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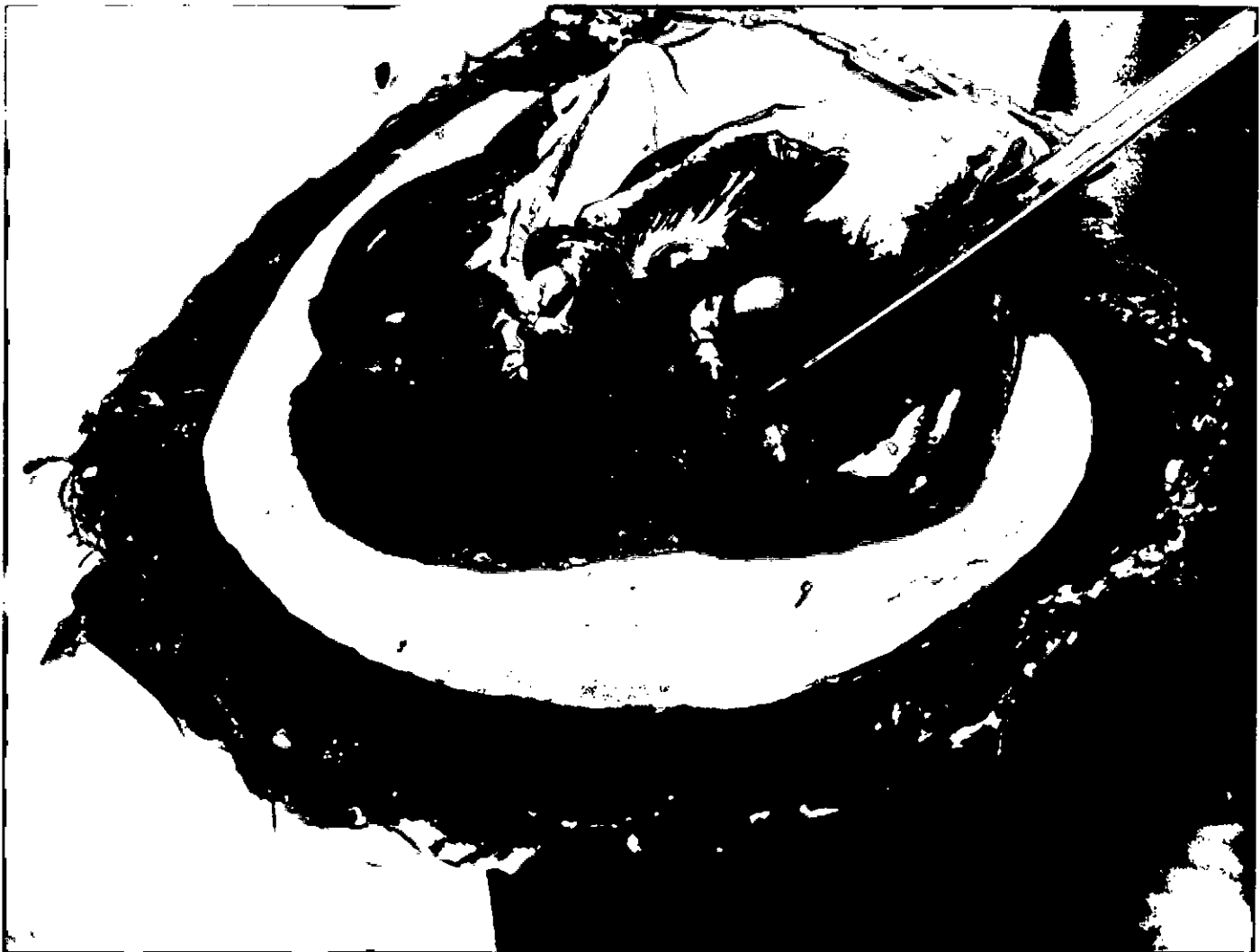


# PEARL WORLD

*The International Pearling Journal*

**From the turquoise waters  
of the Cooks comes a new  
brand of black-lip SSP:**

**AVAIKI**  
**Cook Islands pearls**



## EDITORIAL

**P**roducing this issue must have been— for a hen— like laying a 13-pound egg: it was an excruciating process. Maybe the next one will be easier, as we hope to cover (as we usually have) the goings on at the Tucson Gem Show in early February.

Several long, old-time friends contributed major articles in this issue: Jeweler and the Cook Islands, and we were happy to see them back after quite some absence from our pages.

In redoing this issue over and over again, we were forced to drop a few articles we had originally started out with.

One was a longtime favorite, "Scanning the Pearl World," in which we chronicled the good, the bad and the ugly of current ventures in pearldom... such as the upheaval in Tahiti over the arrest of Gaston Flosse on corruption charges, and the problems of a publically-traded Australian pearling company is facing due to seemingly greatly overin-

flated market value statistics which may have unduly enticed investors.

