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Gemfields invests \$15M in ruby sort house

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Gemfields is aiming to make more of its rubies available. Image credit: Gemfields

By STAFF REPORTS

Colored-gemstone miner Gemfields is looking to ramp up availability of its rubies through a new sort house in Mozambique.

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Situated at Montepuez Ruby Mine, the sort house will use automation as well as human sorting to help scale the volume of rubies produced. Gemfields says this is a first of its kind facility for colored gemstones, with a model that more closely resembles sort houses for diamonds.

Scaling up

The Montepuez Ruby Mine is situated at one of the world's largest ruby deposits. In 2011, Gemfields acquired a 75 percent stake in MRM, and the other 25 percent is owned by the local firm Mwriti Limitada.

At MRM's new sort house, rubies will first be washed before being put under an ultra-violet light. Rubies are fluorescent under the light, and optical sensors can do a preliminary sorting of the stones.

In one day, 10,000 tons of ore can be washed, and Gemfields expects the UV light to be more reliable than the human eye.

"Previously the sorting of rubies was largely manual, but it is very exciting to now introduce automated sorting which will require minimal manual sorting," said Kaung San, ruby grading supervisor at MRM, in a statement. "Our productive capacity will increase exponentially."



Gemfields' ruby sort house. Image courtesy of Gemfields

After being sorted by light, the rubies are then sent for further sorting and grading.

As the new facility increases the volume of rubies that can be produced, MRM is upping its workforce at the mines and in the sort house. The mine is training locals to be experts in grading and classifying rubies.

"We are proud of our pioneering approach and leadership position within the sector and continually work to improve the provision of responsibly sourced colored gemstones," said Sean Gilbertson, CEO of Gemfields, in a statement. "We are delighted to inaugurate this state-of-the-art, industry-leading ruby sort house today and will continue to strive to deliver best-in-class operations and promote transparency, trust and sustainable mining practices."

While record-setting diamond sales dominated the headlines in 2017, it is colored gemstones' huge projected growth that were of special interest to investors in 2018.

Researchers at Fura Gems estimated that the global market for gems could reach \$10 billion in the next decade, while the Pink Star diamond was sold last year for \$71 million, making it the most expensive jewel ever purchased. These data points show that not only are the markets for gems and colored diamonds healthy, they are also prime for wealthy investors to pour their money into ([see story](#)).