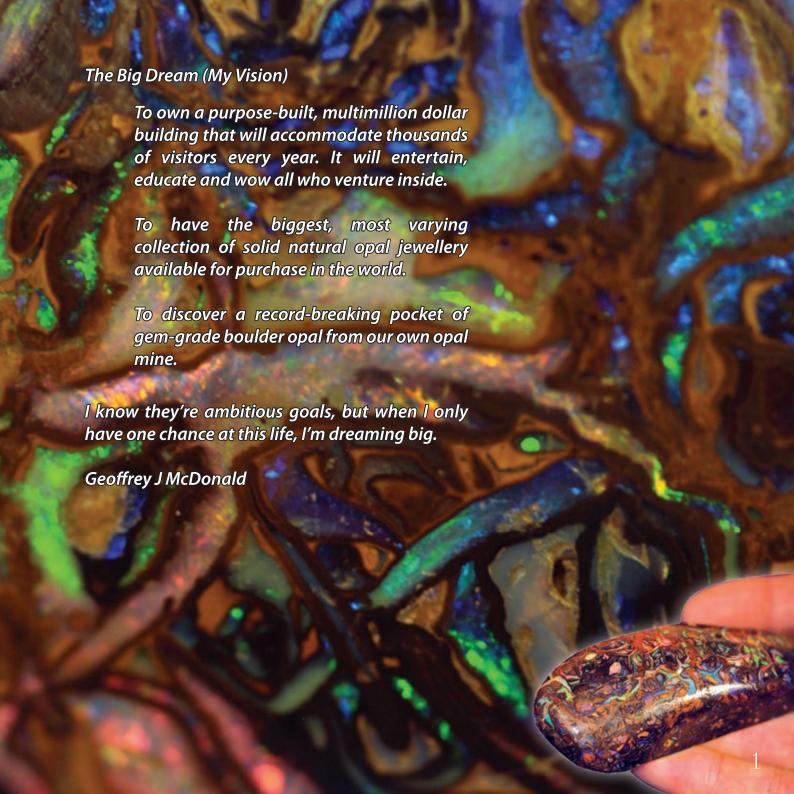


First published in 2017 By Brisbane Opal Museum in Association with Pictorial Press Australia,

ISBN. 978-1-876561-13-0

Brisbane Opal Museum 196 Albion Rd, Windsor, 4030, QLD, AUSTRALIA BrisbaneOpalMuseum.com.au +61 7 3857-7740 © Copyright 2017

Pictorial Press (publisher) details... P O Box 388, Corinda QLD 4075 Phone: (07) 3716 0104 Email: robert@pictorialpress.com.au View our current jewellery online at www.AustralianOpalJewellery.com.au



Intro

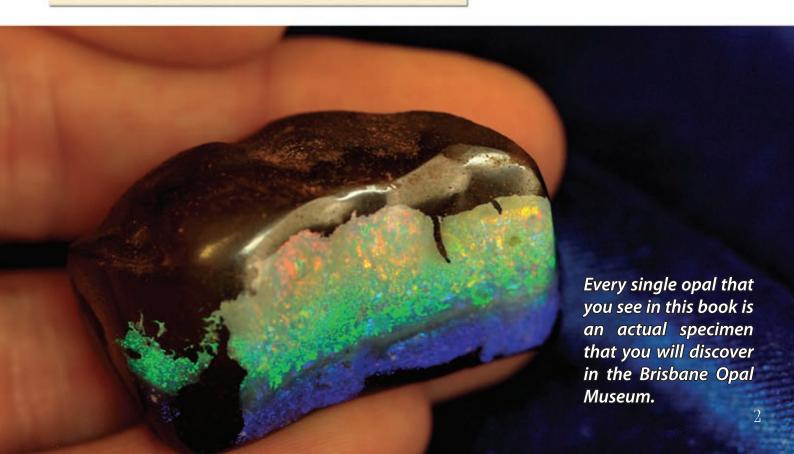
Have you ever been somewhere in nature and been absolutely entranced by it's beauty? Well that's the same feeling an opal can generate for many people. Something so incredibly compelling that it still has the ability to grab your attention decades into the future.

In the first half of this book, I will tell you my story and how the Opal Museum was created. I'm telling you my story because personally, I like hearing other people's stories, so maybe you might like to know mine.

The second half of the book, (part two) contains the information you need, should you like to learn about the opal industry in Australia. It is a general overview of the formation, mining and cutting of opal.