By the bye, both of these topics were brought to mind by blogs and/or mentions in an always-interesting website, *www.pearl-professor.com*, which we recommend as required reading from time to time for keeping abreast of behind-the-headlines pearling matters worldwide.

Another article we had to excise was one on nautilus pearls, occasioned by a dear friend's recent acquisition to his (and his wife's) unusually eclectic collection.

And yet another on an unexplored niche of the pearl world (again, suggested by another relatively recent addition to this friend's pearl cache) called *mustika pearls*. We shall try to carry on with coverage of many of Steve Metzler's unusual pearly wonders in the next issue.

**S**poradic reports coming in to our central command post are trying diligently to indicate that the outlook for the future in pearling is looking brighter. We only hope that this isn't a case of whistling in the graveyard, as snapshots of how pearl-ers are faring do

not cause somersaults of joy. As the Pearl Professor opined recently:

*The global economic crisis has left few untouched. Producers around the globe have covered their grafting tables, pulled their shell and switched off the lights. As wholesale demand decreased, the unstoppable pipeline glut kept growing, pushing pearl prices [down further] to unsustainable levels.*

*Whilst many believe the worst is now behind, producers struggling to hold their footing will be among the last to see the recovery.*

*In West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, 33 of 36 cultivators have stopped or nearly stopped producing. Production has dropped to 200 kilograms from an annual average of 1.2 tons. This has followed a drop in price from Rp 135,000–1.5 million per gram to a paltry Rp 35,000–Rp 300,000 per gram.*

*These prices fall far short of sustainability as prices are well below production cost.*

*The future promises to be difficult for the remaining producers, and those that close may or may not ever return. Without market correction, they won't have any reason to.*

**D**espite this current gloom, we wish all our readers a far Happier New Year. It will be nice to see the year 2009 disappear in our rear-view mirror.



K. Obuchi • President

R. Torrey • Editor

P. Grella • Production Supervisor

P. Brucher • Production Manager

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The rare golden Philippine South Sea pearl from the waters of Palawan, Southern Philippines, is the dazzling result of nature's handiwork and judicious human intervention.

## THE FABULOUS GOLDEN PEARLS OF THE PHILIPPINES A LUSTROUS FUTURE

**W**ith lessons learned from the financial crisis, renowned Philippine pearl producer Jewelmer is poised to take on the challenge of bringing even higher-quality, more environment-friendly gems to the world market.

In times of crisis, sales of what are perceived to be "luxury" items inevitably go down, as people hang on to their money for more basic needs, to keep up with increasing costs of commodities, or to save for

rainier days.

Worldwide sales in luxury items, including jewelry and high fashion, were estimated to have gone down by some 30% in the last year, and the global pearl market was not spared in 2008.

In Chinese, however, the written character for "crisis" is the same one for "opportunity."

Even before the return of some stability to the economy and optimism among financial analysts, more proactive

companies have managed to weather the storm by taking the time to assess their situation, and find creative solutions to their most pressing issues.

Take the case of Jewelmer International Corporation in the Philippines, renowned pearl farmers, designers, manufacturers and sellers... one of the world's top suppliers and producers of cultured South Sea pearls. For the prestigious

"Jewelmer" to page 10

# THE LURE OF THE CONCH

**C**lick on *Pearl-Guide.com* and search for "conch" and you'll find a concise description of this rare and beautiful gem:

## Conch Pearls Defined

A Conch Pearl is a non-nacreous, calcareous concretion produced primarily by the Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*). Conch pearls often exhibit a flame-like pattern due to concentrically arranged calcium carbonate platelets in a lamellar fashion.

## Conch Pearls, The Pearl That's Not Really A Pearl, in the Technical Sense

Conch pearls (pronounced "konk") contain no nacre, so technically they are not actually pearls at all. Instead, the gems are calcareous concretions, similar to kidney stones in humans. They are produced by the Queen conch mollusk (*Strombus gigas*), which lives primarily in the Caribbean near southern Florida.

## Conch Pearls Are A Very Rare Occurrence

No one has quite yet devised a foolproof method for culturing conch pearls\*, so every one you see will be a natural pearl. Therefore, they are extremely rare and valuable. It is estimated that only one

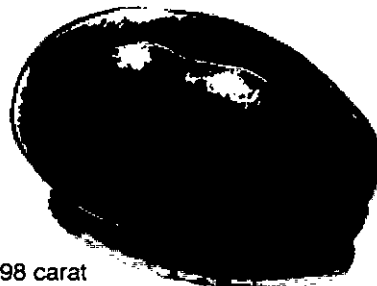
in 10,000 conchs produces a pearl, and that less than 10% of those are of gem quality.

## Conch Pearls Are Nature's Surprise

Since the meat of the Queen conch is prized as food, it is generally harvested by fishermen, rather than being sought for its pearls. The pearls tend to be "by-products" of the harvest, discovered by the fishermen as they clean their catch.

