

Learning Series: A Potpourri of Rock Collecting Information



How to tell the difference between Jasper and an Agate? The simple answer is if you put light behind the material and you can see through it, then it is an Agate if you can't then your holding Jasper. The more complex answer is that it is not always that straightforward. The simple science behind this question is that both Agates and Jaspers are comprised of Quartz- which is one of the most common minerals on the planet. Quartz is comprised of two major types- macrocrystalline (large crystal) and cryptocrystalline (small crystal).

Now here is where it can get confusing, one major variety of cryptocrystalline quartz is Chalcedony. Chalcedony includes Carnelian, Chrysoprase, Agate, Bloodstone, Jasper and others. When Chalcedony is concentrically banded it is called an Agate. Occasionally the banding is larger than the crystal and the banding is not visible- like with most Carnelian.

Another sub-variety of Chalcedony is opaque quartz called Jasper. Jasper can be banded or striated, depending on how it formed, and are most commonly red, yellow, green, brown or a mixture of these colors.

Examples of Macrocrystalline Quartz are clear quartz, Smokey Quartz, Amethyst, Citrine which form in a singular point or clusters. But these are neither an Agates nor a Jasper, so were moving on from these.

The main reason it is difficult to differentiate an Agate from Jasper is that they originate from the same minerals. Another major reason is due to the mislabeling of materials being cut in foreign countries as either an Agate or Jasper without considering the science in the naming process. We recognize this problem quite often, but for reasons of consistency in the marketplace we use the incorrect label.



I hope this sheds a little light on the differences between Jasper and Agate and provides you with a quick test to tell the difference for yourself, even if it is labeled otherwise.

SIDE NOTE: Examples of Macrocrystalline Quartz are clear quartz, Smokey Quartz, Amethyst, Citrine which form in a singular point or clusters. These types of quartz tend to be translucent and neither Jaspers nor Agates fall under this category of Quartz.

Buying a Strand of Gemstones

“What to look for and look out for”

We all have our own reasons why we choose stone in our designs- but I feel we all share one commonality. We like working in a natural product- something that formed naturally over time and each bead is unique to itself- a little piece of art. The issue with natural materials is that there is very little control over how it looks, availability or inherent flaws. Here are a few tips when buying a strand of gemstones to help minimize unusable beads...



Top to bottom. Often when we pick up a hank of beads, we hold it in the center letting 50% of the strand drape. The top and bottom few inches is typically where the bad beads are strung. Lay a strand down and look over the entire length. A few bad beads are acceptable. Hopefully the good far outnumber the bad.

Wear n tear. Check between the beads for wear and chipping at the holes. Beads will rub together over time and can damage the hole. A little dust from the beads is acceptable and will wipe off.

It's all in the drill. How a bead is drilled is very important to how it will work in a design. This is never more obvious than a poorly drilled rondelle. This is one of the most difficult shapes to drill.

To check a drill pull the strand tight from both ends and see how the beads lay. Occasionally the drills are good, but the strand is strung to tightly which causes the beads to look catawampus (yes, it is a scientific term, take my word for it).

These are few techniques you can use when evaluating a strand of stone. Keep in mind that natural flaws, inclusions and that strange black spot that looks like the state of Florida is what makes stone natural and interesting to work with.

