ZADORA

THE PERFECT MELDING OF BEAUTY AND DESIGN

Destined for the traditional career path of the German aristocracy to which he was born, Andreas von Zadora-Gerlof was saved from the military by a crippling hunting accident and a Haida Indian. For the next thirty six years, the world benefited from a display of some of the most beautiful, exotic, and technically advanced art ever produced.

by Walter Knapp

Photography by David Behl

Andreas, how did a hunting accident as a teenage boy completely change your life?

"It's a story I love to tell. It is almost unbelievable. I grew up on The Queen Charlotte Islands about seventy miles off the coast of British Columbia, Canada. Any one familiar with the area knows that it is a lush forested semi wilderness which lends itself to fishing and hunting. At age fourteen, I suffered a serious accident while hunting that left my right hand crippled and claw like. Doctors recommended all sorts of physiotherapy like wringing out towels or practicing crab like movements against the wall. The therapy was boring and tedious and left me feeling extremely depressed.

"One day, a good friend of my father, a Haida Indian artist named Gordon Cross, asked him if he could assist in the therapy by teaching me some native crafts that might help strengthen my hand. My father agreed. From Gordon and others in his family, I was introduced to Haida art. Suddenly, I was no longer bored or depressed. I learned sculpting, silver engraving, totemic wood carving, and carving on argillite, a black stone native to the region.

Andreas von Zadora-Gerlof at work in his shop, 1999.

"The result was that I got so involved and loved the process so much that it was no longer physiotherapy, it was fun! It was nothing for me to work ten hours or more which dramatically improved my hand. It is still crippled, but you can hardly tell. I reckon that I would never have progressed as rapidly had it not been for the Haida processes I had learned.

"Without both those events happening, I would be doing something totally different today. This practice opened up the idea to me that I really could sculpt and it has lead me far from anything anyone in my family had ever done."

You mentioned something you called "Form Feel," what does that mean?

"It's the ability to see the shape of an object in the material I'm using, and then remove all superfluous matter. I just find it very easy to see what material I need to remove from a given shape to create the new shape I desire. I can visualize it and do it and I think that is the first step necessary to have a fair shot at becoming a good sculptor."

I believe it was Michelangelo who said that sculpting marble was easy, all you had to do was cut away the marble you don't want and keep the part you do want. What do you find to be the most challenging part of working with gems?

"First, obviously is that you are working with precious material, so if you make a mistake it is very costly. Secondly, is the fact that the materials can be many times harder than steel, so you're sculpting with tools tipped with crushed diamonds. Even though I know what material I want to remove, it's very hard and very nerve wracking."

Are there any forms that you find particularly difficult to sculpt?

"I consider the two most challenging subjects to sculpt are women and horses. It doesn't matter what material I use, recreating the female and equine forms are the most difficult."

Why women and horses?

"Maybe if I was just doing some generic female and equine forms it wouldn't be so difficult, but usually I am commissioned to sculpt a specific horse or a specific woman and those subjects have unique characteristics that I have to be able to capture. For instance, a mid-eastern client commissioned me to sculpt a couple of his prize Arabian horses. They were incredibly beautiful with splendid muscle structure, and I found that I had to concentrate on every detail. I wasn't trying to re-create a horse; I was trying to re-create "That Horse."

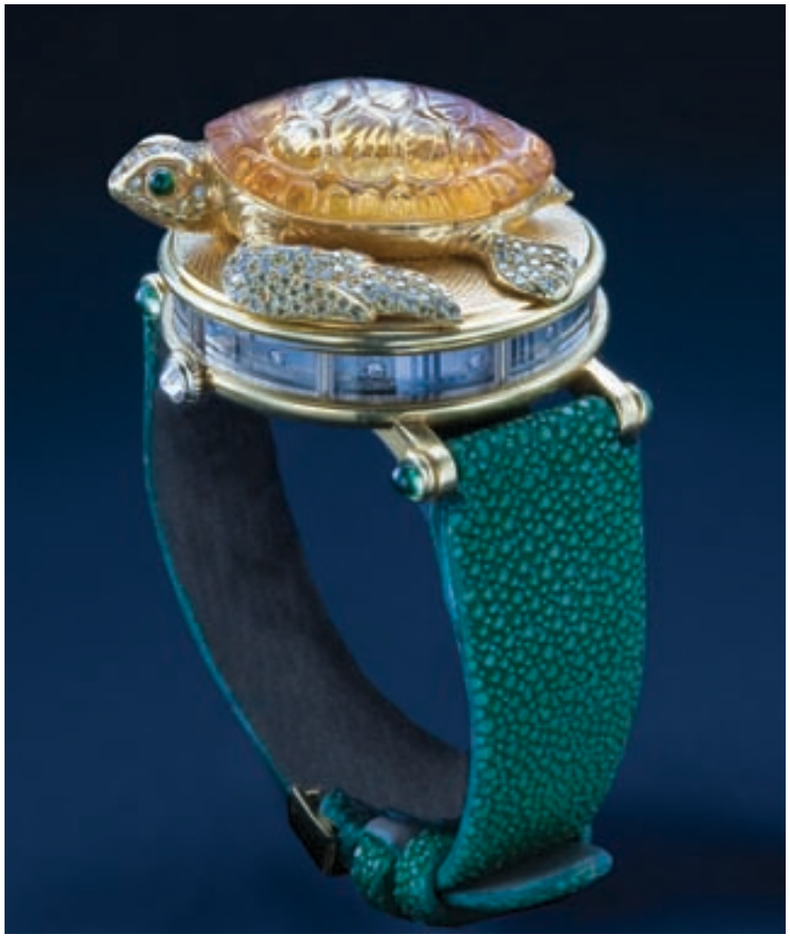
continued on page 66

ZADORA

continued from page 65

"Prior to every sculpture, I carve a wax model and I found that if I am off by only a half of a percent on proportions, you can tell immediately. It looks dreadful and an owner would say, "That's not my horse."

"The same thing is true if a man wants you to sculpt his wife or daughter. He knows all her nuances and mannerisms and can tell immediately whether or not you captured her precisely or were slightly off. I had a client in Texas that asked me to sculpt his daughter as a pixie. The young woman was absolutely gorgeous, and I got to spend several hours with her and also had several photographs to use as I tried to learn as much as possible to adequately complete the project. I carved her out of crystal and thought I had done a pretty fair likeness. When I showed it to her father he noticed immediately that the some of the expression in her face seemed off a bit.



Sea Turtle Watch, approximately 1", 2002, 18kt Gold, Diamonds, Cabachon Emeralds, Citrine Crystal, with shell of sculpted Citrine.

"He was correct, of course, and I made the necessary changes to make her likeness as perfect as she. Projects like these are by most definitions absolutely art."

If there has been a criticism of Andreas' work it is that it is an extremely high level of precision craftsmanship, but not really art. The argument states that he is actually a manufacturing company and not an individual artist. His company employs about one hundred and twenty people to assist in the crafting of the final product and he utilizes a watch works factory in Switzerland to install the gears. True, that is different than putting oil to canvas or removing a log from the forest and carving it into a statue by you alone. But the very first definition of art in the dictionary is "Human Creativity." It doesn't say anything about how many workers need be involved. Zadora's work is defined by masterful sculpting and ingenious engineering creatively designed. If Jackson Pollack is an artist, then, without question, what Zadora does is art and he is an artist!

