



A.B. DAVIS

PEARLS  
AN EXPLANATORY BOOKLET

MAY 2010

# Pearls

*“These elegant, single-row cultured freshwater pearls are individually hand-knotted onto an 18ct gold safety ball clasp. Length 18in and diameter 7–8 mm It’s a classic piece that becomes a staple in every woman’s wardrobe”*

**Key words** ... describing the character and value of pearls

- Genuine cultured freshwater pearls
- Individually hand-knotted
- Single or double row necklets and bracelets
- Saltwater and freshwater
- Natural, cultured and imitation
- Lustre
- Colour
- Size
- Shape and symmetry

Lustre is the primary characteristic ....  
all factors being equal, the larger the pearl the more valuable it is.

Large, perfectly round pearls are the rarest and are highly valued.

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In 1917, jeweler Pierre Cartier purchased the Fifth Avenue mansion that is now the New York Cartier store for US\$100 cash and a double strand of matched natural pearls valued at the time at US\$1 million.

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# Pearls

- Size and trade names
  - **Freshwater** pearls 3 –7 mm in diameter
  - **Akoya** pearls 6 – 8.5 mm
  - **South Sea and Tahitian** pearls as large as 13 mm
    - These are the larger and most expensive cultured pearls. They are cultured in a process that dictates a smaller volume output and they can never be mass-produced. South Sea pearls --- which are white, silver, pink, gold, cream or any combination of these --- are less abundant and hence more expensive than the Tahitian pearls, extracted from the black pearl oyster.
- Colour
  - ***lustre, translucence and orient*** (*the delicate play of surface colours*)
    - Typical pearl colors are **white, cream, yellow, pink, silver or black**. A pearl can also have a hint of secondary color or overtone which is seen when light reflects off the pearl surface.
    - The unique **lustre** of pearls depends upon the reflection, refraction, and diffraction of light from the translucent layers. The thinner and more numerous the layers in the pearl, the finer the luster. The iridescence that pearls display is caused by the overlapping of successive layers, which breaks up light falling on the surface.

# Pearls

- Shape
  - Round is the rarest pearl shape. Non-spherical or even symmetrical are considered lower quality. Akoya, Tahitian, and South Sea pearls found in jewelry have a tendency to be the roundest, while Freshwater pearls can be oval or slightly off-round.
  - Pearls come in eight basic shapes:
    1. round                    the rarest and most valuable
    2. semi-round            often disguised to look like perfectly round pearls
    3. button                   are like a slightly flattened round pearl
    4. drop                     referred to as teardrops & often used in pendants
    5. pear
    6. oval
    7. baroque                unique and interesting shapes
    8. circled                  characterized by concentric ridges or rings

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“Pearl” ..... a [metaphor](#) for something rare, fine, admirable, and valuable.

# Pearls

***The difference between natural and cultured pearls***  
*focuses on whether the pearl was created*  
***spontaneously by nature – or with human intervention.***

## 1. **Natural Pearls**

..... a pearl that forms without human intervention

Natural pearls occur in the wild and are so rare to find in nature. Hence, single natural pearls are a collector's item and are set as centerpieces in unique jewelry. Few matched strands of natural pearls exist.

## 2. **Cultured Pearls**

..... a pearl that forms with the aid of human intervention

Most pearls sold today are **cultured or farmed**. To create a cultured pearl, a tiny bead is implanted into the oyster. .... and gradually over time the oyster coats the bead in many layers of natural minerals and proteins known as nacre and it is the nacre that gives pearls their beautiful luster and color.

Akoya, black Tahitian and white or golden South Sea are all cultured pearls. The rest and majority are beadless, cultured pearls, mantle-grown in freshwater mussels and are known as Chinese cultured pearls.

# Pearls

## 3. Imitation or fake pearls?

*Imitation pearls are inexpensive jewellery ... made of [mother-of-pearl](#), [coral](#) or [conch](#) shell and in some cases from glass coated with a solution containing fish scales. Although imitation pearls look the part, they do not have the same weight or smoothness and have noticeably less luster.*

One method of testing for imitations is to rub the pearl against the surface of a front tooth. Imitation pearls are completely smooth whereas natural and cultured pearls --- composed of nacre --- both feel slightly gritty.

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There is no standardized grading for pearls  
so it is important to purchase pearls from a reputable source

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## Freshwater and Saltwater pearls

*The pearl oyster lives in the sea while the freshwater pearl mussel lives in freshwater.*

- **Saltwater** pearls grow within pearl oysters in oceans. Today, saltwater [pearl oysters](#) are cultivated in protected [lagoons](#) and volcanic atolls.
- **Natural freshwater** pearls form in various species of freshwater mussels living in lakes, rivers, ponds and other fresh water.

Although freshwater and saltwater pearls may look quite similar, pearls from the sea are valued more highly than freshwater pearls.

## Care

When cared for properly, pearls can last a lifetime.

- Put your pearls on last when getting ready and make them the first thing you take off when you come home. Keep them away from household chemicals including perfume, makeup and hairspray as they dull the lustre of your pearls.
- Before putting your pearls away, wipe them with a soft cloth and store them separate from other jewelry to avoid scratching their tender surfaces.
- The best way to care for pearls is to wear them often as the body's natural oils keep pearls lustrous.