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In 1967, a Masai tribesman noticed an azure flicker in the ground during a routine day herding cattle. That indigo light turned out to be tanzanite, a variety of the mineral zoisite. One thousand times rarer than diamond, the stone boasts an exceptional ability to exude blue, violet, wine-red and green hues. Formed 585 million years ago, the tanzanite stone bed resulted from an unusual chemical reaction beneath the earth's surface in the Merelani region of Tanzania. Upon its discovery in Africa, Tiffany & Co. was instrumental in bringing it to the United States, introducing a full collection of tanzanite jewelry in 1968. Today, jewelers like Shaun Leane are reveling in the gem's fluorescence, using the largest specimens available to capture its wide-ranging spectrum. But designers will have to get it while they can. It is estimated that the supply will be exhausted by about 2050.

Masai chief are known to give their wives raw tanzanite upon the birth of a child in hopes of ensuring a healthy and successful life.

In its raw form, tanzanite is trichroic, which means that it radiates an entirely different color from each of its three axes.

In 2005, Tiffany & Co. designed one of the largest pieces of tanzanite jewelry in the world: a 233.96-carat stone fashioned into a \$400,000 branch surrounded by platinum and diamonds.

According to Masai lore, tanzanite was created when a bolt of lightning set the land ablaze and turned the stones within a brilliant shade of blue.

Although tanzanite is technically the birthstone of December, its general popularity has led to its marketing as the universal birthstone.

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