

5 Things to Know When Shopping for Pearls and Pearl Jewelry

Contributed by Webmaster

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Pearls are unique in the gemstone world because they are the only gemstones that are created by living organisms. Each one of them is unique and there is a wide variety in type and quality. If you want to get a good deal on your pearls and make sure you are buying quality, you need to keep the following 5 things in mind while shopping:

Surface quality: A high quality pearl will have the majority of its surface completely smooth with no pits, cracks, dull spots or protrusions. The vast majority of pearls do have these surface imperfections and the amount of them is one of the most influential factors in determining value.

Shine and Iridescence: The best pearls reflect light so strongly that they almost look metallic. This is referred to as "luster". A dull pearl with poor luster is worth a fraction of a similar pearl with high luster. Another characteristic of pearl that will add to its beauty and value are the iridescent pearly colors that are present. This is called its "orientation".

Size: Size is the next most important factor in determining the value of a pearl. Pearls range in size generally from about 2 mm to 20 mm. Pearls above 8 mm are considered large and are most commonly found among Tahitian Pearls and South Sea Pearls (see below). A pearl over 8 mm wide is exponentially more valuable than a pearl of 5 mm of similar quality because of the additional years and resources that are required for their cultivation.

Shape: Pearls come in a variety of shapes. The most valuable shapes are round and near round. Perfectly round pearls are rare to find and are thus the most expensive. Pearls also come in tear drops, domes, buttons, circled (with rings around the pearl) and freeform shapes known as "baroque". The more freeform shapes are usually the least valuable, however can make interesting jewelry when used creatively in a design.

Type: Pearls are classified according to their origins. Basically, there are 3 types of pearls: cultured saltwater pearls, cultured freshwater pearls and natural pearls. Natural pearls are so rare, even most jewelers never see one. Freshwater pearls come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, but are generally less expensive than saltwater pearls. Cultured Saltwater pearls are the most commonly used in fine jewelry. They are categorized further according to origin: South Sea and Tahitian pearls are the largest and most valuable, whereas Akoya pearls are the more common medium sized pearls.

These are the basics of assessing the quality of a pearl gemstone. There is a lot more to learn, however.

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To learn more about pearls and how to shop for them, visit ShopGemstones.com - your guide to buying gemstone jewelry.