

## **THE ORIGINAL**

Mikimoto, The Originator of Cultured Pearls since 1893, has forged a proud legacy of unique design and is internationally respected and revered for its dedication to beauty and quality. Offering the world's finest selection of cultured pearl jewelry, the Mikimoto name is synonymous with unparalleled expertise and service at every stage.

In 1893, Kokichi Mikimoto successfully created the world's first cultured pearl, launching today's cultured pearl industry and making cultured pearls available to women all over the world. For 116 years, Mikimoto jewelry has possessed a timeless quality: a perfect balance of tradition and innovation, always appropriate, always in style. Absolute attention to every detail results in jewels admired around the world, from generations past and for generations to come.

## **K. MIKIMOTO & CO., LTD.**

K. Mikimoto & Co., Ltd. is the world-renowned Japanese jewelry brand founded by Kokichi Mikimoto in 1893. Mikimoto (America) Co., Ltd. is the company's American subsidiary with offices in New York City. The legendary Mr. Mikimoto was the first to develop a technique for the cultivation of pearls, and his namesake company remains the world leader in superior-quality cultured pearls. Mikimoto is internationally renowned and respected for its product design, crafting techniques and strict quality control.

## **HISTORY**

After many years of trials and tribulations, Mr. Mikimoto succeeded in creating the world's first cultured pearl in 1893. He then sent artisans on missions to Europe to master the techniques of jewelry production and design. This knowledge, supplemented by the Japanese aesthetics of form, line and workmanship, produced the distinctive originality of Mikimoto designs. In 1899, equipped with his first collection, Mr. Mikimoto opened the first Mikimoto Pearl Store, Japan's first specialty pearl shop, in Tokyo's Ginza district. After improving his cultivating and harvesting techniques, Mr. Mikimoto was able to ship his product overseas, making cultured pearls available to women around the world.

## **THE CULTIVATION PROCESS**

Pearls are formed naturally when an intrusion such as a shell fragment or grain of sand, lodges inside the oyster's shell. The oyster surrounds this irritant with a protective veil of calcium carbonate, called nacre, to form a pearl. The process of cultivating pearls mimics nature's process. A nucleus, made of pig-toe shell, is manually inserted into only the healthiest oysters. This process is what distinguishes a cultured pearl from a natural pearl. When the oysters are returned to the sea in wire mesh baskets, nature takes over, coating the nucleus with pearly layers of nacre.

## **TYPES OF PEARLS**

The various types of pearls differ in their luster, their mysterious colors and their wide variety of appearances, depending on the type of oyster that produced them.

Akoya Cultured Pearls: Akoya pearls are produced by Akoya oysters in Japan, with sizes ranging from 3-10mm. The varieties of colors of these pearls include white, cream, pink, green, silver, and gold. Akoya pearls are known for their high luster and rich color.

South Sea Cultured Pearls: South Sea Pearls are large pearls, generally 9mm or larger, produced by the *Pinctada Maxima* oyster in the warm waters of the South Seas, in Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines. The color of South Sea pearls is determined by the type of oyster that produces the pearl. White South Sea pearls are produced by silver-lipped pearl oysters. Golden pearls are produced by the golden-lipped oyster. Their warm, natural golden color is said to be rarer than gold itself.

Black South Sea Cultured Pearls: Black South Sea pearls are produced by the *Pinctada Margaritifera* oyster. These naturally black pearls come from Tahiti and Okinawa, with sizes starting at 8mm. Their color is a combination of blue, green and violet tones with peacock green being the most popular.

Conch Pearls: These are natural pearls harvested from Queen conch, which lives in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. The highest-quality examples are characterized by a distinctive 'flame structure' that gives the appearance of a fire burning on the surface.

## **STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE**

As the Originator of Cultured Pearls, Mikimoto maintains the strictest quality standards. Of all the cultured pearls harvested annually, only a small percentage meet Mikimoto's exclusive standard of excellence, the standard that distinguishes Mikimoto pearls from all others. This grading system, unique within the cultured pearl industry, is based on the luster, color, shape and surface perfection of each pearl. The Mikimoto pearl grading scale is the only qualified system which accurately and consistently defines these factors by four individual grade categories.

No one factor can solely represent the worth of a pearl, but luster and surface perfection are key factors in grading a pearl. There are four Mikimoto grades: A, A+, AA and AAA, with AAA being the highest quality. There are also four sub-grades: A1, A+1, AA1 and AAA1. The "1" represents a slightly more blemished surface.

## **PEARLS IN THE JEWELRY MARKET**

"I would like to adorn the necks of all the women of the world with pearls," Kokichi Mikimoto said shortly after he succeeded in culturing a pearl. He seemed to be rambling on about an unachievable dream. However, the elegant beauty of Kokichi's cultured pearls was eventually recognized by women throughout the world, and his wish was fulfilled, as the name "Mikimoto" became well-known around the globe. Mr. Mikimoto's success of culturing pearls made them accessible to women everywhere, effectively creating an entire industry. Today, pearls have evolved from a trademark of nobility to an icon of style, exuding a timeless elegance that will remain fashionable for decades.

For more information and store locations please visit [www.mikimotoamerica.com](http://www.mikimotoamerica.com), or become a fan on Facebook. To view the latest Mikimoto jewelry collections, please visit [www.mikimotoamerica.com/2010catalog](http://www.mikimotoamerica.com/2010catalog).

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