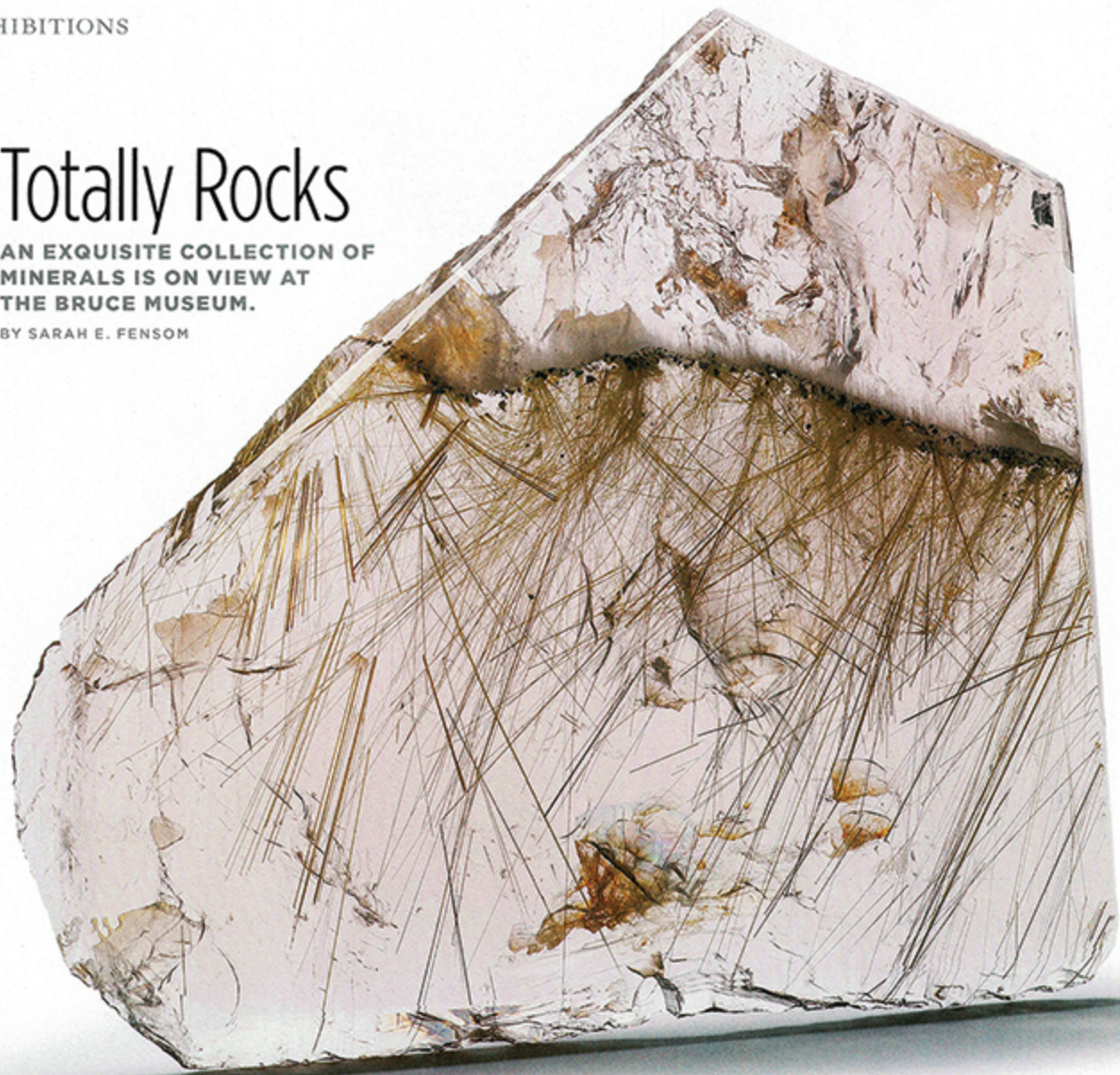


# Totally Rocks

AN EXQUISITE COLLECTION OF MINERALS IS ON VIEW AT THE BRUCE MUSEUM.

BY SARAH E. FENSOM



From top: Quartz with Rutile Inclusions; Fluorite.

