

# 5 Minutes with... Gary Weinstein

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## of Gary's Gem Garden in Cherry Hill



**How long have you been buying and selling gems and minerals?**

I began collecting when I was 11 and started my business at 17. My interests also included fossils, meteorites and stone artifacts.

**What's the coolest thing under the ground in New Jersey?**

Franklin [in Sussex County] is the fluorescent mineral capital of the world. Put those ugly rocks under ultraviolet light and they're beautiful. You can also find fossil sharks' teeth, shells and corals in Monmouth County. And I've seen Native American axe heads that people have dug up in their own backyards.

**When were you last out in the field?**

Last fall, I was in Pennsylvania and Delaware looking for fern fossils. This past April, I was at the Sterling Hill Mining Museum in Ogdensburg and went to the mineral dump. I found some interesting pieces. Most of the old quarries and dumps in the East are closed now, but a few are still open and you can find some good specimens.

**What is it about gems and minerals that speaks to you?**

Science and art have always appealed to me, so I find the natural sculptural qualities of different specimens—and also the cutting of gems and making of jewelry—really interesting.

**What do you think of the reality show *Prospectors*?**

I enjoy the show. The Busse family—Yolanda and Brian and their sons—were here recently. They gave me some specimens of aquamarine and smoky quartz.

We talked for a couple of hours. I encouraged them to talk to the *Prospectors* producers about focusing more on safety. It's really not a good idea to take a hammer to a rock without safety glasses.

**What is your prize possession?**

I have a few favorites, including a big chunk of raw opal from Queensland [Australia], with patterns that are always changing. Opal happens to be my birthstone.

**For people who are new to collecting, what are the "hidden gems" in your store?**

I'd say go for the specimens we've obtained from old locations, where the sources are now closed. Also, we repair and remake jewelry, and we design new pieces around stones that people bring in.

**What's the most interesting thing that's walked into your store?**

Mostly, people walk *out* with the interesting stuff. There are so many pieces I'd love to have back. I suppose that's true for any collector. **EDGE**

**Editors Note:** After Gary Weinstein opened his "rock shop" in 1973, it quickly became New Jersey's go-to spot for everything from rare minerals to fossils to holistic healing crystals to jewelry-making supplies. Gary's Gem Garden is located on Marlton Pike in Cherry Hill; the shop's web address is [garysgemgarden.com](http://garysgemgarden.com).