Andreas, what is your feeling about the art market?

"These days it seems like art collecting doesn't recognize anything about beauty or something well done, it's more about shock value. I don't have a problem with art having shock value, but I believe it should be superbly done. Some pieces today look like they were just slapped together and they sell for millions of dollars. I have a real problem with that being sustainable down the line.

"On the other hand, what I consider my art form is misunderstood. I believe, and continue to say, that you can do something or make something beautifully, well crafted, and engineered and still have it be art."

Let's go back to the earlier years if we might. How you went from totemic wood carving and silver engraving to the automatons and clocks you do today?

"My family has been going into the military for hundreds of years, and now that my hand was much better, my father wanted me to pursue that goal. My father believed that a gentleman's truest calling was in the military. The military in the seventies wasn't the one in which my father and grand father served. I attended military school in Los Angeles, but didn't have much interest. While I was there, I continued to work with silver and practice many of the other Haida skills I was taught, and even sold several pieces. Because I'm not Haida, I began to feel uncomfortable practicing their art, and I soon gave it up as inappropriate.

"It was my uncle who suggested that I learn gemology. 'If you really love this work, you could learn to be a jeweler and gem sculptor.' The idea made sense and I enrolled in The Gem City College in Quincy, Illinois. It might sound unusual, but at the time it was the best jewelry school in America. I spent two years there learning how to be a jeweler. After that, I headed for Germany and attended Idar Oberstein to complete my training in gemology. After passing the course, I landed a position with a master craftsman to learn gem sculpting. After four years, I became proficient at crest engraving, making flowers and smaller animals. I went back to British Columbia and studied on my own for another year trying to perfect my art.

"Following that year, I packed up and moved back to Los Angeles to open a little business. As luck would have it, I sold a few pieces to a dealer and he, in turn, sold one of the pieces to Dudley Moore. Dudley loved the piece and wanted more information about the artist. The dealer put us together and we became fast friends. In fact, he became my patron."

What do you mean by your patron?

"I had amassed a considerable debt while setting up my business. My father still wasn't convinced art was the right business for me , so he wasn't forth coming with any money to bail me out, and banks, being what they are, wouldn't lend me any money unless I could prove I didn't need it. So, in walked Dudley. He helped to the point that he actually paid off my debts in exchange for a few sculptures over the next couple of years. He was a tremendous help, and he more than likely saved my business."

What was your connection to the Faberge?

"The Forbes family from New York, holders of the largest collection of Faberge Eggs outside of Russia, heard about me and sent me some restoration projects. Christopher Forbes was pleased enough that through his help and influence, other collectors sent me their repair work as well. Not only are they extremely beautiful, they are exquisitely made. I learned so much working on them.

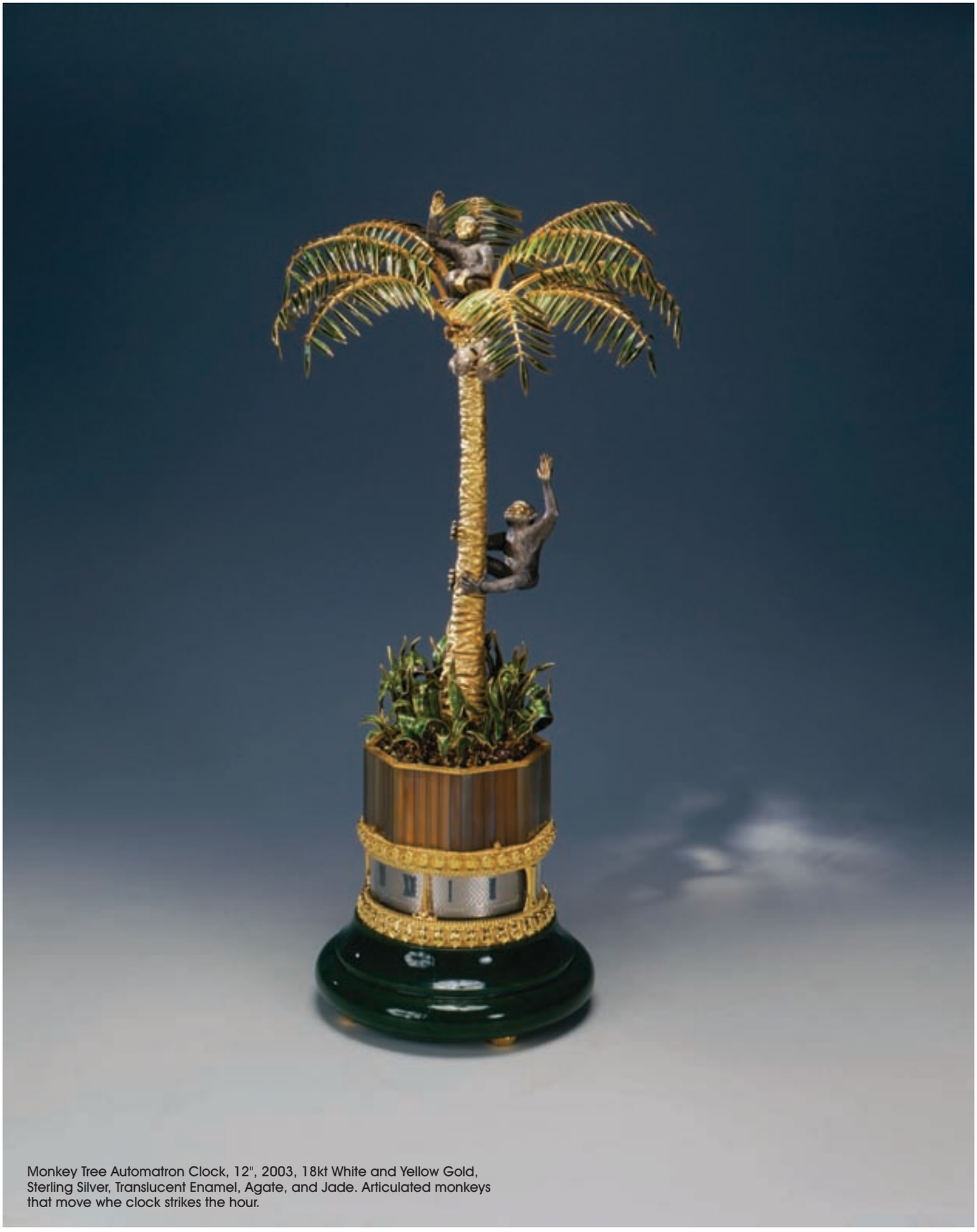
"Every time we repaired an involved art piece, we had to develop the technology to fix them. Some of the enamel that was used no longer exists. Often the machinery to work on them had to be designed and purchased and the clients gave me the money to complete the task. The result was that my shop got more and more powerful tool wise and technology wise that after five years of restoring Faberge the like, we could perform almost any technique you could name."

THE FABERGE EGGS:

Between 1885 and 1917, Peter Carl Faberge and his team designed and built sixty nine eggs. The first was presented to Maria Fyodorovna, wife of Alexander III of Russia as an Easter present in 1885. It looked like a simple white enameled gold egg until it was opened. Inside was a golden yolk with a golden hen inside it. The hen had a crown with a ruby inside.