That's me, Geoffrey J McDonald

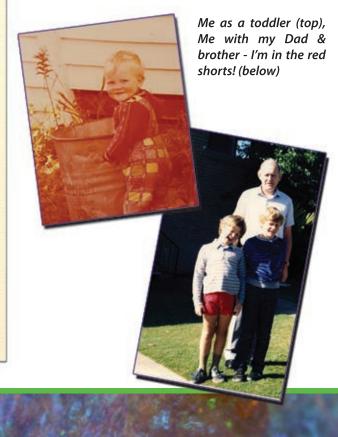


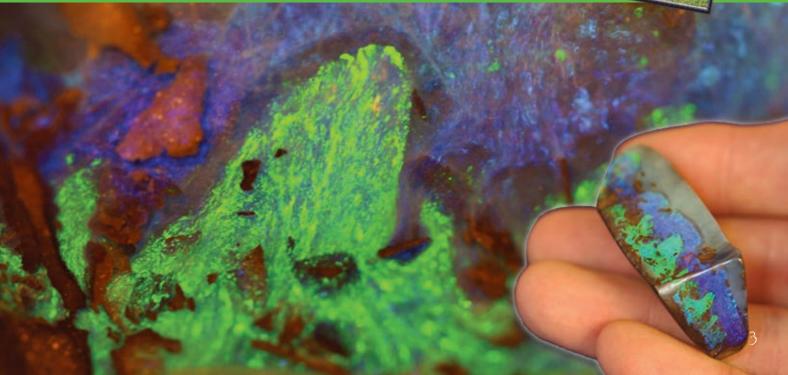
Where it all Started

I have fond memories of my childhood. I was born in New Zealand and due to my Dads work we travelled around alot, so there was always exploring to be done and mischief to be made. At the age of eight my family was transferred across to this ridiculously hot country, Australia.

I was fortunate enough to live in one of the suburbs of Brisbane that still had forestry and creeks, which I used to escape the heat. I spent endless days exploring and swinging off the rope down the creek. I stumbled my way through the girlfriend phase - had my heart broken and did my fair share of breaking hearts too. I loved rock and roll and yep, life was good! I even managed to pass high school - just.

However with the grades I had, there was no university for me. I went to TAFE, and studied to become a motor mechanic. A year later I landed an apprenticeship in a small family business.





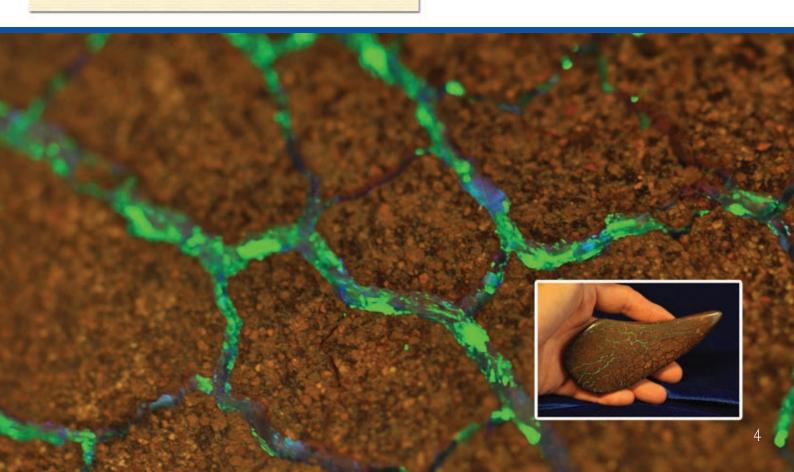
A Very Scary Night

One night, when I was nineteen, I was sitting around a campfire with my best friends chatting away while listening to Bob Marley. Like many teenagers at the time, we had a smoke. However, it wasn't exactly the fun experience I had anticipated. Instead, I became extremely distressed. There was a repetitive thought that simply would not go away and the more I tried to stop it, the more intense it became.

I thought I was going to loose complete control. There was a part of me watching this crazy mind chatter, but I couldn't do anything about it. It was a very scary feeling at the time, and when it wore off, I felt an intense wave of relief.



Celebrating a friends 40th Mates from high school, still mates now.



The Silver Lining

This experience brought with it a silver lining. There was a period during the extreme anxiety, when the familiar thought processes were absolutely gone. The "witnessing faculty" (that part of us which never changes) was experiencing other thoughts and feelings that were completely foreign. This experience was the thin wedge that started me on the path to thinking about what the mind actually is.

A few months later, I heard an advert for a seminar on the radio. It was about using the power of the mind to help oneself become more successful - the power of attraction, that kind of stuff.

