FRUIT OF HIS LABOR

Ken Haladjian designs a pendant good enough to eat

BY GERRY DAVIES

It might have been a simple enough project: A customer commissioned Ken Haladjian of Exclusive Jewelry Designs in Los Angeles to make a ruby-set pendant in the form of a strawberry. But putting his CAD skills to work, Haladjian crafted a jeweled fruit far more elaborate than his customer could have imagined. The finished product comprises three separate parts cast in 18k yellow gold—the 3-D front of the strawberry, the leafy stem, and a flat back. The entire piece features 162 diamond-cut rubies (totaling 15.32 carats), 32 diamond-cut green tsavorites (totaling 1.28 carats), and 40 brilliant-cut diamonds (0.005 carat each).

The eye-catching pendant took the grand prize as Best in Show in the 2007 Gemvision Design Symposium, an international CAD design competition. In the winning rendering, which won the Best Render award, Haladjian created a sumptuous chocolate background that he says "portrayed an image of a realistic strawberry being dipped in melted chocolate."

Haladjian acknowledges that the advent of CAD/CAM technology has allowed him to be more creative in making jewelry. CAD has become "one of my most important tools," he says. "We can see the finished product and make the necessary changes before it is actually made. It speeds up the entire process significantly."

With CAD's ability to carefully plot the layout for the exact size and number of gemstones in this design, Haladjian estimates that the technology saved him 10 times the amount of time it would have taken to create the piece using traditional wax carving techniques.

Haladjian began the project by creating a few design options for his customer to choose from. One area that required multiple changes before settling on a decision was the back of the strawberry. The customer didn't want to simply cut the strawberry in half to make the back flat, so Haladjian presented a few versions of the back. The final design shows about three-quarters of a strawberry and has a flat back that is honeycombed. The holes in the back not only serve aesthetic purposes, but also enable light to pass through to enhance the reflectivity of the gemstones.

When the customer requested adding diamonds to the design, Haladjian had a dilemma. How could he add them without diluting the rich red of the rubies, which was crucial to the strawberry representation? He figured out that he could insert tiny diamonds into the prongs that secure the rubies, where "they sparkle but don't take away from the redness of the strawberry," he says.

When all the CAD/CAM work was done, Haladjian cast the components, set the stones, and laser welded the pieces together—and the result is a strawberry more luscious than anything you'll find at the grocery store.

Haladjian went a step beyond with his CAD renderings, producing a sumptuous chocolate background in the final render. In the resulting image, it looks like his strawberry pendant is being dipped in melted chocolate.

CAD allowed Haladjian to easily make design changes, such as the addition of diamonds requested by his customer. They're set in the prongs that secure the rubies, which makes the diamonds sparkle from many angles without diluting the color effect of the rubies.

The pendant is cast in three parts—the 3-D front of the strawberry, the leafy stem, and a flat back. It features 162 diamond-cut rubies (totaling 15.32 carats), 32 diamond-cut green tsavorites (totaling 1.28 carats), and 40 brilliant-cut diamonds (0.005 carat each).

The flat back of the strawberry is honeycombed, not only serving aesthetic purposes but also enabling light to pass through to enhance the reflectivity of the gemstones. ◆