Maria was so happy that Alexander commissioned Faberge to provide an egg for Easter every year there after. Tsar Nicholas II continued the tradition with his wife. Fifty seven eggs were produced for the imperial family. These were referred to as the "Imperial Collection." The balance were made for the Kelch family of Moscow. Maria Fyodorovna fled Russia in 1918 with The Order of Saint George Egg while the others were either looted or locked up in the vaults of the Kremlin after the Russian Revolution.

continued on page 68



Monkey Tree Automatron Clock, 12", 2003, 18kt White and Yellow Gold, Sterling Silver, Translucent Enamel, Agate, and Jade. Articulated monkeys that move whe clock strikes the hour.

ZADORA

continued from page 66

Following the Revolution, the House of Faberge was nationalized by the Bolsheviks and the Faberge family fled to Switzerland. In need of foreign capital, Joseph Stalin sold many of the eggs, most of which were purchased by Armand Hammer of Occidental Petroleum, a personal friend of Lenin.

After the Kremlin, the largest collection, totaling fifteen eggs, eleven of which were part of the imperial collection, was held by Malcolm Forbes. In 2004, the Forbes heirs sold the collection through Sotheby's. The entire collection was purchased by Victor Vekselberg for well over one hundred million dollars. The collection was returned to Russia. Of the original sixty nine eggs, only sixty one have survived. Counting the Vekselberg collection, Russia has thirty. There are small collections in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the New Orleans Museum of Art. Four eggs are believed to be in private collections and eight are missing. Of these, two eggs, Royal Danish of 1905 and The Alexander III commemorative of 1909, are the only ones to even have photographs.

When did you decide to move from Los Angeles to New York?

"During the time we were working on the Faberge Eggs we took on other projects and most of that work was coming from the East. My sculpting was getting stronger and stronger and I was challenged by my clients to do bigger and bigger pieces. It became apparent that we had a solid market in the east and it was necessary to move closer to it."

On the new pieces, were you building them along the same lines as the Faberge Eggs?

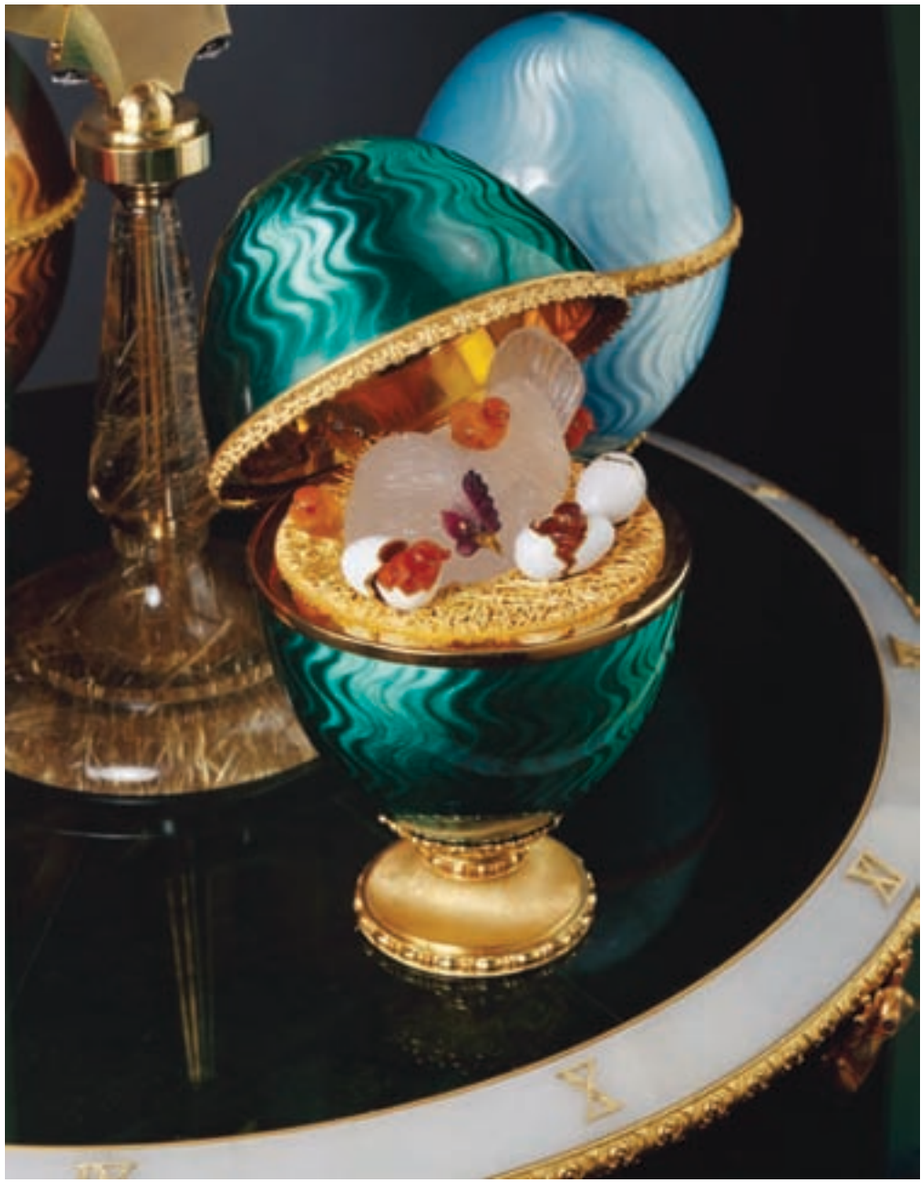
"No, our clients kept asking us to build automatons and clocks well beyond the scope of Faberge. It seemed like our clients were challenging us, after each piece, to go farther then we did on the last one.

"I promised myself and my clients that I will never redo a design. If you own a Zadora watch, it is a one of a kind masterpiece. So, to continually reach beyond the last design, when we thought the last one was the ultimate, really stretched our creative limits."

Let's shift gears again one more time. What inspired you to do the skull exhibit in London?

"Ah, now that was kind of fun. Actually it was the inspiration of Tim Jefferies, a renowned gallery owner and international Bon Vivant. I knew who Tim was, but I had never met him until one day we literally met on the street. A cup of coffee lead to a discussion about how we might work together and the next thing we were seriously trying to figure out how to make it work.

"During a lunch meeting he commented that my work was too pure, and he wanted to know if I had a dark side. 'Not really,' I said. To which he replied, 'didn't you do a skull once?' Of course, I had done a skull for a client in Mexico. Our conversation ended with the decision to produce twenty five skulls from a variety of material and build a show around them. Each skull was cut from a solid stone such as jade, agate, crystal and so on. It took two years to produce the skulls. Some were heavy and masculine while others were obviously light and female. Prices were moderate, between eighty thousand and two hundred thousand for most of the pieces, but three of them were a little pricey, in the half a million dollar range. They were on display for two weeks and nineteen skulls sold in the course of the show. Besides selling several skulls, the show was also beneficial because it introduced me to a much younger group with whom I'm not normally associated."



Four Seasons Clock Detail, 5", 1997, 18kt White and Yellow Gold, Transparent Green Guilloche Enamel, Chirasol, Citrine Crystal, White Opaque Enamel. A mother hen tends to her chicks as they hatch.

I realize that these prices are well below your normal commission rate, so how much time did you personally spend working on the skulls?