I went to this seminar. It was a personal development talk from a gentleman called Michael D Rowland. After that event, I never looked back. I was hooked on the personal development train and, 22 or so years later, I have never really hopped off. Michael Rowland helped me believe that I could do whatever I wanted to with my life.

That seminar made me realise that I wanted to have my own business, and, to be good at business, you need to be able to sell.



Time for a Change

So I quit my apprenticeship, packed up my tools, and stepped into a new chapter of my life. I became a door-to-door salesperson, selling a child development program, (a fancy way of saying encyclopedias!) Talk about baptism by fire!



After eight months of grinding, arduous, deflating work, I left the door-to-door selling job. I had learnt a lot about sales. Mostly, that I never wanted to sell like that again.

The Best Child Development Product that NEVER was

While working in the "child development industry", I came up with a product that would help motivate kids to stay focused on a goal. I invented the "Funky Chart". It was like a star chart, but better. Essentially, it was a sticker chart that told a story.

Over the next five years, I continued to work on the chart while doing other things. However, a time did come when I needed to have a serious chat with myselves ('myselves" is not a typo, I believe that we are made up of different individual personality mind parts) and decide on exactly what I wanted to do. I decided to completely stop Funky Charts in order to focus entirely on the jewellery business.

We were about to go out and knock doors for the night (above). One of the Funky Charts (below).



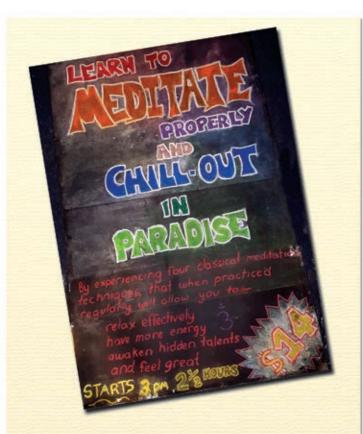
Meditation in Paradise

I'm getting ahead of myself. During one of my time-off periods from working on the charts, I packed my bags and became a hippy, teaching meditation to backpackers in the Daintree rainforest. It was not my intention to teach meditation when I went up there, however after two weeks having the time of my life, living in paradise, with beautiful, cool, friendly people from around the world, I didn't want to leave.

However, I was living in a tiny tent and running out of money fast, so teaching meditation sounded a whole lot better than washing dishes or cleaning out cabins. I was lucky because I came across an old friend-of-a-friend who worked in the reception of the backpackers' hostel. They allowed me to put up a poster advertising my services, and, when a busload of backpackers arrived, they would get the usual....



The meditation poster that I put up in the reception (top/right) Waterhole in the Daintree Rainforest (above)



Welcome Speech ...

- Ride a horse
- Scuba/snorkel the Great Barrier Reef
- Taste tropical fruit
- Walk in the jungle at night
- Ride a bike and ...
- What the? "Meditate in the jungle".

The Daintree rainforest is a very special place in Australia (three hours north of Cairns). After six months of teaching meditation and talking about the experiences of enlightened gurus, I wanted to talk about it from a sense of knowing rather than just a theoretical point of view. It was time for me to leave the jungle and go back to reality.

How we Started in Jewellery

I returned home to my parent's house, and after some more time on Funky Charts, it was time to leave for India. I wanted to see for myself what the place was really like and listen to some real-life Gurus. Without going into too much detail about my Indian adventure, all I will say is, that I found India to be a place of extremes (good and bad, beautiful and ugly, joyful and sad).



While I was in India, I met with my older brother John, whom I hadn't seen for four years (he had been travelling). It was great catching up with and hearing about my brother's adventures. We talked about many things, including what we wanted to do when we went back home.

(photo above) A group of kids who live in the tent in the background. Photograph was taken in a village called Sarnath, India



We both wanted to be our own boss., so we decided to get into the import business, buying products in India and bringing them back to sell in Australia. I purchased (and when I say "I", I actually mean I borrowed money from my parents) statues, paintings, singing bells, feng shui items, wood pipes and carvings. Most importantly, I purchased lots of semi-precious jewellery. It was this jewellery that started us both on the path towards opals.

Arriving back in Australia, my brother and I started selling at markets and of all the things I brought back, jewellery sold best, and we also both enjoyed it the most. We stuck with it for a year and sales were OK. We put in a few more orders for jewellery, but after my Daintree rainforest and Indian adventures, I still had "itchy feet". I was still not ready to knuckle down and give myself 100% to the jewellery business.