## Conch Pearls, Small But Pretty In Pink

Conch pearls are usually small in size -- 3 millimeters or less -- and baroque or oval in shape. Their colors are generally pink, yellow, brown, white, or golden. Pink (or a salmon-colored orange-pink) is generally the most sought-after color, while white and brown are relatively rare.



A 3.98 carat conch pearl, priced at \$3,582, courtesy of *PearlParadise.com*

## Conch Pearls Have A Flame Structure

In addition to its striking colors, the conch pearl often has another important surface feature called a "flame structure," which is a unique pattern in the coloration. The flame structure generally appears in the pink or white-pink pearls, although the other colors sometimes also exhibit it.

## Be Careful, The Color Of Conch Pearls Can Fade

An important fact to remember, if you are considering purchasing a conch pearl, is that its colors tend to fade significantly over time. Experts are not completely sure why, although sunlight is often cited as at least one factor in the fading. Thus, it's recommended that conch pearls be worn primarily in the evening and not exposed to excessive sunlight.

## Finding Pairs Of Conch Pearls Is Extremely Rare

Since conch pearls are naturally both rare and unique, finding matching pearls for sets, earrings, strands, etc., is extremely difficult, thus significantly increasing both the cost and the value of such sets.

"Conch" to page 15

**T**he conch pearl has always been an intriguing gem. May one call these non-nacreous concretions pearls? I've always thought so. They are beautiful in their own right, but information and research has been sparse at best. I believe the only real account of the gem is in *The Pink Pearl*, by Bari and Federman.

Thanks to Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, we may soon learn much more about this elusive gem. Using modified conventional techniques of seeding both freshwater and salt-water mollusks, efforts to culture both beaded and non-beaded conch pearls in the *Strombus gigas* have proven successful.

The research conducted was not secret, as the technique was published years ago. In order to graft the *Strombus gigas*, it is first necessary to relax the snail so

the innards become exposed. The locations of the grafts remain proprietary, a possible insinuation that the gonad is not necessarily host to the beaded pearl.

With the advent of this culture technology, will we see a shift from the natural to the cultured? Will non-beaded cultured specimens will differ in any way from their natural counterparts? A report is soon to be published in *GIA's Gems & Gemology*. The market for natural conch will undoubtedly remain. Natural pearls, now overshadowed by the science of periculture, have always maintained a degree of market share. What will become of those who've hoarded conch pearls over the past decade, watching their investment flourish with the consistently rising values of this non-culturable pearl?

Source: *The Pearl Professor*

## COOK ISLAND SSPS UNDERGO REVITALIZATION AND RENEWAL

**R**emote purity is one of the slogans for the new Avaiki Cook Islands Pearls brand launched recently – a description fitting the high quality pearls that will soon be marketed to the world under the new name, reports Cook Islands News

The brand is part of a strategy formed under government's Cook Islands Pearl Authority (CIPA) and industry members with the aim of renewing the economy of the northern Cook Islands.

Not long ago, Avaiki was officially unveiled and launched by deputy prime minister and minister for CIPA, Sir Terepai Maoate.

"For us to be here today to mark and celebrate the brand launch of premium Cook Islands pearls is a momentous occasion for the country, our pearl industry and the Cook Islands Pearl Authority," he told around 100 guests.

"Today marks how close we are to enjoying the full success of a journey that began three years ago. It is a journey that I have fully supported from the outset, so for me personally, it is quite overwhelming to stand before you this evening and be able to say – much has been achieved, we have done well. Having faith in the potential of our pearl industry, the ability of our farmers and the role of the Pearl Authority and what could be achieved by working together has paid off."

Sir Terepai credits Manihiki pearl farmers, many who were present at the launch, for much of the achievements so far. "Nothing could have been achieved without the support and cooperation of the most important contributors to this entire equation – the pearl farmers themselves."

Earlier this year Sir Terepai went to Manihiki and held talks with the farmers. "This visit was extremely valuable as it served to remind me yet again of the difficulties that a small, isolated community faces every day. Our pearl farmers have to be amongst the most hardworking in our country. Pearl farming is not for the lazy, weak or fainthearted."

Sir Terepai noted that during its heyday the industry contributed over \$18 million annually to the economy. "Today we have a group of about 30 resilient, industrious and committed pearl farmers continuing to contribute over \$2 million to our economy. To me, that is still a tremendous achievement for a tiny island

and such a small group of people," he said.

Sir Terepai said the repositioning of the country's premium pearls on the international market comes after two years of work by CIPA and consultant Brian Richards. He says CIPA will work closely with CI Tourism to promote Avaiki pearls.

"Our pearls will be taken to the world. I have every confidence that we will succeed in rebuilding our pearl industry, we will see it grow and flourish and I know that confidence is shared by many in the industry," he said to much applause.