"Not counting the original design for each skull and the choosing of the material, which, of course I did, about one week per skull. So twenty five weeks. After choosing the material and drawing the design, I did the first cut. Once the rough cutting was done, I did the finish cuts and completed each one. They were exceptionally well displayed at the show, the lighting was perfect and they showed beautifully."

Do you still do many shows or any speculative work?

"We do very little speculative work at all. We have just our commission clients. The client usually will ask to see a concept drawing for an intended project. Monica, my wife and partner, will do a painting of the piece to show the client what the finished product will look like. Now, we can also do a computer rendering so that the customer can see a three dimensional and if there are to be any moving parts, it can also be seen on the computer. The client feels quite confident about what he will be getting about a year before delivery.

"I do have two requirements when working on a commission piece. First, I let the client know that I will need a significant bit of time from him. A few hours spent together a few times gets me on board with what he is thinking and exactly what he wants me to do. Secondly, I want him to know that we are working in gem stones and it's very expensive as well."

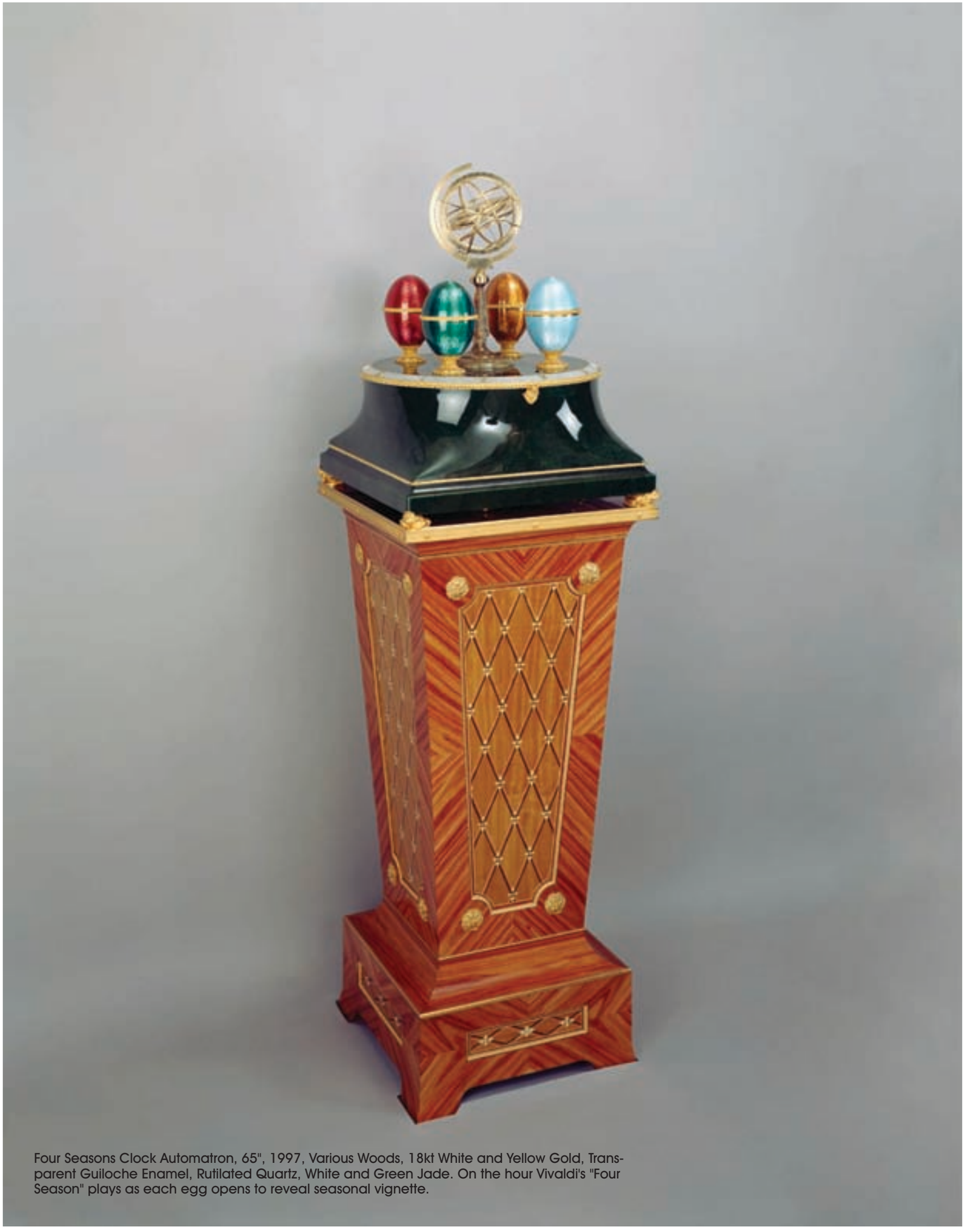
What about shows?

"Tim Jefferies continues to want me to do a show with him every couple of years. We will probably make that happen because, as I said, it was fun and we got to meet an entirely different audience. Other wise, I truly like the commission process and our clients seem to like it as well."

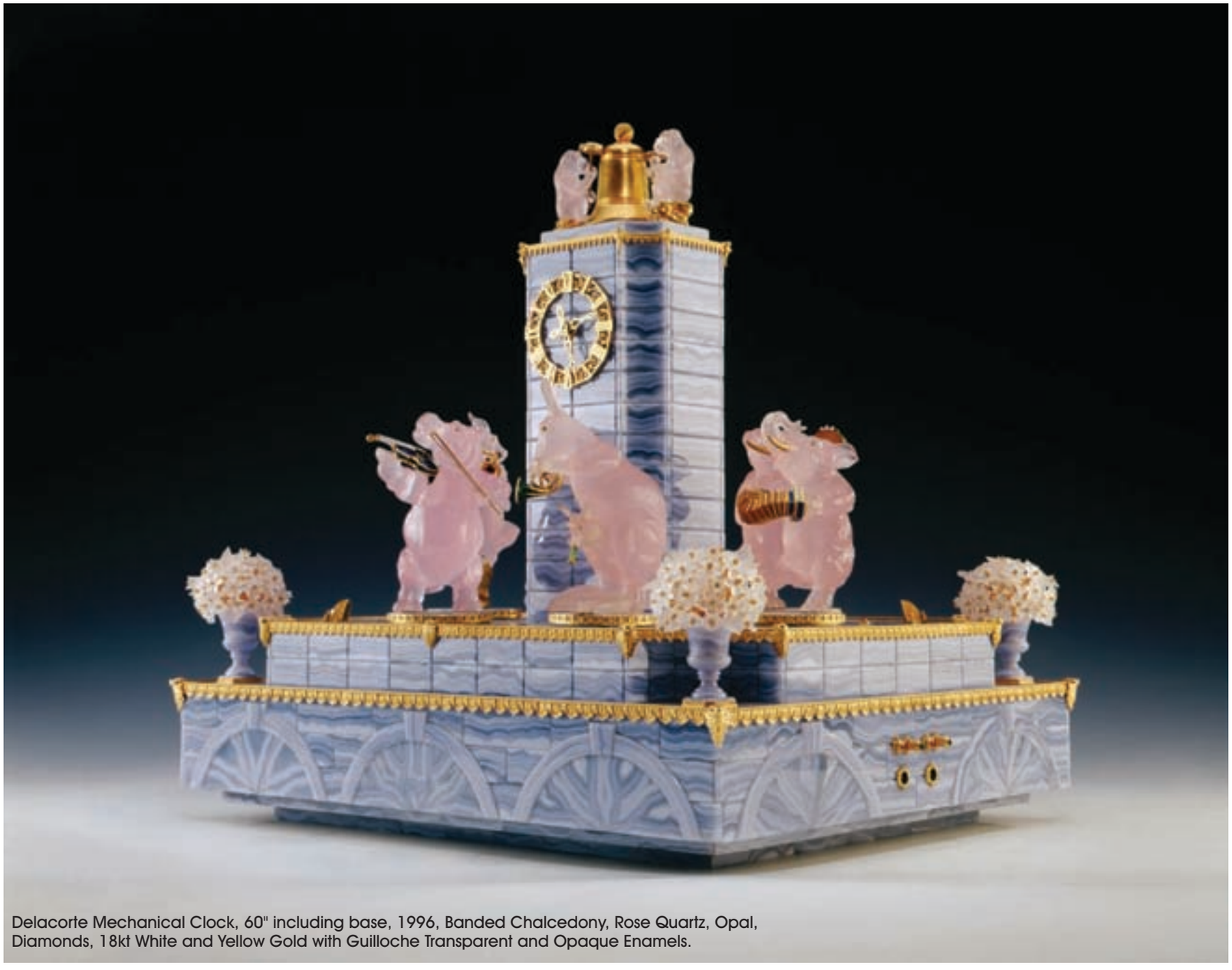
Where do you see your career taking you now?