I told my brother that I was going to do what he did and travel off to London for a couple of years. So, with my parents' and his blessing, I stepped into the crazy world of London.



Once an Entrepreneur, always an Entrepreneur

while I was in London, John left for India to study gemology. Although I was over in London, I never stopped working on the charts, nor selling jewellery. I even asked my brother to send over a parcel of jewellery once I was settled.

I always knew if I was desperate, I could unroll a blanket, place the jewellery on it, and let the colourful pieces captivate the people passing by. My London friends found it strange that I would do this, but I had learned (from door-to-door selling) resilience and I was not affected by what others thought of me.

London was a wonderful, exciting adventure, but after two years, I was ready to go home. So I returned to Australia with renewed focus and determination, (and in love with a French lady called Valentine)



My wife Valentine and I (above). Outside the shop before we turned it into the jewellery shop (top)



Let the Work Begin

Once back home, I got to work. At the time, I foolishly believed eBay would be the best way of selling the jewellery online, (which was a terrible mistake,) but we're all geniuses in hindsight.

In the beginning, Valentine and I worked out of our garage. We did this for a couple of years. We just kept listing jewellery and working hard, always trying to do more, including building our own website.

I had this very misguided belief that if I could just keep adding more items on eBay, then this would get more people bidding against one another and I would sell more. However, this required lots of work and meant that we needed to employ more people.

We needed to expand. I wanted to bring in another income stream, so I set about opening up a bricks and mortar shop.



VIP room Before/After

The Shop

I found an old shop in Windsor. It had great exposure, but it needed a lot of work. Luckily, I had a great landlord, who was quite forgiving of my never-ending renovations.

I remember long ago, when I first started the shop renovations, I had this saying, "Build it and they will come", repeating in my mind (like in the movie 'Field of Dreams'). However this type of thinking is delusional at best and financially crippling at worst, because I built it and no one came. If you are thinking of starting a business, you need to become an expert in marketing. Nothing else matters, even if you have the best product in the world. I believe the key to effective marketing is know exactly who your target market is, have many different methods of "talking" to them and to contact them more than once. Now, getting back to the old shop.

Constant, Never-ending Improvement

In the beginning, I spent most nights doing the renovating. We had very little money, so I needed to do everything myself. Weeks turned into months, and months turned into years. Even now I still spend one night a week working into the night doing ...

- Renovations.
- Cleaning,
- Thinking,
- Creating.

I really enjoy this late-night work time, when I am not doing work stuff, but focusing on growing the business. Mind you, when I am doing renovations, it helps to have a beer or two.



Across the road from the Museum (lower/left). Out the front of the shop (below). Over the years we have expanded to occupy 4 shops - surrounding Jimmy the Tattooist.



Failing

We sold thousands of semi-precious jewellery items on eBay every month, and there was so much work to be done. We acquired another room when an adjoining tenant moved out, hoping to increase the size of our shop.

But, ultimately, the news was not good. No matter how hard we worked we were not able to make a decent living selling semi-precious jewellery.

However, opal seemed to do very well, and through selling opal, we could focus on our "niche" while still keeping variety. We also noticed, people would come out from the city to see us.

It was then that I decided to change our business completely and focus entirely on opal by opening up an Opal Museum.



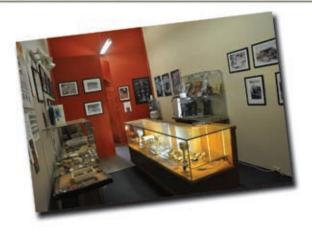
I had been reading a lot of business books and they all pushed "giving a good experience".

I then decided to open up an Opal Museum next to the shop and focus on "giving a good experience", telling a great story and letting the product sell itself. The idea was there, the decision was made... now all I needed to do was build it! The renovations continued ...



There was one concerning issue... we didn't have any big WOW! specimens that someone might expect to find in a museum. Could we even call ourselves a museum? I went to the dictionary and looked up what the word "museum" meant. One of the definitions was "a place of learning", so that was good enough for me.

I then contacted Len Cram (a famous opal miner-come-photographer) and asked if I could use some of his photos in our museum. He said yes. I was also lucky enough to convince an opal wholesaler, Phil Rigby, to put some of his "top end" opals in our museum. I am eternally grateful for their generosity.



How to Make a Small Museum a Great One

I was determined, that if customers had to ride 15 minutes in a bus from the city or catch a taxi, that I was going to make it worth their while. I knew that I had to come up with an interesting, engaging tour. I crafted a story that was enough to engage even the most stoic of husbands. I believe the tour is still one of the best parts of the museum, and have continued to refine it over the past four years to make it even better.



