

THE INDUSTRY AUTHORITY

JCK

SPRING 2018 / JCKONLINE.COM



A DEEP DIVE INTO
VARIETIES, AVAILABILITY,
PRICING, AND TOP TRENDS

PEARLS

(GO FOR BAROQUE!)





FROM THE EDITOR

R

eady for a pearls trip?

WELCOME TO *JCK*'S first annual pearl supplement, celebrating a gem like no other.

That's because for all their enduring appeal, pearls are the anomalies of the jewelry world. Unlike most gemstones, which are mined from the earth, pearls are derived from living creatures known as mollusks. They owe their signature iridescence not to a mineral but to an organic material called nacre; the mollusk secretes it to protect itself from irritants that find their way into the fleshy part of its shell. Most unusual of all, pearls emerge from those shells as finished products, requiring no cutting or polishing to enhance their lustrous good looks.

No wonder we're wild for pearls and always have been. The world's most cutting-edge designers, who've embraced the pearl in recent years, would no doubt agree. Time and again, they continue to use the cultured baubles in inventive styles that make the classic gem feel simultaneously fresh and new.

To find out what's new in the pearl market, consult "**Cultured Club**" on page 8, contributor Martha C. White's primer on supplies, prices, and other key details about the pearls on everyone's most-wanted lists.

Then apply that knowledge as you read up on the latest pearl jewelry trends in "**Pearls! Pearls! Pearls!**" on page 13 by *JCK*'s All That Glitters blogger Amy Elliott, who recaps the season's most relevant pearl styles, a mix of pieces both familiar (hoop earrings, baroque shapes) and unusual (ombré!). The key takeaway from our first section devoted entirely to pearls? The queen of gems continues her reign.

Natural white South Sea pearl ring in platinum with diamonds, **\$68,000, Jye's International**, 866-633-8880, jyescorp.com; Indorussian opal and pearl earrings in 14k yellow gold and sterling silver, **\$3,200, Sanjay Kasliwal of the Gem Palace**, 212-988-1511, sanjaykasliwal.com



Victoria Gomelsky

Victoria Gomelsky

Editor-in-Chief

vgomelsky@jckonline.com

PARAGON
PEARLS

CULTURED PEARLS CLUB

JCK'S SNAPSHOT OF THE PEARL MARKET TELLS YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHARACTERISTICS, PRICING, AND AVAILABILITY

PEARLS HAVE UPPED their game in recent seasons, going from traditional and classic to trendy and chic. Both supply and demand have risen—presenting opportunities and challenges for retailers who want to capitalize on their popularity while maintaining achievable price points. Below, we've assembled a primer on the six pearl varieties you're most likely to find in jewelry collections. (Note: All of the varieties described are cultured, except for conch pearls.) —**MARTHA C. WHITE**



1



3



5



6



2



4



PEARLS 9

1 FRESHWATER

2 AKOYA

3 WHITE SOUTH

4 GOLDEN SOUTH SEA

5 TAHITIAN

6 CONCH

INTRODUCTION		
Cultured in the <i>Hyriopsis cumingi</i> and <i>Cristaria plicata</i> mussels, freshwater pearls have a reputation as entry-level pearls. For retailers, that means these gems are better suited for fashion-oriented rather than investment pieces.	Born of the <i>Pinctada fucata</i> or <i>Pinctada radiata</i> saltwater oyster, akoya pearls are widely considered the "classic" cultured pearl—the smallest and most affordable of the marine varieties, they are squeezed between freshwater pearls at the low end and South Sea pearls at the high end.	South Sea pearls are the crown jewels of statement-making pearl jewelry. A longer cultivation time inside the silver-lipped <i>Pinctada maxima</i> saltwater oyster and thicker nacre give these pearls a soft luster that is highly prized, but this also makes round specimens scarcer, and baroque pearls more common.
CHARACTERISTICS		
Freshwater pearls range significantly in both size and color, coming in generally between 4 mm and 14 mm. They come in a variety of natural colors: white, cream, yellow, orange, pink, and light purple, with overtones of pink, blue, and/or green.	Most of the market ranges from roughly 6 mm to 9.5 mm; akoyas' thinner nacre coating relative to South Sea pearls gives them a shinier luster.	The white variety can be pure white to cream-colored, sometimes with subtle overtones of pink, green, or blue. They generally range from roughly 10 mm to 18 mm in size, and can top out as large as 20 mm to 22 mm, with most falling in the 13 mm to 15 mm range.
PLACE OF ORIGIN		
The lion's share of freshwater pearl production today comes out of China, where they are farmed in lakes and rivers.	Akoyas were first cultivated in Japan around the start of the 20th century; these methods were adopted by the Chinese, who came to dominate akoyas. But today, buyers say Japan is the primary source again, with China ceding the majority of the industry back to the akoya's original country of origin.	White South Sea pearls are produced across the South Pacific, east to the Indian Ocean, and off the northern coast of Australia.
CURRENT SUPPLY FORECAST		
Although dealers say quality has improved as production has grown, they add that finding high-end freshwater pearls can be more challenging, and the price premium they command can put them on par with akoya pearls of similar size and	Buyers say robust production has led to a bifurcated market: Prices for lower-quality specimens are falling, while they have risen at the top end.	Demand from the U.S. and Chinese markets has risen while production has been crimped by storms and pollution, inflating prices.
CURRENT PRICING		
A 16-inch strand of 9 mm to 10 mm freshwater pearls—a typical size—at the high end of the quality spectrum can be found for \$500 to \$700.	For good quality, a strand of 8 mm to 9 mm akoya pearls generally costs between \$1,000 and \$1,500, according to dealers.	A high-quality strand of 12 mm to 15 mm South Sea pearls fetches between \$10,000 and \$15,000, while scarcity has driven up prices for top-quality strands to \$20,000–\$30,000.