Chair of the CIPA board, Tina Browne, also made an address at the launch saying the industry that began in the 1980s will now get a boost from the new marketing strategy. She said one of the most

important aspects of the work carried out by CIPA over the past two years is that pearl farmers reached a consensus to support these efforts along the way.

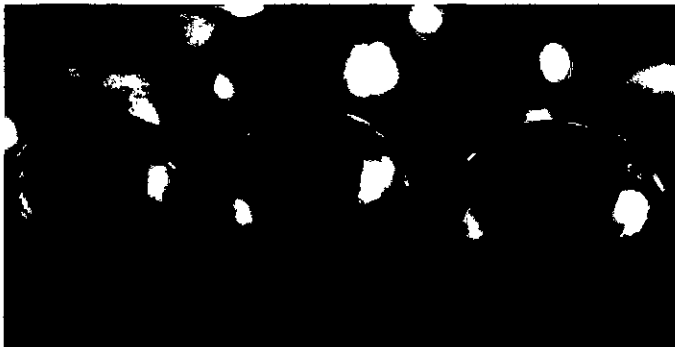
She also said key to the collaborative approach to reforming the industry is the commitment by all stakeholders. "The farmers agreed with our vision to work together to rejuvenate the pearl industry. Another important step was the formation of the Manihiki Farmers Association."

She said CIPA's primary objective since 2006 was to arrest further decline in pearl production and the continued exit of farmers from the industry as well as to initiate efforts to revitalize and grow the industry.

Consultant Brian Richards was also at the launch to describe the branding process. He says the next step is to set up a network globally that will carry the Avaiki name to the world. Retailers that meet the Avaiki standards can use the brand as well as international wholesalers selected by CIPA.

Richards says it will take time for Avaiki to be recognized globally, but using the branding and marketing strategy CIPA has adopted will no doubt see this achieved in the future.

The launch of Avaiki at Crown Beach featured the song and dance of the Manihiki people courtesy of its Te Maeva Nui team and a jewelry show featuring exquisite items from Bergman & Sons, Moana Gems and Paka's Pearls and TAV's fashion.



### "Cook Islands" from page 5

Avaiki was announced as the new brand name for Cook Islands pearls at a special launch at Crown Beach Resort. Deputy prime minister and minister for the Cook Islands Pearl Authority Sir Terepai Maoate (CIPA) officially unveiled Avaiki to around 100 guests. "The name reflects Polynesia, her peoples and our aspirations. It has deep significance for all us Polynesians," he said.

Avaiki is known as a name for 'homeland' or 'homeland of the ancestors' and it is hoped that the brand will gain international recognition over the next few years.

Sir Terepai said the journey to launching the brand as part of reviving the pearl industry has not been easy going.

"Three years ago our pearl industry was nose-diving and it became apparent to me that there would be nothing to salvage if government stood by and merely watched its demise. We had to make a serious commitment to our pearl industry and its potential to save it and the government did this through the resurrection of the Cook Islands Pearl Authority," he said

Sir Terepai described a vision formed in 2006 to see the ailing industry lifted out of its decline, inject new life into the industry and to motivate and unite

pearl farmers under an association.

CIPA chief executive George Ellis was pleased to announce the signing of the first local retailer to use the brand name – Moana Gems. He says pearl retailers and wholesalers here and abroad will be able to use the brand name as long as they adhere to its strict standards. The new brand applies to A, B and C grade pearls that have been nurtured in the lagoon for at least 18 months to ensure a thick coating.

Consultant Brian Richards, who helped engineer the new brand, says it's been a very worthwhile exercise. He feels the pearl producing families of Manihiki deserve a much higher price for their pearls and believes this can be achieved with buy-in on the new brand name.

He said the aim of the branding exercise is to reposition Cook Islands pearls on the global market to give them real visibility that will distinguish them well-apart from other pearls. Avaiki pearls will be marketed for their rarity, thicker nacre (coating), high luster and the array of colors they come in.

While CIPA knows it will take time for industry members to sign on to use the new brand name, they have so far had positive feedback from farmers and retailers who are keen to take advantage of the promise it offers.

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## Brand Launch Promises New Beginnings for Cook Islands Pearls

The recently launched new brand of Cook Islands pearls is expected to mark an important turning point in the industry. A milestone on the road to improving the longer-term wellbeing of the small communities on the isolated atolls of the Northern Group and the Cook Islands economy as a whole.

The new brand, known as Avaiki, reflects the long and proud heritage of pearling in the Cook Islands. A heritage which started with mother-of-pearl shell exports since the mid 1800s and cultured pearl farming since the 1970s. The word "Avaiki" denotes the ancestral and spiritual homeland of the Polynesian people as well as evoking its seafaring heritage as the ancient Polynesians traversed and settled the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean over nine centuries ago.