One more Challenge, One more Big Decision

A few years after we opened the museum, we were faced with another challenge. We were getting phone calls asking if we could take large groups, (twenty people or more) but I was having to turn them away as we could not fit that many people. I knew that at some point, we would need to expand -but how?

Moving was out of the question, as we had established ourselves here in Windsor and I didn't want to start all over again. But then, out of the blue, yet another adjoining tenant moved out. A much larger area became available and, yes, it meant that I would have to do a lot more renovating. It also meant that we had to go around the back of Jimmy the Tattooist, and no, we couldn't really afford it. But when you have a goal, and opportunities arise that are in line with that goal, there is only one decision that can be made.

We were going to do this!



The Brisbane Opal Museum in 2017

Here we are today, in 2017. Whilst everyone around us seems to be talking doom and gloom, we continue to grow. Things are still challenging, but we are doing well. Frequently we have those visitors where the museum and shop absolutely blow their minds!

So, that's about it for me. I hope you have enjoyed my story. I hope to see you soon. Enjoy the rest of the book!

You can check out our reviews on www.tripadvisor.com.au (search Brisbane Opal Museum)



I am grateful to the following people...

Firstly, thank you to the many wonderful past customers for their support of this business, through taking the plunge and discovering your own unique opal you have also helped to support us and the industry as a whole.

Many thanks to Pat McGrath, (a wonderful opal dealer whom I purchased many of the opal museum specimens from), the many other supportive opal dealers... Phil, Neva, Holly, Mark, Gary, Ralph, Ken, Dent, Dale, Sam, Peter, Sally and the late David Ratliff.

A big thank you goes out to my fantastic staff, Susie, Tara, Adelaide & Ashley. My past staff, Ursula, Nicki, Anastasia and Matthew. My accountant Karam, My jewellers Mohan Jeet Singh, Ronald Ki, Alan and Ben, Zhult, and the amazingly talented Glen Bell.

A special thankyou to Helen, Andre & Family (my landlords) and their wonderful late Mother Zelpa who put-up with my endless shop renovations. And speaking of renovations I would like to thank All my mates who helped out from time to time, in particular Brad, Chris, Nathan, and Fraser.

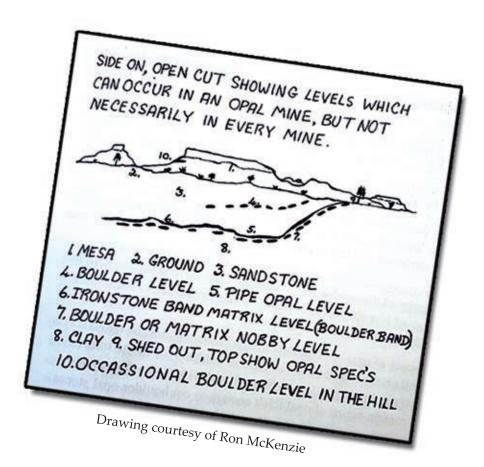
To John McDonald, my brother, may we continue to grow. <u>John's store</u> is called the Australian Opal Shop (which is part of the same company as the opal museum) it's on the Gold Coast at the Harbour Town shopping Centre.

To my Super-Mum Margaret who has helped in so many ways. To my beautiful wife Valentine, who knows how to get the most out of me.

Lastly to my wonderful Dad who died almost five years ago. He supported me from the beginning and I hope to be as good a father to my kids as he was to us.

Part Two

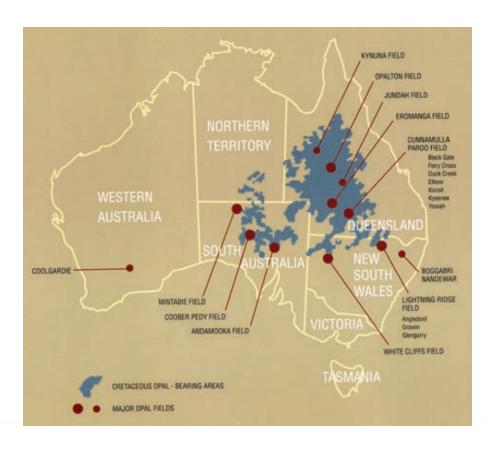
- Where opal is found
- Why it formed
- Our mine
- How to care for your opal
- What is a solid opal
- Why there is colour
- How it formed
- Cutting and shaping opal
- Valuing and pricing opals
- What to do next...