INTRODUCTION		
These visually stunning cousins of white South Sea pearls, birthed by the golden-lipped <i>Pinctada maxima</i> oyster, are as prized as they are rare—and also threatened.	Tahitian pearls are the black variety of white and golden South Sea pearls, and are produced by the black-lipped <i>Pinctada margaritifera (cumingi)</i> saltwater oyster.	These vivid pink pearls might not have the luster of their Pacific cousins, but they are highly valuable in their own right.
CHARACTERISTICS		
The yellow color of these pearls ranges from pale straw to rich gold, like the metal. They're slightly smaller than their white counterparts, generally in the 9 mm to 14 mm range. Specimens above 14 mm are very rare, and these top out a few millimeters below their white counterparts, at about 18 mm.	Often called "black" pearls, Tahitians actually come in a rainbow of grays, browns, deep blues, greens, and purples. Most produced today range from 8 mm to 11 mm, but they can go up to 20 mm in size.	Conch pearls are small and porcelaneous (that is, non-nacreous), and range in color from the palest pink to nearly red. They are measured in carats rather than millimeters for commercial purposes, with 6 to 8 cts. typical. A pearl larger than 10 cts. is extremely rare.
PLACE OF ORIGIN		
Golden South Seas are produced primarily in Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. Indonesian producers are said to produce higher-quality golden pearls.	Despite the name, Tahitian pearls are grown across French Polynesia, a group of islands and atolls in the middle of the South Pacific Ocean.	Grown by a type of giant sea snail in the Caribbean waters around the Bahamas and Bermuda, these pearls occur naturally and are a byproduct of conch shell fishing.
CURRENT SUPPLY FORECAST		
As with white South Sea pearls, producers must contend with pollution that can injure the oysters and storms that can disturb the beds.	Buyers say supply and demand have been steady, with smaller pearls readily available; large specimens without irregular shapes or blemishes, however, are scarce.	Conch pearls have become more popular over the past five years or so. Their entirely natural formation combined with restrictions to prevent overfishing makes these pearls exceptionally rare.
CURRENT PRICING		
Thanks to strong Chinese demand, a strand of the highest-quality 10 mm golden South Sea pearls wholesales in the \$17,500 to \$20,000 range; a 12 mm strand could be twice that.	Buyers say a strand of 12 mm Tahitians can cost \$5,000 to \$10,000, depending on size and quality.	Their rarity and size make conch pearls extremely expensive gems. A single pearl might cost \$10,000.

1. Polished cage chain necklace with 15 mm–18 mm white baroque freshwater pearls on a 37-inch 18k yellow gold chain; **\$3,630; Mastoloni**; 800-347-3275; mastoloni.com
 2. 14k gold akoya pearl large safety pin earrings; **\$800; Mizuki**; info@mizukijewelry.com; mizukijewelry.com
 3. Kobe drop cuff with 12 mm South Sea pearls and pavé diamond rim in 18k yellow gold; **\$9,900; Belpearl**; team@belpearl.com; belpearl.com

4. 12.4 mm–12.9 mm golden South Sea cultured pearl drops with 4.12 cts. t.w. black and 3.7 cts. t.w. brown diamonds in 18k rose gold; **\$14,200; Reho Concepts for Assael**; 212-819-0060; assael.com
 5. Diamond floral ring with 1.36 cts. t.w. diamonds and 14 mm Tahitian pearl in sterling silver; **\$1,850; Vincent Peach**; 615-378-1374; vincentpeach.com
 6. Natural conch pearl two-in-one flower necklace and brooch with 28.12 cts. t.w. conch, 1.59 cts. t.w. diamonds, and 0.57 ct. t.w. rubies in platinum; **\$59,985; Tara**; 888-575-TARA; tarapearls.com

PEARLS! PEARLS! PEARLS!