The Avaiki brand, backed by a fresh set of underpinning performance standards, will aim to lift the price points of qualifying pearls and improve financial

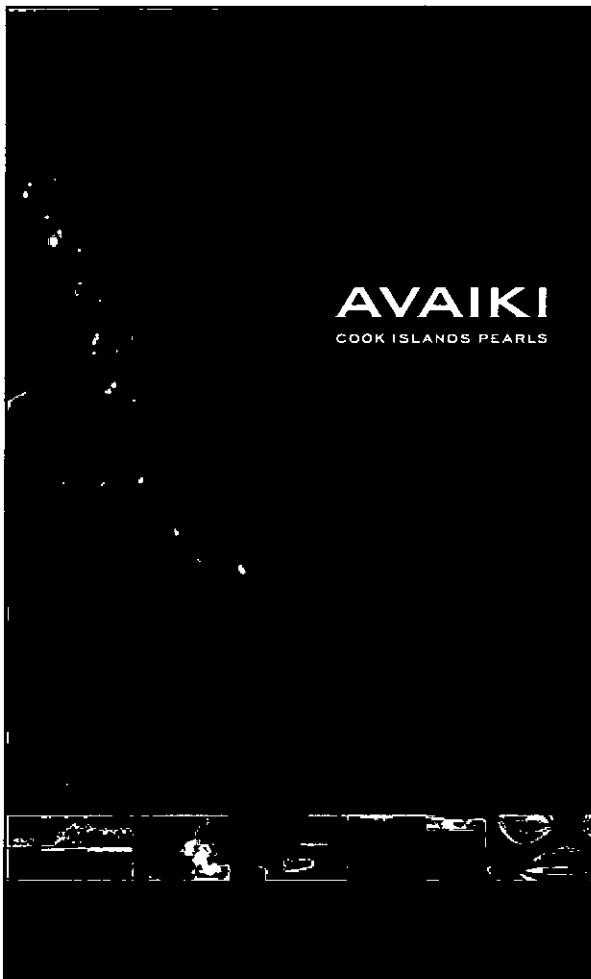
returns to all industry players, including pearl farmers on these small isolated atolls.

Avaiki will be used as the brand for premium Cook Islands pearls, and will target high-end jewellers and retailers in key international markets. Only pearls that are graded A-B-C and meet stringent performance criteria will be eligible for the new Avaiki brand. To maintain its premium status, accredited farmers, retailers and distributors handling the brand will also be required to meet a set of quality benchmarks.

The forging of the new brand follows an extensive period of pearl industry reorganization. It also marks a new level of collaboration in an industry that has suffered many setbacks over the past seven years and, until recently, operated on a very ad hoc basis.

According to brand and marketing consultants, Brian R. Richards Ltd., who were engaged to advise the Cook Islands Pearl Authority (CIPA) on the project, the time spent getting the industry in shape has been well worth it. "I think it's fair to say that

"Cook Islands" to page 8



### *Expressions of Interest*

#### **A rare opportunity** International Wholesaler/Marketers

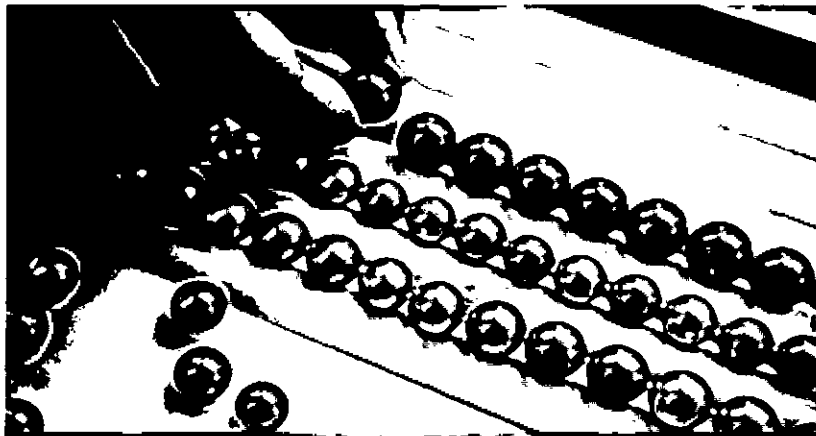
Avaiki is an exciting new brand of sustainably harvested pearls of quality, integrity and rare depth. We require a small number of Wholesaler/Marketers to work collaboratively to assist us in bringing these special pearls to the attention of leading jewellers in the world's major markets. The selected individuals or companies will be given exclusivity for a substantial geographic area for a set period.

The people we are seeking will have substantial experience in dealing with the international jewellery trade and have good access to a network of premium jewellery customers. Enthusiasm, long-term commitment and the willingness to be part of a carefully planned global brand strategy will be qualities Avaiki will also be seeking. For more details regarding this unique opportunity please email [enquiry@avaikipearls.com](mailto:enquiry@avaikipearls.com)

### "Cook Islands" from page 7

when we were asked almost two years ago to come up with some marketing solutions to lift the industry out of the doldrums, we knew it was going to entail much more than a straightforward marketing exercise. Fundamental industry change would be required before any new brand could see the light of day", stated Brian Richards.