Australian opal is famous due to its display of incredibly bright, vibrant colours and intricate, captivating patterns. Much of it, but not all, is also very stable (resistant to natural cracking).

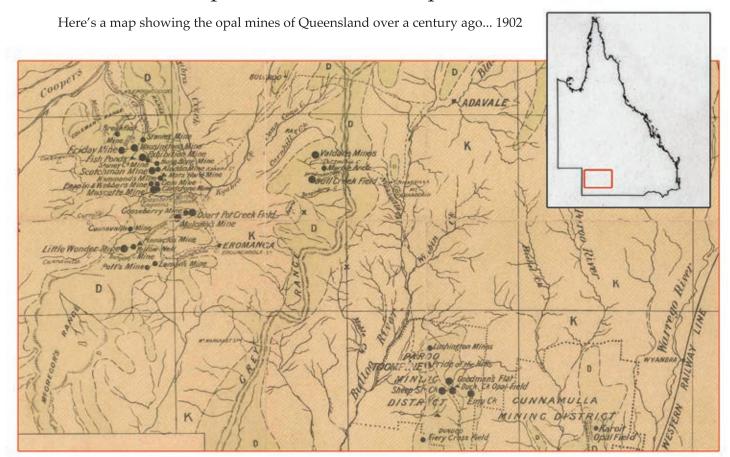
This map shows the opal fields of Australia. We have opal in Australia, due to a series of congruent geological events. The first of these, was that, millions of years ago, there was a vast, shallow inland sea. There was some uplifting of the ground and the freezing of the polar-caps. As a result, inland the sea disappeared. What was left in its wake was a land that had a high concentration of silica.





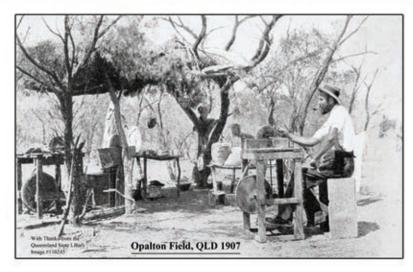
Over the following millions of years, there was a lot of volcanic activity causing acid rain. This created long, sustained periods of deep weathering which caused extensive erosion (chemical weathering). This in turn dissolved away the silica from its crystalline form into minute silica particles. The particles were carried by water (springs, floods and the rising and falling of the underground water table) through the sandstone until it collected in the empty cracks in the rock. It also collected in the empty voids left over from organic materials such as plants, animals and shells eventually turning to opal.

A Prospectors Treasure Map





The Eulo Queen.
Over a hundred
years ago. She was
the owner of one
the most remote
pubs in the world Eulo. A shrewd
dealer - she had her
hand in many an
opal deal.



Opal mining – a game of hide and seek where nature usually wins.

The geology of Australia varies considerably and so does the mining of the opal. I constantly hear from opal miners, that these days the challenge miners face is huge – it is very expensive to mine opal.

In the early days, when miners searched for opal in Queensland, they would roam the lands looking for floaters (traces of opal that had came out of the ground naturally.) Once they found some, they would try to work out where they came from — which could be hundreds of metres away. When they felt they were close, they would throw their hat up in the air, and wherever it landed, was where they would dig.

After some time searching like this, the miners started to notice that opal formed at the base of mesas (flat-topped hills) in areas with dark red sandstone.

Prospectors also looked for certain trees (gidyea and mallee) that grew in red sandstone. They sought the deep-rooted lapinga trees, which cluster along lineaments and slides.

When mining in Queensland, opal miners look for what they call "pockets". Pockets of opal are typically formed when a horizontal layer of dense, impervious rock (beneath the sandstone), starts to tilt down. Then, at some point, this rock tilts back up, trapping and pooling the water and silica particles. This eventually forms the opal.



The above photo is an image of our mine. You can watch a video of it at... www.AustralianOpalJewellery.com.au/content/20



In the photo above you can see my brother John cracking an ironstone boulder looking for any opal inside.

In the years ahead you will be able to watch some of our opal mining discoveries at the following address... www.AustralianOpalJewellery.com.au/content/21

"You haven't been in the game long enough until you've broken a valuable opal"...

Was what I was once told by a long time opal dealer after I explained how upset I was because one of my favorite opal specimens (below) had been dropped and was now in four pieces....



How to care for your SOLID opal

An opal can scratch and, dare I say it, break. An opal is similar to a valuable piece of art. Every opal is unique and it needs to be looked after.