"I see me pushing the limit every day to make the most complicated automatons and clocks possible. I don't know

continued on page 70



Four Seasons Clock Automatron, 65", 1997, Various Woods, 18kt White and Yellow Gold, Transparent Guiloche Enamel, Rutilated Quartz, White and Green Jade. On the hour Vivaldi's "Four Season" plays as each egg opens to reveal seasonal vignette.



Delacorte Mechanical Clock, 60" including base, 1996, Banded Chalcedony, Rose Quartz, Opal, Diamonds, 18kt White and Yellow Gold with Guilloche Transparent and Opaque Enamels.

ZADORA

continued from page 68

where the end is, but we want to keep pushing the envelop until we find it. Currently, I am working on a jaw dropping piece for a Middle East client with the most rare and fantastic materials in the world. It's beyond anything that has been made to date. Things levitate, they fly around on the hour and look alive. Something like that pushes the limits and has never been done before.

"I don't mean to sound flippant, because I have been inspired by so many creative and talented people, but some of these pieces have not only never been done before, but no one has ever even attempted them before. That to me is really fun. The client has bragging rights to a one of a kind piece and I have the luxury, luck, and skill to make it for him."

Andreas, when an architect designs a world class building, any one who travels down the street can view his work. Who beside you and your client actually gets to see what you did?

"That is a very good question. If there was any element of longing in my career, and I don't want to dwell on the longing part, because it isn't really a longing. I actually don't even know how to explain the feeling; it would be that no one else gets to see my creations. In some cases we can take pictures, but on many, we can't. These are private treasures solely for the pleasure of our clients. That's the way it is with commission work. I know that entering into negotiations for a project, but I would like to have more people know what it is I do.

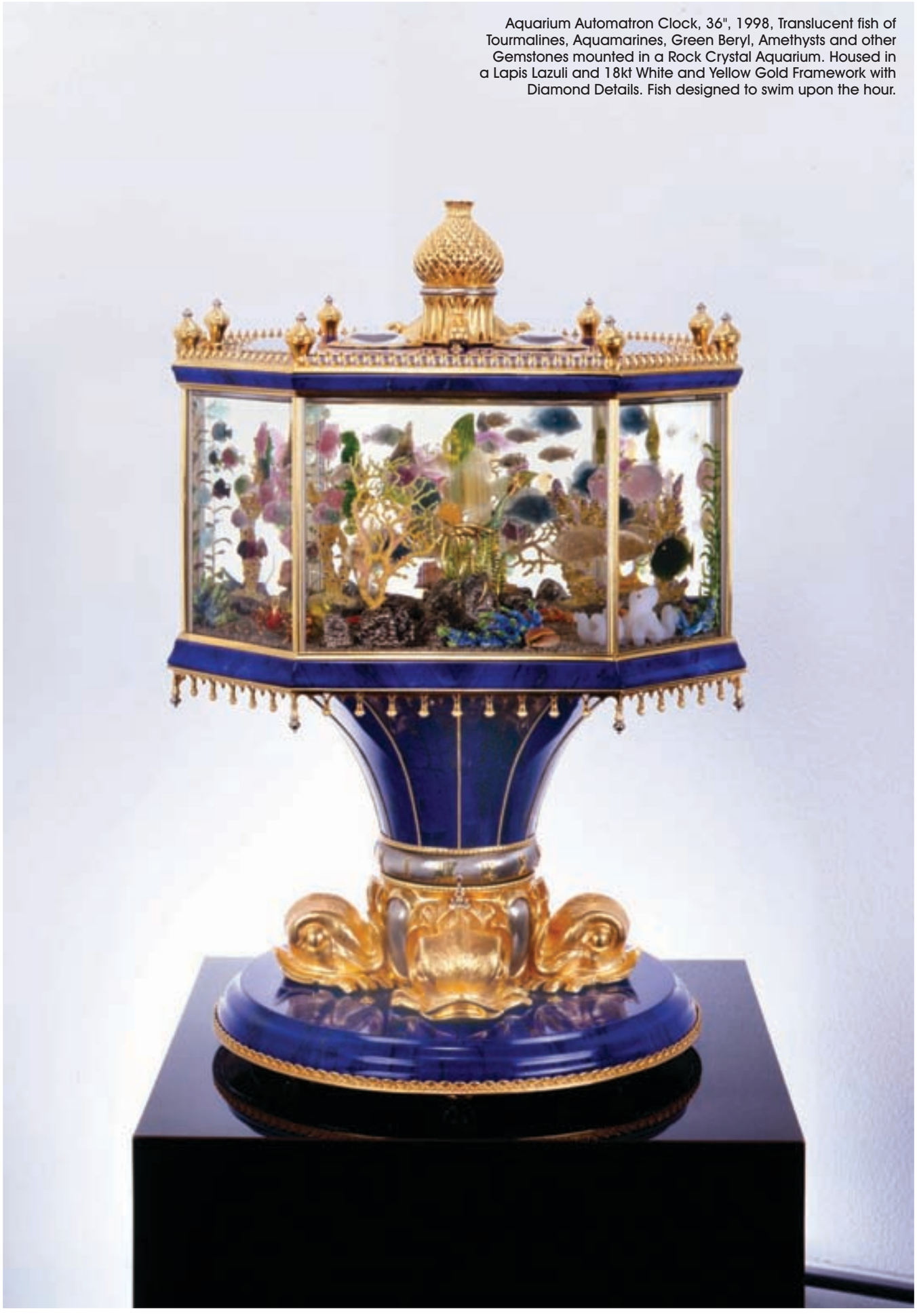
"The ones we can film and photograph I'm going to put together in a book fairly soon. There is a book in the planning stage to be published in the near future. It should be about four hundred pages long, and will be even more comprehensive than the last one written by Janet Zapata about seven or eight years ago. It was titled The art of Zadora, America's Faberge.