COLLECTOR Robert R. Wiener first became enamored of minerals at the age of seven, when his grandmother took him to the Museum of Natural History in New York. "Most kids go crazy for the dinosaur bones, but he was drawn in by the minerals," says Daniel Ksepka, the curator of science at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Conn., and himself a paleontologist ("I work on fossils but I have a deep appreciation of geology," he says). Instead of subsiding, as many childhood fascinations do, Wiener's interest in minerals increased—now chairman of Maxx Properties, a real estate company in Harrison, N.Y., Wiener has grown a dazzling mineral collection of his own. Built over the course of 40 years, his cache features thousands of unique and rare examples from around the world—the stuff of a crystal enthusiast's wildest dreams.

Ksepka, who was first introduced to Wiener





Clockwise from top left: Aquamarine and Cassiterite on Muscovite; Apophyllite on Stilbite; Quartz and Hematite.

and his collection over a year ago, likens the number and caliber of its minerals to those of an institution. "Robert has 1,000 museum-quality minerals in his office, set up in cases like in a museum, and then another 3,000 in his home," says the curator. "There are even pieces of quartz in his driveway!"

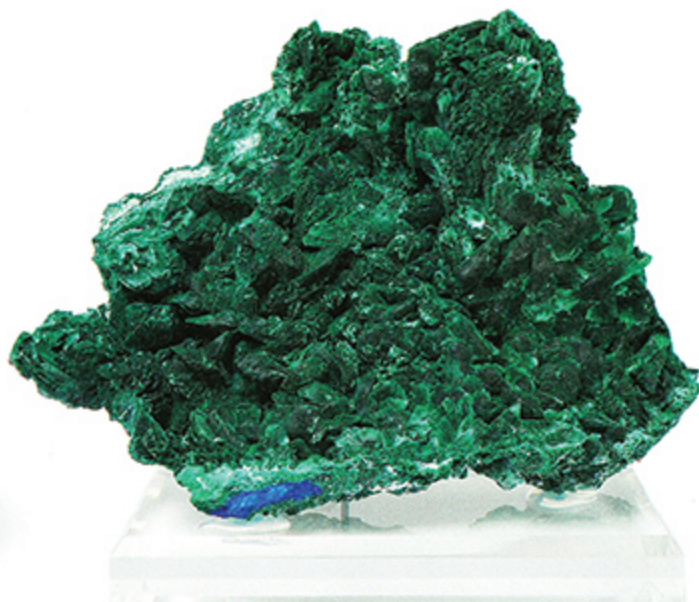
It seems only fitting, then, that Wiener's collection—or at least a portion of it—be featured within the hallowed halls of a museum. Last month, the Bruce Museum, an institution devoted both to art and to natural history, took up the mantle, opening "Treasures of the Earth: Minerals Masterpieces of the Robert Wiener Collection." The show, on view through April 1, features 100 of Wiener's pieces. The selection, Ksepka admits, wasn't easy to make. "It's a very deep collection. When I was going through it, there were minerals whose names I'd never heard of or minerals that had grown in a different way than I'd seen before," says the curator. "For instance, I'd never seen a quartz crystal that's bigger than my car, but

there's one in Robert's collection that is." In the end, variety and quality proved most important. "We want to maximize mineral diversity, so we've included a lot of different colors, forms, and lusters, be they pearly, adamantine, vitreous, or greasy in texture," says Ksepka. "We're putting up the best of the best, but there are definitely a few blockbuster pieces that will blow viewers away."

One of those is the quartz Ksepka described as being bigger than his car. That piece, which weights multiple thousands of pounds, was dragged out of a mine in Argentina by horses. There's also an astonishing piece of vanadinite—Wiener's favorite mineral—a deep red specimen that splinters into prismatic or stubby stop sign-like hexagons. Vanadinite grows most abundantly and beautifully in Morocco, but it can also