The industry reforms have focused on the island of Manihiki which produces 95% of the pearl crop. With a combined effort from CIPA, the Manihiki Pearl Farmers Association, the Ministry of Marine Resources and the Manihiki Island Council, the industry for the first time now has a common grading system and a comprehensive Lagoon Management Plan to maintain the integrity of their key resource.



The Avaiki brand will be managed by CIPA, the national agency responsible for promoting the sustainable development of the industry. According to George Ellis, CEO of CIPA, the Avaiki brand development is a vital part of the strategy to rejuvenate a pearl industry which has experienced major setbacks in recent years from cyclones, a bacterial disease outbreak and falling world prices. Cook Islands pearls are produced from the "black lip" (*Pinctada margaritifera*) oyster.

"Our pearl production has suffered in recent years and is 'way down from what it used to be. We are trying to rejuvenate it because it is an important source of income and employment for the people of these small and isolated communities. If we fail, people will pack up and leave and these communities will die", said Ellis.

Ellis stated that CIPA recognized the challenge and hard work ahead to have the brand established successfully in light of the current economic climate, global over production and falling pearl prices. "We will not compete on volume but will seek to develop new partnerships that recognize and will promote the quality, rarity and

integrity of a modest but premium pearl crop from the Cook Islands", said Ellis.

The Avaiki brand will be backed by new performance standards, such as requiring qualifying pearls to be grown for a minimum period in order to attain a desired nacre thickness as well as having them graded by accredited graders under a new and uniform grading system.

The intention is to build a new brand-managed distribution system involving accredited farmers, retailers and distributors who are committed to maintaining a set of quality benchmarks that will not only enhance the integrity of the pearls in the mind of customers but also instill greater confidence in the Cook Islands as a reputable point of origin.

Farmers who wish to come under the Avaiki

brand are currently undergoing an accreditation process to evaluate their commitment to and compliance with environmentally sound lagoon and farm management practices. Likewise, the process to appoint accredited Avaiki retailers in the Cook Islands is underway. CIPA will soon be canvassing for expressions of interest from potential wholesalers and distributors overseas for appointment as an accredited brand user. (Ed: See ad, bottom of page 6.)

The new Avaiki brand and point-of-sale promotional collaterals were officially unveiled at a colorful launch event on September 10th in Rarotonga by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Sir Terepai Maoate K.B.E.

Pearl farmers, retailers and other stakeholders attended the event which also featured the cultural group from the island of Manihiki and a fashion show featuring the new Avaiki pearls. ♦

Source: Cook Islands Pearl Authority







**AVAIKI**  
COOK ISLANDS PEARLS



Far from the clamour of our everyday urban world, in the vast blueness of the Pacific, lies the pristine necklace of the Northern Cook Islands. The remote home of Avaiki pearls. From their clear depths, the profusion of green, blue, aubergine and silvery hues in Avaiki pearls capture the rich colours of the lagoon.

For discerning jewellers and jewellery buyers who demand beauty, rarity and integrity, Avaiki pearls have a special appeal. Only the highest grades of pearls sustainably harvested from the lagoon become Avaiki pearls. Their consistently deeper nacre creates higher lustre and resilience - a rare beauty to stand the test of time.

"Jewelmer" from page 3



30-year-old company, crisis response without the casualties boiled down to two imperatives: managing costs and focusing on the clients.

"In crisis, there is no time for fancy marketing strategy," says Jewelmer's Assistant Managing Director Pierre Fallourd. "It is time

