

Emerald Lost at Sea for 400 Years Hits Sotheby's Auction



A 6.25-carat emerald that spent nearly four centuries in the depths of the ocean is set to go under the hammer at an upcoming Sotheby's sale in New York.

The octagonal step-cut gem, salvaged from the fabled *Nuestra Señora de Atocha* shipwreck of 1622, will be one of the items the auction house will showcase at its December 7 Magnificent Jewels sale, it said Monday. A specialized team led by treasure hunter Mel Fisher discovered the stone in 1985 off the coast of Florida.

The *Atocha* was commissioned by the Casa de Contratación, a Spanish government agency that attempted to regulate the country's exploration and colonization efforts. The ship departed Spain and set sail for the West Indies in March 1622, picking up noble families and their belongings in Cartagena, Colombia and Portobello, Panama. However, on its way back to Spain in September of that year, during hurricane season, the ship hit a squall in the Florida Keys and sank along the reefs, where it remained for 363 years, Sotheby's explained.

From the wreckage, Fisher and his team retrieved around 180,000 coins and 24 tons of ingots made from Bolivian silver, as well as 125 bars of gold bullion and 70 pounds of rough-cut Colombian emeralds.

As a patron of the *Atocha* discovery, Frank Perdue, CEO of the Perdue chicken empire, was awarded some of the treasure, including the emerald, which he had cut and mounted onto a ring to propose to his future wife, Mitzi Perdue, a writer, activist and philanthropist, in 1988.

“It’s not every day that we offer long-lost, hidden treasures discovered from the depths of the sea, concealed by tide and time for centuries,” said Alexander Eblen, senior specialist of Sotheby’s New York jewelry department.

The ring carries an estimate of \$50,000 to \$70,000, and all proceeds from the sale will be donated to support the humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, Sotheby’s noted.

Image: The emerald ring. (Sotheby’s)