YOU'RE ALWAYS FULLY STOCKED WITH WHITE STUDS
AND JACKIE KENNEDY–STYLE TRIPLE STRANDS,
BUT WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KEEP
PEARL LOVERS ON TREND THIS SEASON?
JCK HAS YOU COVERED.

BY AMY ELLIOTT

FRESHWATER BAROQUE PEARLS WITH 18K GOLD CLASP, \$4,450. 18K GOLD REMOVABLE PENDANT WITH 25.27 CT. FACETED AQUAMARINE AND 0.2 CT. T.W. DIAMONDS. \$5,270. THE MAZZA CO., 800-654-3400; MAZZAJEWELRY.COM



White freshwater fluid gold pearl XL rod hoops; **\$5,320** (sold as pair); **Mizuki**; info@mizukijewelry.com; mizukijewelry.com

Twins hoop earring with freshwater pearl and emeralds in 18k yellow gold; **£650 (\$915)** each (sold as singles); **Delfina Delettrez**; delfinadelettrez.com

HOOP EARRINGS

“Hoops are the thing for sure when it comes to pearl jewelry in the fashion world,” says Lauren Kulchinsky Levison, owner of Mayfair Rocks in East Hampton, N.Y. Having attended both the New York and London fashion weeks in February, the jeweler observed pearl embellishments—and jewelry—in abundance on the runway.

She was also seen at several shows wearing a pair of coaster-size pearl hoops, custom-made for her by “one of the industry’s top pearl artists.” Featuring mixed baroque pearls in shades of pink, white, and blue, Levison’s hoops attracted the attention of buyers, designers, makeup artists, and editors, many of whom went on to place personal orders. The earrings also caught the eye of street-style photographers.

“They know what’s up,” Levison says. “They look for what’s new; I assume the jewelry industry will get it in a breath or two if what I was photographed in is any barometer.”

While the cognoscenti are newly enamored of pearl hoops—the bigger the better—top pearl merchants will likely evolve (and enlarge) their hoop styles in the coming seasons, with pearls dotting the circumference like spokes on a wheel, or all the way around like a pearl collar in miniature.

IT MAY SEEM counterintuitive to consider pearl jewelry in the context of fashion trends—after all, a string of pearls is a perennial classic, regardless of what’s happening on the runways. But looking ahead, a survey of the fall 2018 shows in New York

City and London points to a whole new morning for pearls, and with it, opportunities to bring your customers ever-new and exciting options, from open rings and statement cuffs to convertible earrings.

That pearls popped up as a favorite new motif everywhere from Michael Kors to Erdem means looking critically at your fall and holiday assortment of traditional pearl jewelry and peppering in designs with an edgier, more fashion-forward feel.

To help guide your selections, we spoke with retailers, pearl designers, and our industry’s top jewelry trend spotters. The takeaway? Shop with an eye for day-to-evening versatility. Consider the asymmetrical and unusual. And if you can picture it with jeans and a leather jacket, go for it. Read on for insider tips and an overview of the trends to jump on now.

Faceted aquamarine and square freshwater baroque coin pearl and diamond 18k yellow gold bracelet; **\$9,845; The Mazza Co.;** 800-654-3400; mazzajewelry.com

Pendant with baroque pearl and 0.93 ct. t.w. diamonds in 18k white gold; **\$10,532; Yael Designs;** 415-989-9235; yaeldesigns.com

BAROQUE SHAPES

Consider the athleisure trend, and how millennials tend to favor included and otherwise imperfect gems that reflect the vagaries of Mother Nature, and the current appetite for baroque pearls is not surprising. “As the country continues to move into a more informal style, baroques are embraced for their casual and individual appeal,” says Amanda Gizzi, jewelry style expert and director of public relations and special events for Jewelers of America.

Mastoloni Pearls in New York City and Nashville-based designer Vincent Peach have successfully debuted baroque pearl styles that deliver on the promise of taking a customer from the conference room to a cocktail party. “Our pearls have an everyday feel to them,” affirms Peach, who often pairs pearls with leather cords and equestrian-inspired clasps. “I design for consumers who want something versatile and beautiful.”