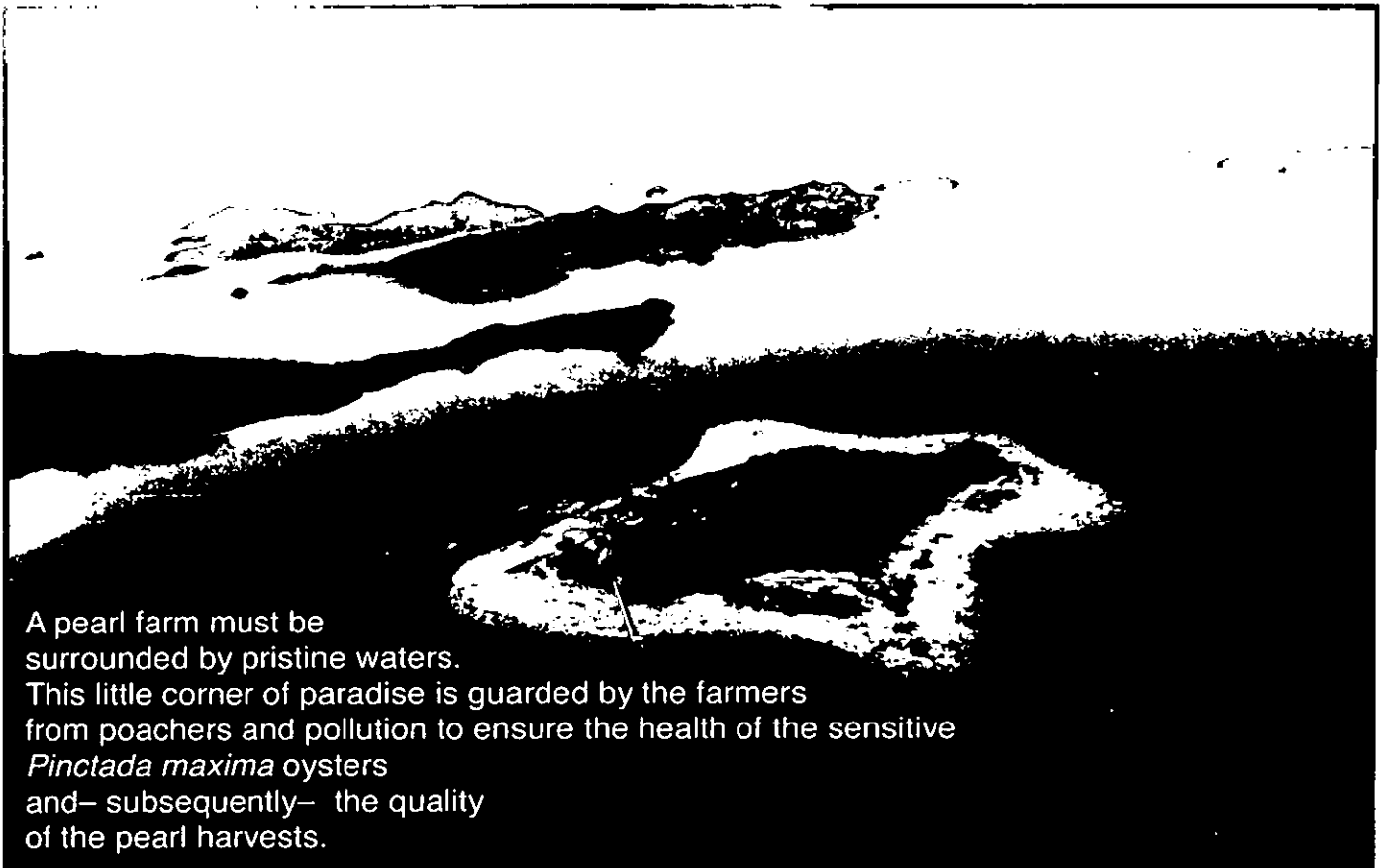
for straightforward, efficient action."

Managing costs meant streamlining operations for the company, which operates state-of-the art pearl farms in Palawan, southern Philippines. This involved steps like practicing more stringent energy conservation, such as preventive maintenance and proper operation of boats to maximize fuel efficiency, and education of workers to manage environmental resources.

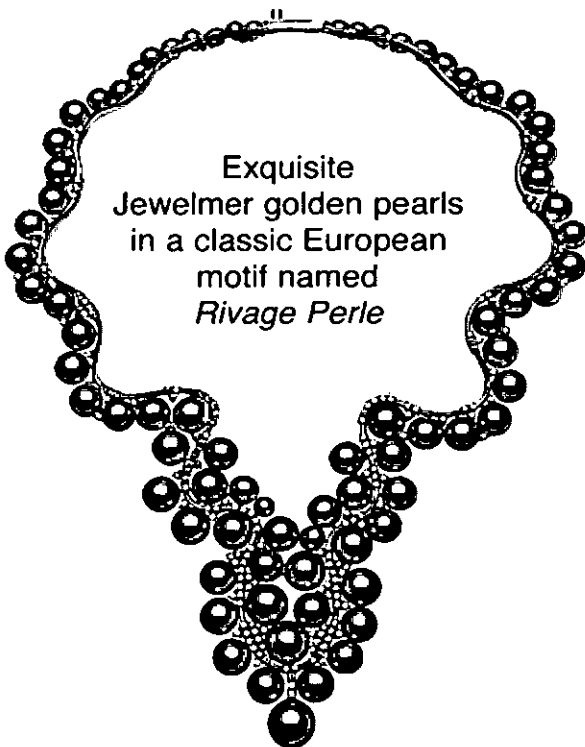
Left: Jewelmer's Managing Director, Jacques Branellec, grading the latest golden South Sea pearl harvest from the company's farm in Palawan.

Below: Jewelmer's one-of-a-kind fine Philippine South Sea pearl jewelry is the collaboration of European design sensibility and Filipino craftsmanship. It is available in each of Jewelmer's 14 showrooms located in Metro Manila and in Metro Cebu.