It is best to avoid exposing the opal to long periods of hot sunlight. If you are going to store it in a dry environment for a long period of time, pop it in a sealable bag with a splash of distilled water (solid opals only). Otherwise, wear your opal and keep in mind that it's fine to get it wet occasionally (as long as it is held in well by the setting) The strongest and most stable (reliable) of all opal is boulder opal.

We strongly recommend solid opals over doublets, triplets, synthetic and treated opal for two main reasons:

1) In this age of science and technology, there is something inexplicably special in knowing the captivating colours and patterns of an opal are 100% natural and not in anyway altered by man.

2) They're the most durable.

So what is a solid opal?

Type 1: Classic, solid opal, where the whole stone is either precious opal or a mixture of common opal (potch) and precious opal.

Type 2: Boulder opal (named as such because the opal forms in ironstone boulders) is a layer of opal naturally attached to the host rock underneath (usually ironstone).

Type 3: Matrix opal, which forms inside something else. When we see a matrix opal, we see on the surface of the stone a mixture of ironstone and opal.

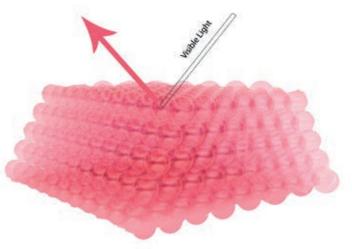
Here is an image of solid opals, doublets, triplets.



For images of synthetic opal and treated opal please go to...www.BrisbaneOpalMuseum.com.au

How does opal get its colour?

The difference between precious opal and common opal (opal without colour, also called potch) is that in precious opal we can see with a high-powered microscope a patchwork of 3D domains of silica spheres. The important fact about this structure is that all the spheres are the same size and that they are in the order of 400 - 700 nanometres (visible light).



A very simplified explanation is that the direct result of the spheres being arranged like this will cause visible light to interfere with itself as it passes through the structure. The smaller spheres produce a blue colour. As the spheres increase in size, we go through the different colours in the rainbow until red is displayed – the rarest of all colours.

Why the Silica Spheres Developed

So what actually caused the concentrated silica solution to form into these solid silica spheres? After all, if all we're talking about here is silica (a very abundant mineral) and water, why is there not lots of opal everywhere in the world?

The catalyst for opal formation happens in one of two ways – organically or inorganically.

Inorganic opal formed when there was a basic pH (pure water). This was caused by an increase in temperature, or by the presence of molecules such as iron oxide, aluminium oxide, magnesium oxide, sodium sulfate or simply sea salt.

Organic opal formed when silicic acid accumulated in little cellular compartments. The silicic acid formed from algae, sponges, single-celled organisms and vascular plants. The silicic acid created specific proteins which started the process.



Geoff's rules for cutting and shaping opals...

I'm a slow opal cutter. Once I have revealed the opal face, I ask myself, "can I cut this into a nice matching pair of earrings"? The second question I ask is, can I bring myself to actually cut the stone in half?

I then need to decide which way to orientate it (where the fire shows the best). Days later, after a break, I will come back to the piece, and continue shaping. I will repeat this two or three times until it's completed.

The shape of an opal is very important. While I focus on brightness, I will nearly always sacrifice colour if it improves the shape. The opal needs to have balanced sides or angles. In most cases, I remove the ironstone, however occasionally, the brown rock can improve a stone by adding to the picture of it.

Finally, one of the secrets to cutting opal is the concept of "less is more". I focus on the colour and pattern. I can often increase the Wow! factor of an opal stone by making it smaller.



In the photo above I had just finished cutting, polishing and shaping the opals (they were still glued to the dopping stick). Take note of the shapes. They are all balanced and pleasing to the eye. You can watch a video of me cutting an opal here...



I cut this stone in half to make these beautiful earrings.



Valuing opals – the brighter the better

The key to valuing opals is to always stick with opals that are 100% natural (solid opal). It then becomes a level playing field and simply comes down to the "Wow!" factor of an opal; which is based on eight value-determining features – type, tone, shape, thickness, transparency, colour, pattern and brightness. The better these eight features are, the more attractive it is, and therefore the more people want it, thus increasing the demand (some of the features are more important than the others, but they all do matter, with the most important being brightness – officially known as brilliance – closely followed by pattern and colour).

