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STONE OF HEAVEN

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STONE OF HEAVEN

Green Mountain Jade is not only producing large quantities of raw jade but is also changing the way the world views jade

by MASON BUETTNER // photos courtesy Green Mountain Jade

With the jade mining season just starting with spring's arrival in British Columbia, Green Mountain Jade Inc. (GMJ) plans on increasing its production by up to 50 per cent to keep up with increasing demand.

Last season GMJ produced 400 tonnes of nephrite jade, 90 per cent of which was exported to China, to whom it is known as the stone of heaven. Nephrite jade is the official native stone of China, and British Columbia is the largest producer and exporter of nephrite jade in the world, which leaves GMJ in a good position for the foreseeable future.

"Canada has the smallest scale of mining, but still it offers half of the world's supply . . . Canada has around 70 per cent of the world's nephrite deposits right here in B.C.," said GMJ president Shao Long Li.

The price of jade steadily increases every season, depending on the grade. Jade mining brings in approximately \$US20 to 30



This skillfully carved jade screen features a jade scene set in an exquisite wood frame.

million into the B.C. economy every year just from the raw material alone, which is only three to five per cent of the whole market.

GMJ hasn't been in the mining industry long, however, only beginning operations in 2009 under current president Li, who is also the visionary behind GMJ's first retail

location opening later this year in Richmond, B.C.

A lot of GMJ's success has to do with its partnership with the Jade West Group, which has been producing and exporting nephrite jade for over 40 years with Kirk Makepeace at the helm since the beginning. Makepeace started his jade mining career in 1976 and is currently the COO of GMJ as the two companies now operate as one.

In the first year of operations, GMJ only acquired one mine from the Jade West Group and has since expanded operations to include four active mines over its short existence. "The target of the first year wasn't production, it was an introduction to this whole business and the whole season I was up there learning the process. It was a very interesting year," said Li. "It was a very important year and we still managed to produce about 200 tonnes."

Typically when the mining season is over

QUICK FACTS ABOUT JADE:

- The only pure forms of jade are **NEPHRITE AND JADEITE**
- Jadeite is an aluminum-rich pyroxene
- Nephrite is a magnesium-rich amphibole
- Nephrite is the official native stone of China
- Nephrite is the toughest natural stone in the world
- Most people recognize jade as being green in colour, but it can also be white, lavender, yellow, blue, black, red, orange and grey
- British Columbia is the largest producer and exporter of nephrite in the world



in the fall, the jade is hauled from the mines to the Lower Mainland for auction, with most of it selling over a weekend. This doesn't leave a lot of jade available for purchase during the rest of the

year, which is why GMJ decided to open a retail location.

"Having product available every month and week is very important to the market. We have inquiries all the time, but over half of the time we have to say, 'Sorry, but you have to wait another couple months or close to a year until the next season,' which isn't good for the buyers," said Li.

GMJ will be working with some of the smaller mining companies as well as other clients to supply product as well as carvings and jewelry for their new retail location. They will also be operating a jade trading centre for people who already have jade in their homes to buy and sell with other enthusiasts. "We won't just have Canadian jade, but we'll also have Siberian

Russian jade, Chinese jade and Burmese jade," said Li. "We expect to open the retail store in July and the whole trading centre platform probably before the mining season ends in October." The retail store will be located on River Road in Richmond and

will be the first of its kind in the Lower Mainland.

Producing the jade is obviously first and foremost, but GMJ is also focused on continually building the market for jade. "We want to build a connection and get the story out . . .

A lot of people don't even know Canada produces as much jade as we do," said Li. "There is really a disconnect between the supply here and the market in China. Before, all of the good Canadian jade was called Chinese or Russian jade, but we produce some of the nicest jade in the world, so we intend to change that."

www.greenmountainjade.com



A piece of jade is similar to a regular piece of rock until it is cut open with diamond-tipped tools



A GEM OF A TOWN

It's jade's time to shine, thanks to the reality TV show *Jade Fever*

by MASON BUETTNER // photos by MICHAEL HALL

"We're just a bunch of hillbillies mining for jade, crazy to begin with. We're not doing this for TV—this is the way we live our lives and it's funny to some people," said Claudia Bunce, star of Discovery Channel's *Jade Fever*.

The season 2 finale of *Jade Fever* aired May 3 and filming for season 3 is set to begin later this month. It's safe to say *Jade Fever* has captured the attention of Canada and the world beyond with its first-hand account of life as a jade miner in northern British Columbia. At the heart of the show is the larger-than-life personality of Claudia Bunce who, along with her husband, Robin, owns and operates the Cassiar Mountain Jade Store and Dease Lake Jade Mining. She is also the unofficial mayor and mother of Jade City, a small tourist stop of a town started by Claudia's father in the 1980s, more than 10 years after he began mining in the area.

Claudia's family has been involved in the jade mining industry for over four decades and her passion for the stone began at a young age. "My dad started designing some of the jade pieces with the crew he was

working with . . . and I remember looking at the jade and the wood and just loving them. That was my first remembrance of loving the wood, rock, design and it just went crazy from there," said Claudia. She has been designing her own pieces for 15 years and now one of her sons is becoming a carver.

Despite the family's rich history with jade mining, it wasn't an easy decision for the Bunce family to do the show, but it was too good of an opportunity to pass up. "We never could've planned this," said Claudia. "We definitely never wanted to be famous. Rich, yes, but not famous. Now we're famous and not rich, go figure!"

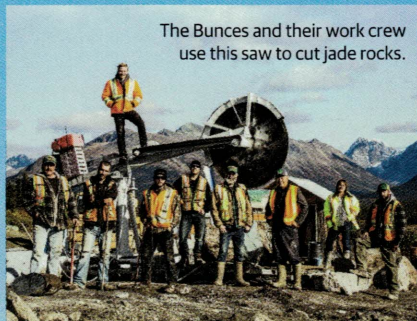
Jade City itself is located near the Yukon

border on Highway 37 north of Dease Lake and is home to approximately 35 people year-round, with as many as 50 during the mining season. The city has seen a big increase in tourists since the first season of the show aired. "We had people in from the Czech Republic yesterday, who came all of the way through Cassiar highway because they watch the show and wanted to say they've been to Jade City," said Claudia. As the tourism side of the business grows in popularity, so do the mining operations. "I mine under Dynasty, I mine under Dease Lake Jade and I just formed another mining company called Jade Fever," said Claudia.

Cassiar Mountain Jade, Dease Lake Jade Mining and now Jade Fever are family businesses through and through. Robin is the mining operations manager and their sons each has his own role within the company as well. One is an equipment operator, another is studying to be a geologist and the third designs and carves jade pieces while helping manage the store. "We're really a family company—that's family and friends," said Claudia.

Since starring in a hit TV show and operating her own business aren't enough, Claudia has a few more projects on the go. "Right now I'm writing a book and we've been asked to do a couple of other TV projects, so we're really excited," said Claudia. "We're showcasing an industry that we're proud of and we are loving what we're doing. It's time for the world to know what we have to offer here. It's just a small little bit of Canada and a small little bit of British Columbia, but it's time."

The Bunces and their work crew use this saw to cut jade rocks.



The population of Jade City, B.C., swells to as many as 50 during the mining season.

