

The Essence of the Pearl

On May 18, 2004 Tiffany & Company announced on their shareholder report that they entering a new retail jewelry venture. The venture was to open and operate a retail new jewelry store name IRIDESSE that will be exclusively focused on pearls and pearl jewelry. The approximate price points will range from slightly under \$100 to \$40,000. The first store opened in McLean Virginia in the fall of 2004. Within five years, Tiffany's expects to open 20 IRIDESSE stores. These stores will NOT carry Tiffany & Co. jewelry. IRIDESSE will be an indirect, wholly-owned subsidiary of Tiffany & Co.

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What this means for you and me is that pearls are going to be everywhere ... more so than ever before. The designs are creative, exciting and new. The single strand of small- to medium-sized pearls will always be available and considered the most traditional. Now there is abundance in the variety of shapes, types, and color. The following charts will help you in deciding which pearls are for you and how to care for them.

Natural pearls are rare and are usually found in estate sales or in museums from when European royalty discovered the Americas and the bays filled with oysters filled with naturally occurring pearls. Those pearls had an irritant that naturally made its way inside the muscle of the oysters started it producing layer upon layer of nacre which continued to build until the oyster was removed by men.

Now day's pearls that are affordable are **cultured**. Which means that mature oysters are harvested from a riverbed or ocean: A small round bit of oyster shell is inserted into the muscle and the same nacre producing activity begins building a pearl over a period of 10 months to 3 years.

Man-made or faux pearls are produced when a round glass bead is covered with iridescent fish scales that generate a pearly finish. When you rub one of these beads against your front teeth, they feel smooth. Whereas when you do the same with a cultured pearl, the nacre coating feels slightly gritty against your tooth.

<p>Pearls are the last on and off when dressing and undressing.</p> <p>Any alcohol-based products can dull the pearl luster (makeup, hairspray, perfume, etc.).</p> <p>The acids in our body oils can build up on our pearls. Wipe with a soft cloth or wash with a mild soap.</p> <p>Never use an ultrasonic cleaner.</p> <p>It can damage the pearl and wash out the color if dyed.</p>	<p>A knot tied between each pearl keeps the pearls from scratching each other.</p> <p>It also prevents you from loosing all the pearls if a necklace or bracelet breaks.</p> <p>Keep pearls separate from the other gemstones in your jewelry case to prevent scratching. Or store your pearls in separate silk pouches.</p> <p>Restring every 2 years.</p>
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Man-made pearls, such as your standard Mardi-gras beads will feel room temperature when you pick them up. Cultured pearls will feel cold, especially when in an air-conditioned room.

Pearls need to be the last thing you put on after you have dressed, applied makeup and fixed your hair. Hair styling products, deodorant, fragrance and any alcohol-based spray will break down the luster and finish on a pearl causing it to look pitty because the nacre layers will begin to peel off. The acid in our natural occurring body oils can build up on pearls which can make them look dull. It is best to wipe them off with a soft cloth or wash with a mild soap to remove a build up on the pearl surface. Do not dip in an ultrasonic cleanser, the damage would be immediate.

Your more expensive pearls will have a knot tied between each pearl bead. This prevents them from scratching each other. Also if you break a strand, you would only loose one pearl instead of all the pearls in the jewelry piece. Store your pearl pieces in separate silk pouches or lined jewelry box dividers so that harder gemstones you own do not scratch the pearls either.

Start noticing the variety of pearls you see in stores and catalogues. Because China has improved the quality of their cultured pearls and have more pearl farms than another other country (even Japan), pearls are now affordable and will be available in more stores than ever before.