"I'm hoping that in ten years or so, if I continue to have the same great relationship with my clients that I have today, and I certainly expect to, that we can put together a retrospective. A couple of museums have already said they would enjoy hosting it. We would hope to put a little museum tour together that would allow a wider audience to see our work, and we are hoping to find a major bank interested in doing the sponsoring."

You spoke about a "jaw dropping" piece you are doing for a Middle Eastern client, Can you elaborate on what that might be?

"And example could be a project similar to The Dragon Fly Tree Stump Clock. Imagine that you are walking through a forest and you come across this fallen tree. The tree has begun to rot a little and water has pooled in the top of the trunk where the main portion of the tree has fallen away. In the pool, some frogs have decided to make their home. The frogs act as if they are alive; they swim around and alternately push

continued on page 72



Aquarium Automatron Clock, 36", 1998, Translucent fish of Tourmalines, Aquamarines, Green Beryl, Amethysts and other Gemstones mounted in a Rock Crystal Aquarium. Housed in a Lapis Lazuli and 18kt White and Yellow Gold Framework with Diamond Details. Fish designed to swim upon the hour.

ZADORA

continued from page 70

each other off various lily pads. Hovering over everything is a dragon fly. If you try to reach for it, it darts away."

How does that happen?

"There are fifty different magnetic force zones and if you interfere with any one of them, it forces the others to work against each other and causes the dragon fly to move away. She is very elusive, but she can be caught. If you finally catch her, you see that she is really a broach. When you release her again she assumes her normal position over her lily pond."

Wow! That sounds like an engineering overload. Who does your technical and mechanical work for you?

"I have the idea and I do the first schematic. Then I have four amazing fellows (engineering types), the foremost being Gennady Osmerkin. He is my right hand man and is technically way beyond me and can take the ideas and drawings to another level.

"Then we have some computer engineers, a new luxury we have added in the last ten to twelve years, because these are new technologies and the computer engineers help us to cut through the old process of trial and error. They do all the testing of the ideas on the computers which helps save both time and money. This allows us to create much grander products in much shorter time."

Can you explain the planning process?

"The first design is always Monica and I talking about how the piece should look and work. I tell her what I want to make and she puts it to paper. Next is one of the most difficult; it involves finding the right material. We often use several different stones and metals for any one project and we have to know exactly how they will interact with each other to give the finished piece the perfect appearance. The critical point here is knowing the characteristics of each stone to be used so we can determine things like hardness, coloration and so on.

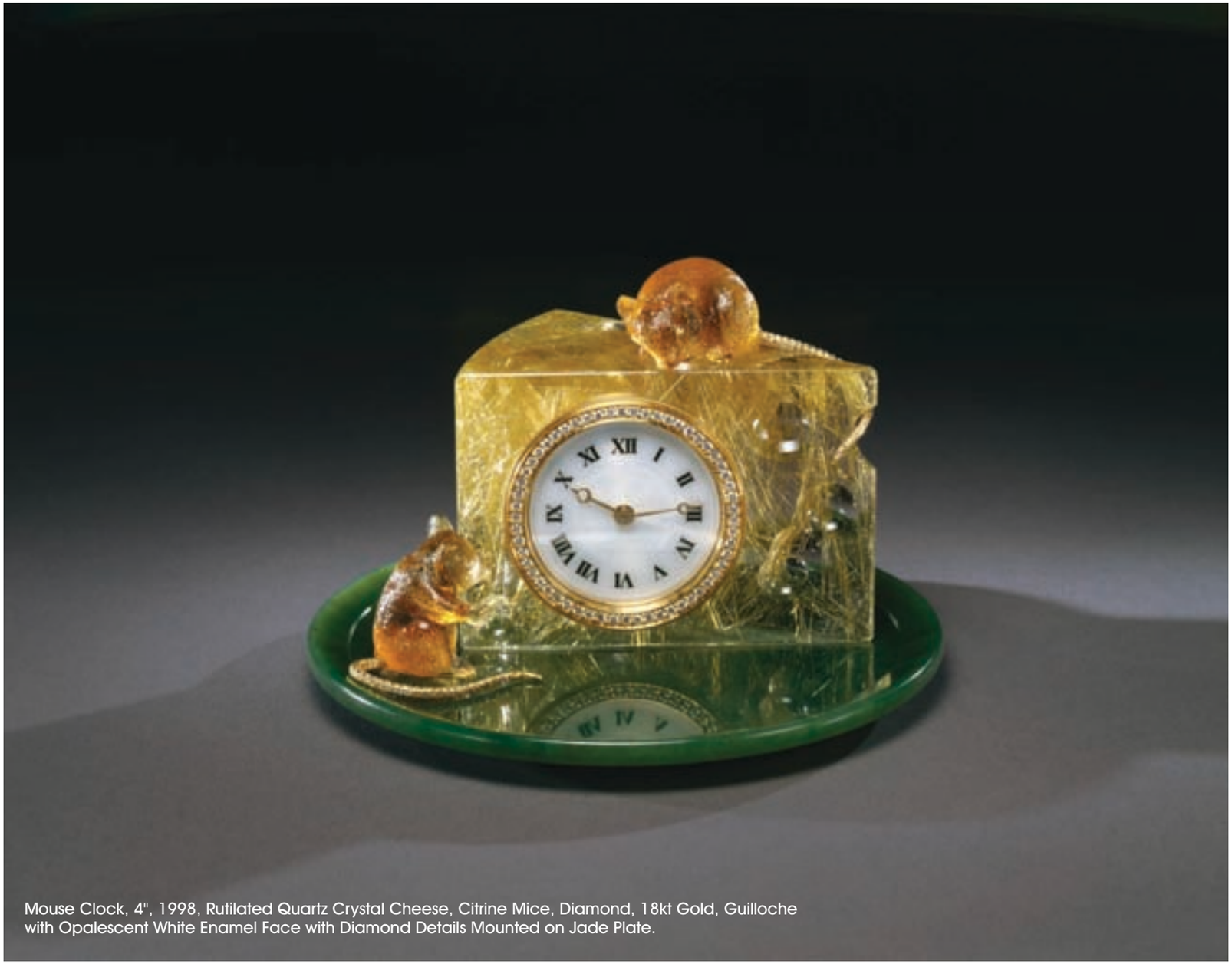
"Using either a grease pencil or a felt tip pen, I draw a rough image on the surface of the stone to show the desired shape. Then I do the first schematic and linkages. I understand enough to know what type of worm gears or other gears will be required. Gennady then takes it to the next level and finally, for the manufacturing part, we take it to our shop in Switzerland.

"They are so precise, and their tolerances are within microns. Consider that we are dealing with something that can have as many as three thousand moving parts. It is therefore critical that every part mesh perfectly. It must work every time perfectly if we are going to charge that much money for it."