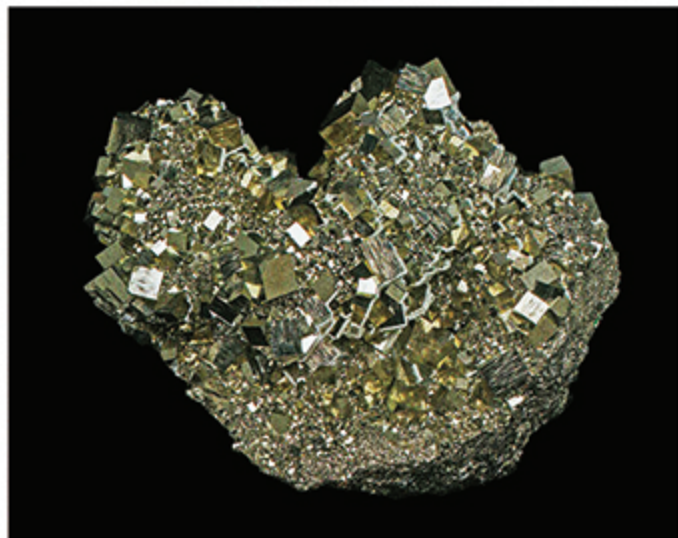


Clockwise from top left: Vanadinite;  
Malachite; Gypsum "Ram's Horn"  
(Selenite); Pyrite.

be found in Arizona. Pyrite, one of Ksepka's favorites, will be fantastically represented in the show, with an assembly of pyrite cubes the curator calls "gigantic." He says, "There must be more than 200 cubes in the blocks we have—some as big as a Rubik's cube." During the California gold rush, pyrite was often mistake for gold, not only for its similar color and shape but also because the two frequently occur in close proximity. Though it's common throughout the world, there are extensive deposits of small crystal clusters of pyrite in Peru, which is where Wiener's exquisite example was found.

Some of the most interesting specimens in the show are examples of multiple miner-

als growing on or into each other. One such piece is a 6- to 8-inch slice of quartz with rutile inclusions. Rutile, which is the most common natural form of titanium dioxide, has a habit of forming these sorts of inclusions in other minerals. Long and slender, rutile inclusions can look like bits of straw trapped inside another mineral. In Wiener's example, the inclusions are extremely fine and elegant, and perfectly visible within the clear piece of quartz. "It looks like a pristine piece of glass with golden threads or Rapunzel-like hairs inside," says Ksepka. Another piece, which Ksepka calls "the pomegranate," features an absolutely stunning sea-foam-green apophyllite crystal growing on







top of a fleshy pink stilbite. "It's the size of a pomelo," says Ksepka, referring to the large citrus fruit. "The apophyllite is sharp, while the stilbite is soft and pulpy—it's a very evocative piece, it almost makes me hungry."

Another wild combination is an aquamarine and cassiterite on muscovite. "The juxtaposition of textures is incredible," says Ksepka. "It's this hexagonal aquamarine crystal growing on muscovite that looks like a bunch of crumpled leaves." Muscovite, which is the most common form of mica, develops crystals in thick flakes and scaly forms and has a pearly luster, while aquamarine, the blue-green variety of beryl, is a transparent to translucent gemstone. As

odd a couple as these two minerals seem, it's not completely uncommon for them to form together. This example, however, also has cassiterite growing within the muscovite toward the base. The best-known tin mineral, cassiterite forms in prismatic or pyramidal crystals, with a greasy or adamantine luster. Here it is a blackish brown, which creates the illusion of a crystalline cave or black hole in the side of the specimen.

The beauty of these pieces cannot be overstated, but Ksepka notes that minerals are an essential part of life on earth down to the food we eat. "They affect everything we do," he says. "And it takes some 200 rare minerals to make an iPhone!"

Clockwise from top left: Calcite Stalactites; Wulfenite; Chalcocopyrite with Quartz; Amethyst with Hematite Inclusions; Globular Lepidolite.





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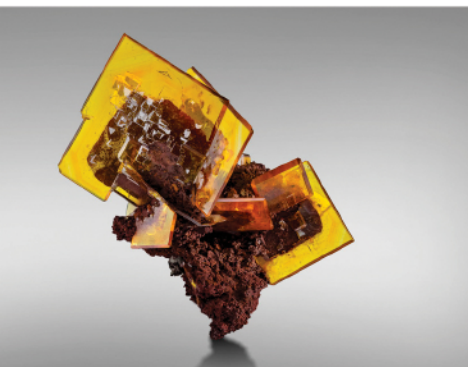
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