
What Exactly are Pearls... and, Why are They so Special?

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By Michael Landonson Price

Pearls are one of nature's most wonderful gifts. They are formed by mollusks and, unlike other precious gems, come from nature perfect and without further need of shaping by man.

The color of the mollusk's shell determines the color of the pearls. Not all mollusks create beautiful pearls, but those that do can create the kind of spectacular gleaming gems that have captivated mankind for centuries.

Pearls have been so highly prized throughout history that their value once surpassed virtually all other gemstones. The sacred books of most of the world's religions compare heaven to pearls and have used pearls to describe the sublime happiness that comes with discovering God. Pearls have come to symbolize purity and innocence. Some people have even ascribed supernatural powers to pearls.

Pearls that occur naturally without human intervention or encouragement are rare. To find a single natural pearl, it might be necessary to open 10,000 oysters. An even then, only a small percentage of the natural pearls one might find would have the size, shape and quality to make them useful as jewelry. Today virtually all pearls sold commercially are cultured pearls.

Since pearls are formed by mollusks in response to small irritants that find their way inside the animal's shell, it was only a matter of time before humans discovered that they could introduce small irritants into the oyster or mussel to induce it to create a pearl. The cultured pearl was born and now nearly everyone has a chance to appreciate the beauty of pearls.

In the case of saltwater pearls that are formed by oysters, a tiny piece of tissue from another oyster is implanted into the host oyster along with a shell bead (generally round) created from the shell of a certain kind of freshwater mussel. Over time the host oyster will lay down layer upon layer of nacre coating the shell bead until a pearl is formed. Nacre is composed of a calcium carbonate material that is basically the same thing as the Mother-of-Pearl coating found inside the shells of the mollusks that make pearls.

Although pearls can be found in a variety of mollusks including; abalone, nautilus, conch, clams, cowries and others; only certain varieties of oysters and mussels are utilized for commercial pearl production. Differences in pearls derive from the different species of mollusks used to form the pearls (oysters or mussels) as well as different varieties within those species as well as the environmental conditions in which the mollusk lives including water temperature, surrounding minerals, etc. Most pearl producers understand how to manipulate these variables to achieve the most beautiful results possible.

To create a saltwater pearl, an oyster must be birthed, collected, nurtured until maturity, then carefully implanted with a small piece of mantle tissue and a shell nucleus which is surgically placed in the oyster's gonad. The oyster is then returned to the sea where, hopefully, the pearl begins forming. In some cases the oyster ejects the nucleus or otherwise fails to produce a pearl from the implant. In those cases where the implant is successful, the oyster may be left to coat the nucleus with nacre for up to two years. During this time the pearl farmer carefully maintains the health and safety of the pearls. Once harvested, in some cases the oyster may be able to support 2-3 successive implantations until it reaches the end of its life.

Of the pearls harvested, only a small percentage, are of exceptional quality. Pearl harvests follow a pretty typical bell-shaped distribution curve. The majority of pearls are of average quality (grade C) somewhat fewer are of B or D quality and only relative few are of truly exceptional A quality or better. The Fs never see market.

So although the cultured pearl industry has put pearl ownership within the reach of many people, truly outstanding pearls of great beauty are still rare and require significant effort, risk and time by those who produce them. You can find a great selection of pearl jewelry offered at affordable prices at www.MermaidPearls.com .

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Dave Battles is the founder and owner of www.MermaidPearls.com and is a graduate of the Gemological Institute of Americas Pearl Certificate program.

The Essence Of Pearl Fashion Jewelry

By Victor Eband

Pearls have been used as in jewelry for a few thousand years now, and pearl necklaces, bracelets, and other pieces of jewelry are the quintessential fashion jewelry that have been valued possessions since pearls were first incorporated into jewelry a few thousand years ago.

The term pearl is today synonymous with fine, rare and valuable. Although, the use of pearls today is largely confined to the jewelry industry, in centuries past, pearls have also been sewn on to costumes for royalty as well. Pearls today are also sometimes incorporated into cosmetics, and the popularity of pearls can largely be attributed to their luster and iridescence.

A pearl begins to develop when a foreign body or an irritant such as a parasite or sand particle enters the soft tissue or mantle of an oyster or other mollusk. As a defensive measure, the mollusk secretes a material to coat the irritant in fine layers. This substance, which is called nacre, is a fine crystalline calcium carbonate, which is held together by an organic glue. The nacre gradually increases in size and hardens, leading to the formation of a pearl.

Prior to the twentieth century, the introduction of the irritant that triggers pearl development was left solely up to Mother Nature. Pearls of this type are called natural pearls. Divers would dive down to the bottom of the seas to collect oysters from pearl beds. The oysters would be pried open and the creature killed in order to identify and collect the pearl. Since the introduction of the irritant needed to trigger the development of the was left entirely to chance, a large number of mollusks were destroyed in order to find just a few pearls. This is what made, and continues to make, natural pearls expensive.

Today, cultured pearls are quite common in the world of fashion jewelry, and this is largely due to the development of peri-culture. For cultured pearls, the stimulus needed to trigger the development of the pearl is provided by man. An external irritant such as a small bead or tissue from a donor mollusk is inserted into the tissue of the host mollusk. Each host oyster can have up to a dozen such insertions, which results in a dozen or more pearls from each host.

Pearl farms in Asia and primarily China are now mass producing cultured pearls. Cultured pearls are significantly less expensive than natural pearls, and therefore very popular with fashion jewelry designers. Although pearls are available in a variety of colors, the most common colors for pearls are white or light cream. The color can vary depending on the

mollusk that produces the pearl. Dark colored pearls such as the Tahitian pearls are rare and quite expensive.

In general, other properties being equal are the larger pearls, which are more expensive than smaller pearls. Pearls can generally be found in eight basic shapes such as round, semi round, button, drop, pear, oval, baroque, and circled. Perfectly round pearls are the rarest and most valuable. Semi rounds are also used in necklaces or in pieces where the shape of the pearl can be disguised to look like it is a perfectly round pearl. Button pearls are like a slightly flattened round pearl and can also make a necklace, while drop and pear shaped pearls are largely used in pendants and earrings.

Victor Epanand is an expert consultant for personalized gifts, invitations, and fine jewelry. Find the best shopping for personalized gifts, invitations, greetings, and essence of pearls.

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