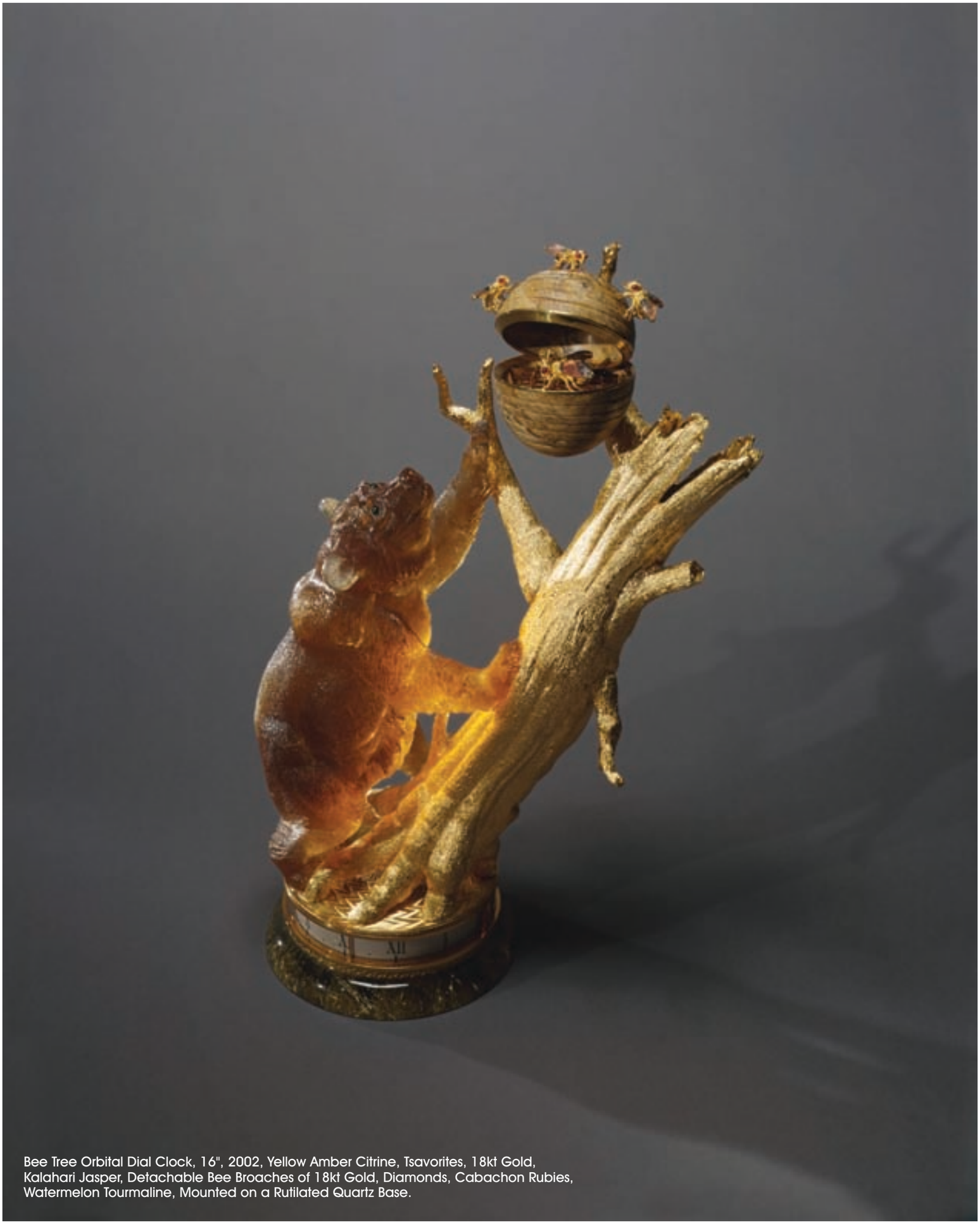
Do you use mini computers or software programs within the piece itself?

"No, I try to avoid computers because they actually date the project. By that I mean a software program may only work for ten or twenty years and then be out dated and obsolete. If you build it with brass wheels in the old method, and do it perfect-

continued on page 74



Mouse Clock, 4", 1998, Rutilated Quartz Crystal Cheese, Citrine Mice, Diamond, 18kt Gold, Guilloche with Opalescent White Enamel Face with Diamond Details Mounted on Jade Plate.



Bee Tree Orbital Dial Clock, 16", 2002, Yellow Amber Citrine, Tsavorites, 18kt Gold, Kalahari Jasper, Detachable Bee Broaches of 18kt Gold, Diamonds, Cabachon Rubies, Watermelon Tourmaline, Mounted on a Rutilated Quartz Base.

continued from page 72

ly, in three hundred years, as I learned from the restorations, it will still be working. If it ever is in need of repair, a technician with some understanding of engineering and some basic watch working tools can rebuild or replace any moving part and the piece will operate good as new. I expect that these pieces should have a life span that is virtually limitless."

That sounds like the ultimate Swiss watch.

"It is. Think about it, twenty years ago when the quartz movements first appeared, everyone viewed it as the death knell for watch making. It didn't happen, in fact, if anything, they became even more in demand. Sure, a quartz movement keeps accurate time for a few years, and then you throw it away and buy another one. A quality watch will last several life times. Look at how many watch repairers work on antique watches that need only minor tweaking to continue running perfectly. They are the ultimate family heirlooms.

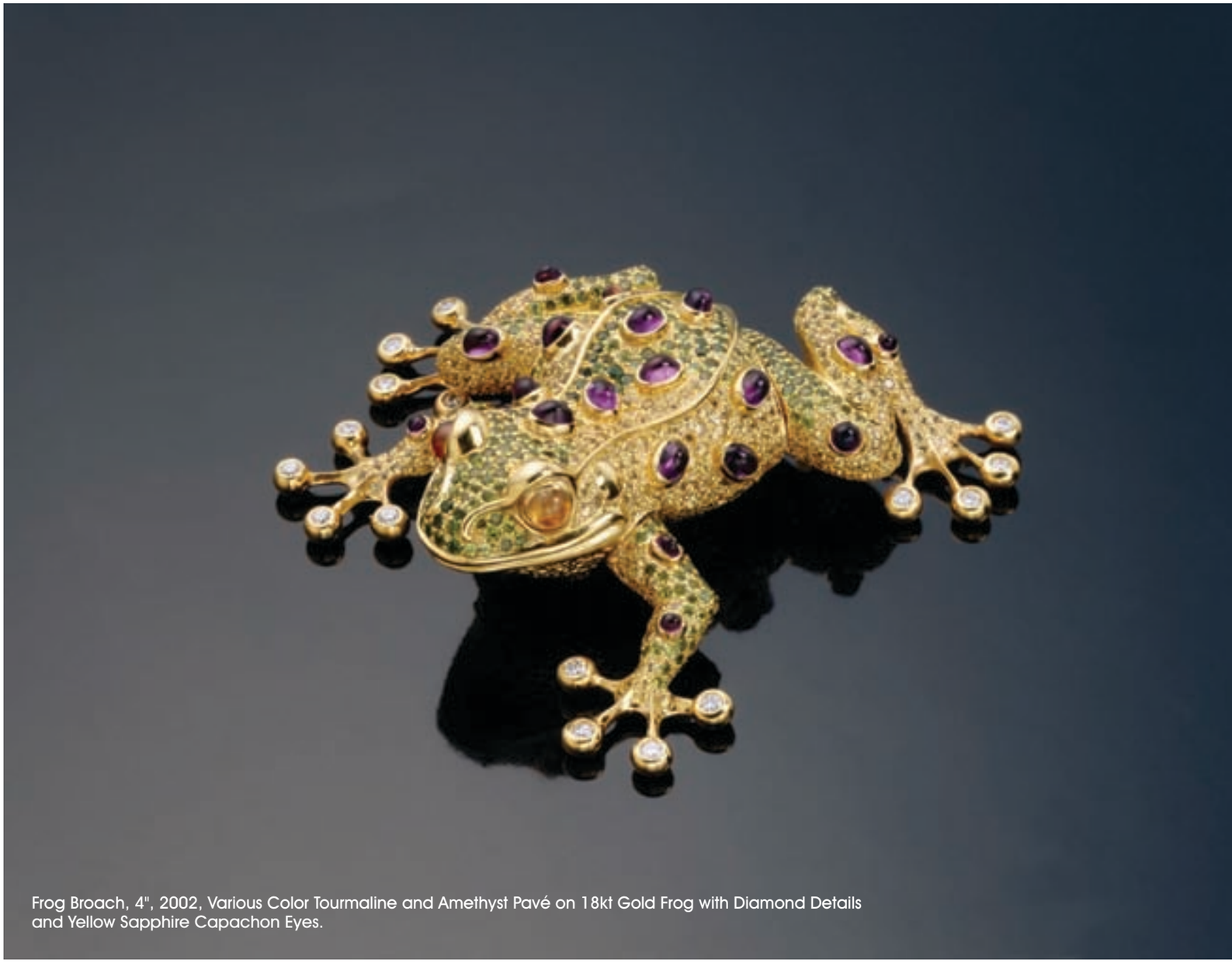
"While I was doing the restoration projects, I remember the tremendous feeling of awe I had as I took the art objects apart. The pieces were over one hundred years old, and they could be returned to perfect condition. I could only imagine what it must have been like to have worked in Faberge's shop in 1885. Imagine working with the tools they had at their disposal and building the first egg."