Meanwhile, other designers have chosen to explore the asymmetrical shapes and nuanced colors offered by luxurious Tahitian and South Sea baroques, encasing the gems with lashings of diamonds or creating deliberately mismatched earrings (a popular look on the red carpet). “Designers like Savannah Stranger, Mizuki, and Sophie Buhai are using them beautifully and artistically,” says Marion Fasel, founder and editorial director of online fine jewelry magazine *The Adventurine*.



Natural-color South Sea and radiant orchid freshwater pearls with 9.61 cts. t.w. diamonds in 18k white gold; **price on request**; **Yoko London**; 917-213-8161; yokolondon.com

OMBRÉ

Pearl strands strung in a light-to-dark progression of tones reflect a trend that's been thriving across all aspects of fashion, from wedding cakes to workout gear. Tonal color-blocking always looks modern, and jewelry designers have embraced the trend by clustering light blue, periwinkle, and cornflower blue sapphires in a brooch, for example, or placing a row of oval, pastel-to-deep pink tourmalines in a prong-set ring.

Now that neutral-colored stories are gaining momentum in pearl jewelry, an ombré pearl necklace that starts out white, moves to gray or silver, and culminates in a spectrum of blue to black tones feels new and exciting. Like baroque pearls, it's also a quick and easy way to indulge a pearl craving that in no way resembles what your mother or grandmother wore—the reigning consumer mindset, according to the pearl experts we consulted.



Tahitian and white South Sea 10 mm x 11 mm bracelet with a sterling silver black rhodium magnetic clasp; **\$680**; **Baggins**; 213-624-2277; bagginspearls.com

Moonstone, diamond, and pearl eternity earrings with Tahitian baroque Dracula pearls; **price on request; Featherstone Fine Jewelry**; 212-343-0604; featherstone.design.com

SHADES OF GRAY

The American Gem Trade Association reports a strong interest in gray and silver Tahitian, South Sea, and akoya pearls, with semi-round and baroque akoya pearls in this color family among the most desirable. "Prices are still reasonable in the 6- to 9-millimeter size, but dealers say that this may not last long," says AGTA's CEO, Douglas K. Hucker.

Why? "It doesn't sound glamorous, but the silver-gray color and shape of the akoya is due to a bacterial infection that alters the oyster's environment," says Anil Maloo, president of Baggins, a pearl company based in Los Angeles. In other words, it's a happy accident that suppliers can't quite control. "The color is gorgeous, but difficult to obtain," adds Maloo, whose firm has become a go-to source for these akoyas while they're still available.

Consumer demand for gray-toned jewels is a reflection of the color's popularity not only in fashion but also in other jewelry categories such as engagement rings and chunky bead necklaces hung with pendants. "I believe the silver color adds a cool factor to the traditional reputation of pearls much in the same way gray diamonds and moonstones are a little edgier than white diamonds or blue moonstones," Fasel says. As in other jewelry categories, the combo of gray pearls with vibrant colored gemstones is especially appealing. "The grays play extremely well with the green tones of tsavorite, chrome diopside, or emerald," says designer Steven Mazza of The Mazza Co. in New York City.

18k white gold earrings with 37.1 cts. t.w. pearls, 1.61 cts. t.w. diamonds, and 1.51 cts. t.w. paraiba tourmalines; **\$23,003; Yael Designs**; 415-989-9235; yaeldesigns.com

SUPER PEARLS

You weren't seeing things:
Pearls were ubiquitous
during the fall 2018
runway shows

BY MELISSA ROSE BERNARDO

Backstage at **Emilia Wickstead's** fall 2018 London show

RUNWAY REPORT

A CLOSE-UP LOOK AT THE CROSSROADS OF JEWELRY AND FASHION

AS JACKIE KENNEDY once said, "Pearls are always appropriate." Who knew that decades later fashion designers would still be following that maxim? From New York to Paris to London, the fall 2018 runways were practically awash in pearls: Michael Kors' girls sported double strands—some with cheeky rhinestone bows—under chunky (faux) fur coats and atop preppy Argyle sweaters. Prabal Gurung, artistic director at pearl-heavy jewelry brand Tasaki, accessorized his models with gumball-size

pearl ear cuffs and studs, as well as sweeping single-earring shoulder-dusters. At Erdem, caged pearl earrings and pearl-and-gemstone drops complemented the '20s-esque eveningwear (pearls even dangled from some of the dresses). Valentino accented its oh-so-'80s oversize floral prints and flowing tunics with mismatched pearl ear jackets and climbers. And at Emilia Wickstead, dainty pearl drops—and delicate pearl details atop her ladylike designs—were the thing. *Always* appropriate.