

Pearl Academy
by RAW PEARLS



Part 1:
Natural, Cultured & Fake Pearls

RAW PEARLS
FINE PEARL JEWELLERY

What is natural and what is cultured?

- A pearl is created when a foreign body invades a mollusc. To protect itself the mollusc coats the foreign body with layers of nacre. Nacre is a substance which is made up of microscopic crystals of calcium carbonate.
- Where this happens as an accident of nature, the pearl is natural.
- Where this happens because of human intervention, a person has inserted that foreign body on purpose, it is cultured.
- In the culturing, or farming process, the technician may insert a small piece of mantle tissue, or, both that, and a mother of pearl bead.
- As long as the foreign body remains in the shell, the mollusc continues to wrap layer upon layer of nacre around the intruder, creating a either a natural or cultured pearl.



A little word on use of terminology:

- When you are talking about a 'pearl' without any further qualification, you are referring to a natural pearl.

"Cultured
Pearl"

"Natural
Pearl"

- When you are talking about any pearl that is not natural, i.e. it is cultured, you must use this term to qualify the word pearl. The term 'cultured pearl' can be used regardless of the species of mollusc, or body of water used to form them (i.e. saltwater vs freshwater).



Saltwater Pearl Farm



Freshwater Pearl Farm

Scarcity of natural pearls and the invention of cultured pearls

- Of the huge number of molluscs known to us only a very small number can actually produce pearls.
- Of those, only a small number of the pearls produced will be a desirable shape, size and colour, and only some of those will be found by human beings!
- As a result, natural pearls are very rare and often very expensive.



Pearls were once unobtainable by most

only the very rich, and royalty that could gain access to them.

- Culturing made pearls

accessible to a far wider global audience. Culturing began in the late 19th and early 20th century and Mikimoto successfully commercialised these pearls. Now, pearls are cultured in many locations in the world.

- If we relied solely on nature to produce our pearls they would be out of reach in terms of availability of supply, and financially, of most people. And indeed prior to culturing it was



Today, pearls are widely available

How to tell a natural pearl from a cultured pearl

- Here you might like to look at the drill hole. If they are unstrung, or loosely strung, or in need of a restring you may be able to see a line where the bead nucleus meets the layers of nacre (of course this would only apply where there is a bead nucleus rather than just a piece of mantle tissue as in the case of some culturing).
- Since natural pearls are valued by weight often a smaller drill hole is made to maintain the weight and therefore the value.



Small drill holes on natural pearls



Top row = natural. Bottom row = cultured

Also, you may want to look at the shape. With culturing getting better and better, and people like myself going out to sort the wheat from the chaff, some often expect pearls to be blemish free and round but often natural pearls have a more 'raw' look, more off shape, perhaps not a perfect match on the stand, and often smaller in size. They are highly likely to also be graduated.

- Finally, the only way to be sure is to send them for certification.

Fake, synthetic, artificial, imitation, faux

- The terms used to sell these 'pearls' are numerous. But do not be misled into thinking these are in fact pearls – they are not made of nacre, and they do not occur either naturally or via a culturing process, but often in a factory.



Don't be fooled by faux pearls

- They can be made of a variety of substances including plastic, shell or glass.
- Often customers ask... 'are they real?' We try to avoid usage of this term, it is somewhat



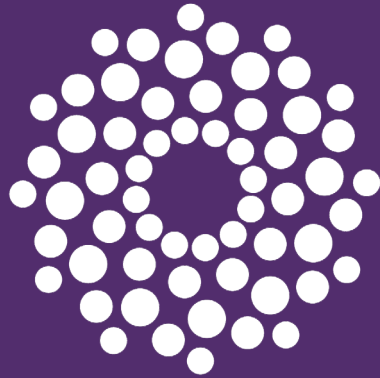
Rub two pearls gently together

misleading... a pearl may either be natural or cultured.

- This so-called pearl has not come from the inside of a mollusc. It is entirely manufactured. For this reason, they often look rather perfect!

Perfectly clean, perfectly round, perfectly matching. Watch out for that.

- Also, because they are not formed of layer upon layer of nacre, they will not reflect light in the same way as a natural or cultured pearl and as a result will not have 'lustre'.
- And finally, you can rub the pearls across the front of your teeth, or, slightly more politely if they are not yours, gently together, a fake pearl will slide straight off as it is not made of nacre... and a cultured or natural pearl will have some small resistance, or texture, because of the structure of the nacre.



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To stock our range email us at
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