You have come a long way from the fourteen year old boy with a crippled right hand, haven't you?

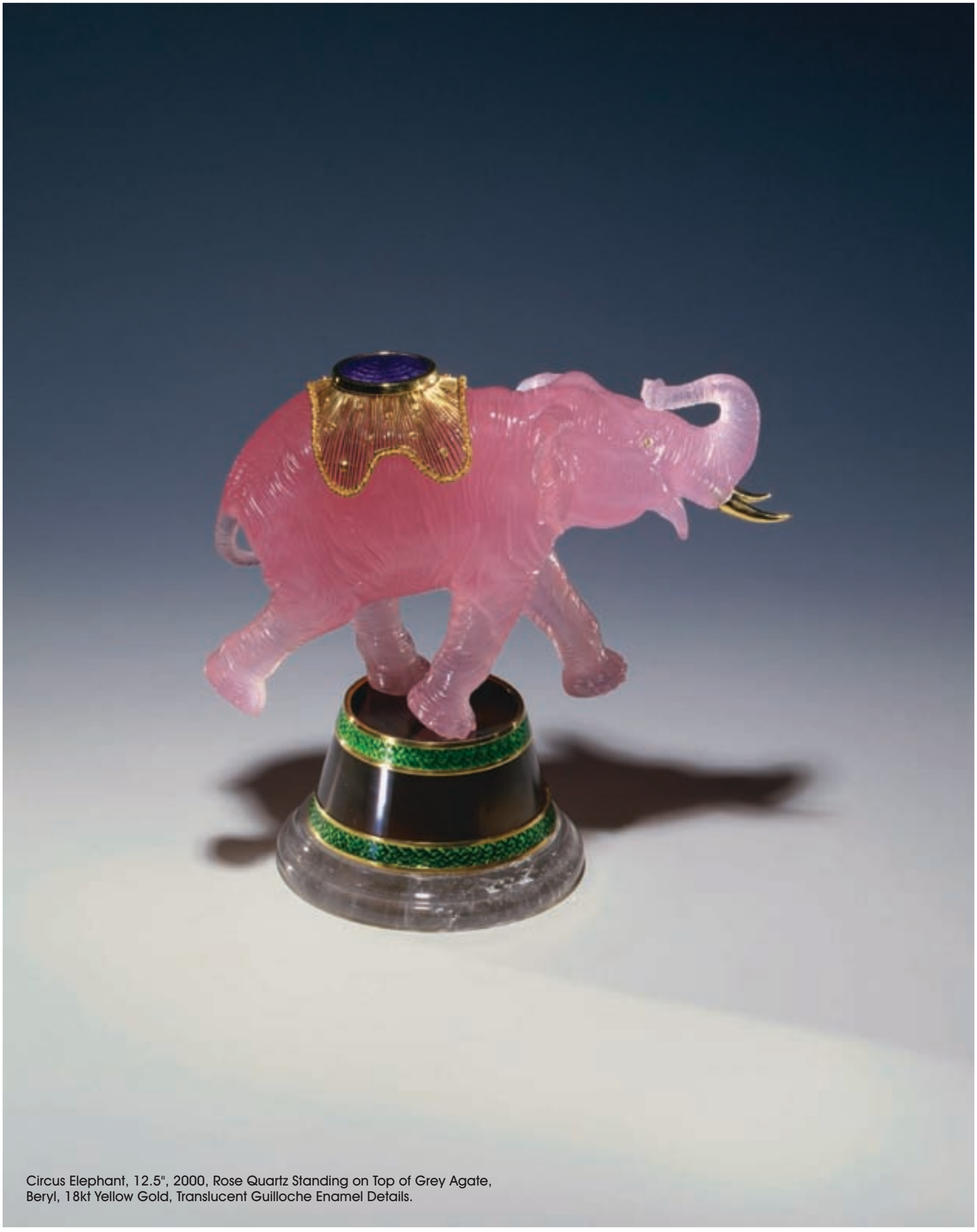
"Not really so far as you might think. The confidence I have to work on any project I might imagine comes from the confidence I developed all those years ago while working with my Haida teachers. Sure, my tools, techniques, and skills are far more involved, but it all began with an engraving tool on silver among the Haida Indians on The Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia."

To complete even the simplest project liking cutting an animal from a piece of crystal can take Andreas anywhere from several hours to several weeks depending on the characteristics of the material and the amount of detail desired. His tools are saws and grinders coated with diamond dust so that he can carve through the hardest material. Once the stones are carved and the metals formed, they need to be affixed to the mechanical gears that bring the piece to life.

Viewing his work creates a sense of awe knowing that you are witnessing the art of a master. His simple animal sculptures are so life like that you actually expect them to either run off or to fly away. But his automatons and clocks simply blow you away with their intricacy of design as well as their flawless execution. As he said, each piece seems to push his creativity to another level so he can come up with the next. Perhaps his critics are correct, what he does isn't art, it is what ever exists at the next level above art. Andreas von Zadora-Gerlof is a master and he may well be better at what he does than anyone else in the world.



Frog Broach, 4", 2002, Various Color Tourmaline and Amethyst Pavé on 18kt Gold Frog with Diamond Details and Yellow Sapphire Capachon Eyes.



Circus Elephant, 12.5", 2000, Rose Quartz Standing on Top of Grey Agate, Beryl, 18kt Yellow Gold, Translucent Guilloche Enamel Details.