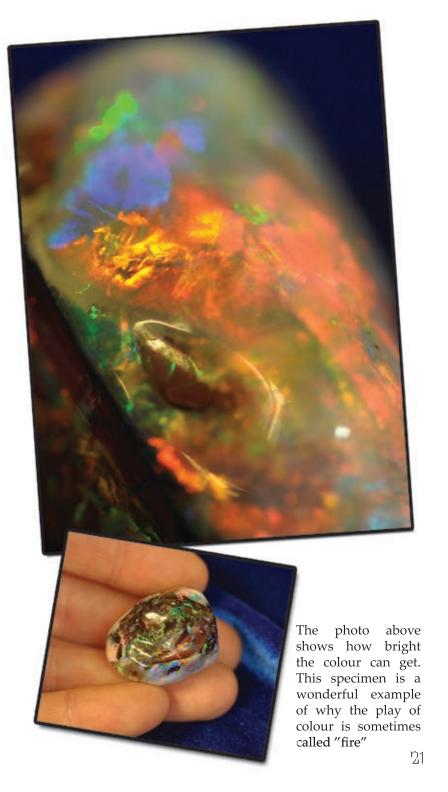
Pricing

As you can imagine, with such a variety, it is not easy to price opals. Like many things, you need experience and knowledge of the supply versus demand price point.

Valuing opals is in many ways similar to valuing artwork (painting). Because like opal they are extremely varying and can also be utterly compelling. The only way to gauge their value is to get the paintings in front of many possible buyers and gauge their reaction.

I have shot a fun video where I value my top Opal Museum specimens (like the one in the image). To watch the video, go to...

www.australianopaljewellery.com.au/content/24





If you can't visit us instore then shopping online is just as easy.

I've been working on websites for over 20 years. I know know how to build a website that is easy to use and customer focused. All the jewellery and loose stones that are valued over \$300 we list on our website. We also include a video for each item (and talk about the item on the video) to give you a real feel for the item. And every item comes with a no-fuss money back guarantee.





To give you an idea of our jewellery.

These are photos of our pieces that SOLD over the past 12 months.

To view these items in greater detail go to

www.australianOpalJewellery.com.au/content/26





The beautiful Lady above is called Adelaide. She works in the Opal Museum part time. When she's not working here she's travelling all over the world being an international model. For more images of our jewellery being modelled please go to...

www.AustralianOpalJewellery.com.au/content/27

So you made it to the end of the book. I hope you enjoyed it! Do you think you will now appreciate your opal more? If you don't know, because you don't have one, then I know just the place to go to find one ...

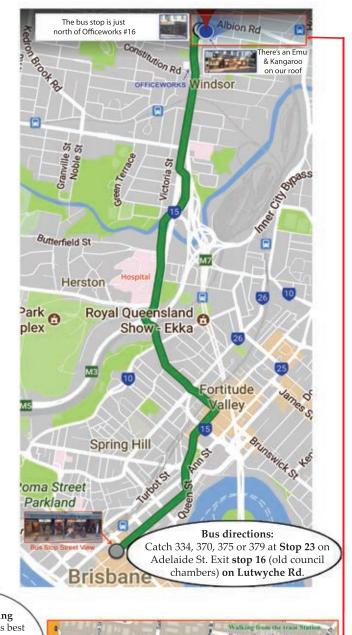
And this depends on where you are.

If you're **NOT in Brisbane** and have no intention of visiting Brisbane, then a good place to start finding the perfect item is to answer the same questions that we ask our customers to help them narrow down their opal. To view these questions go to www.AustralianOpalJewellery.com.au/content/28

If you are in Brisbane, then you need to come visit the museum. No doubt about it – if you enjoyed reading this, then you will enjoy the museum! It's only a 17 minute bus ride or 12 minutes in a taxi/Uber from the city. So we'll see you soon!



This final photo is of my three boys Maxime, Alexis, and Julian. They're a handful, but I love them dearly. May they grow up strong and healthy and have wonderful adventures.



If you're **driving** from the city, it is best to drive down Albion road, turn around in a side street, and then head back up towards the traffic lights.



196 Albion Rd, Windsor, 07 3857-7740

Finding spiritually through being a business owner.

It can be tough running a business and being spiritual. Because you want to be all caring, good and honest but what do you do when you're short on cash but you really need the sale?

Not as much these days, but in the old days that's been the challenge. To not let fear take over, and have the faith to know that when I don't have the money, the money will come - it may not be from this person in front of me right now but if I give my 100% to this person it will come - and it does.

When you do business with myself or my staff we promise to have your interests at heart. We truly want you to find your perfect opal so that you wear it often and that it brings you years of joy and happy memories.

Yes I know. Not your average content for a book about opals. But then again I guess the Opal Museum is not your average business.

Geoffrey J McDonald

