

Crafting Agate Cameos



Craftsmanship with centuries of tradition

Natural agate is needed for crafting cameo stones. The agates today are mined in Brazil, however, in the past they also used to be found in the Idar-Oberstein region. Only selected agates that we chose directly at the Brazilian mines will be considered for crafting cameo stones. These amount to only about 4% to 5% of the agate occurrences



Here at Idar-Oberstein the rough agates are then passed on to our experienced cutters. Taking into account the natural irregularities present in every stone, the stones are then shaped to plates measuring about 6 mm thickness. For this process we use an intricate cutting technique, which allows only 6-10% of the original rough stone to be used.

The resulting rough agate plates are further processed and subjected to traditional treatments in order to bring out different colour combinations. The following variations are possible here: black – white, green – white, red – white, blue – white, and yellow – white. The complete procedure involves 84 different processes and takes 3 – 5 months depending on the hardness of the stone. Dying cameo stones is a craft which is only known to a few families from the Idar-Oberstein region, as the secret recipes have been handed down from generation to generation within the family. The coloured cameo-agate stones are then calibrated and polished by qualified cutters. The next step is sorting each and every stone according to quality and size. Now the layered stone is ready to be carved.



The cameo engraver will sketch each design onto the stone before engraving it, and then the actual carving occurs by means of finest diamond tools, by the artist's hand. This process takes again about 6 to 16 h, depending on the dimensions and design of the finished cameo. It demands years of expertise and artistic talent.