A pearl farm must be surrounded by pristine waters. This little corner of paradise is guarded by the farmers from poachers and pollution to ensure the health of the sensitive *Pinctada maxima* oysters and—subsequently— the quality of the pearl harvests.



Exquisite  
Jeweler golden pearls  
in a classic European  
motif named  
*Rivage Perle*

“We lowered our expense and energy, while at the same time improving our farming techniques, so the recovery rate—the number of oysters that bear pearls—would increase,” says Fallourd.

At Jeweler, the farming process is already a unique and complex exercise, mainly because it is a non-extractive process that takes nothing from the ocean, and necessitates caring for the entire ecosystem in which the oysters are nurtured and the pearls grown. That translates into keeping the ocean clean and pollution-free, protecting other organisms that live there, and zealously guarding the area against destructive fishing methods.

The most beautiful of pearls need such ideal conditions to thrive, and it makes good business sense to be environmentally conscientious.

From the time the company was established in 1979 by partners Manuel Cojuangco, Jeweler’s President, and Jacques Branellec, Managing Director, it has evolved from a regular responsible enterprise to a true conservation steward and a partner to the community in which it operates, spearheading livelihood programs and educational campaigns and seminars.

“Jeweler” to page 12

“Jewelmer” from page 11

“Our farms are located in very remote, hard-to-access areas, as these are usually the more pristine and environmentally suited for our business,” wrote Cojuangco in a previous article for *Pearl World*. “As a result, we find that our task metamorphoses from one of building a functioning, harmonious organization to one of building a viable, thriving community in the fullest sense of the term.”

Indeed, keeping its environmental standards high has allowed Jewelmer to work efficiently with Mother Nature and minimize any losses or compromises in quality as well as output, while contributing to the all-important bigger picture. “Environmental measures will ultimately result in securing food supply for future generations,” seconds Branellec.

A reassessment of its own retail market, and a stepping-up of efforts to reach its hometown target buyer—the upwardly mobile, accomplished young Filipina out to buy herself a lovely piece of jewelry—have proven effective for Jewelmer.

At a time when other organizations were reeling, the company recorded a 17% increase in sales after the first half of 2009 and opened two new showrooms in Eastwood City Mall and Greenbelt 5, all prime commercial areas in Manila, with more slated to open in 2010.

Aside from catering to its wholesale market, Jewelmer conducted market research to



get some clearer directions in retail marketing.

The research offered a lot of lessons. The first was to always listen to the buyer, and the company spoke to clients to determine what steps to take in terms of marketing and merchandising.

The second lesson was in getting a clearer message across, which allowed the company to market pearls to women who were buying them as personal as well as practical long-term investments, as

classic fashion statements, and as prime, meaningful specimens of “deep luxury”—that is, environment-friendly gems that don’t harm the planet.

The third lesson demanded greater visibility for the product, which has led to aggressive marketing campaigns, participation in special events and fashion shows, and enlisting local celebrities to wear the pearls

With prices having stabilized by the third quarter “Jewelmer” to page 14



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"Jewelmer" from page 12

of 2009, Jewelmer is preparing itself to deal with a more dynamic, albeit vastly changed market.

Surprisingly, some high-end, entry-price items have been selling well, a merchandise category that was largely untapped in the past year.

The bestsellers, however, have been seemingly "safer" standards like basic pendants and earrings sets with more simple designs, probably considered more reasonable purchases in a time of tight finances and reined-in spending on jewelry.

The hierarchy of pearls is also more clearly defined, with South Sea pearls still considered the best, most high-end, and most desirable purchases. Tahitian, akoya pearls, and high-quality freshwater pearls come next in line.

In other words, consumers today really want to know what they are buying. "People are becoming faster, smarter, more organized, and have better knowledge of what they're buying, and this information goes all the way to the end consumer," says Fallourd. "There is less impulse buying; people are more informed."

A main source of such crucial information has been the

Internet, which actually grew as a sales channel during the crisis. The most cutting-edge digital marketing, public relations, and sales campaigns are now also electronic; Jewelmer's own website, [www.jewelmer.com](http://www.jewelmer.com), gets some 2,000 hits a month.

While pearls are now more accessible and increasing in popularity, both financial and natural resources are becoming



scarce. Production of pearls worldwide is going down, "and only good farmers will survive," says Fallourd.

An estimated 30% decrease

in production is anticipated in the next 12 to 18 months. That's not necessarily a bad thing, however, as focus will be more on quality than quantity.

Much like organic and artisanal farmers in the west who tend to small plots with excellent output, so will the more established pearl farmers opt to come up with less pearls, but at a better price, and with higher standards.

For both wholesalers and end consumers—such as the career woman who is mulling over buying herself a lustrous promotion present that she can eventually pass on to her daughter—the message is clear: there's no better time to buy than now.

Under such conditions, the pearl industry must rise to the challenge of producing a limited number of top quality gems for an increasingly discriminating market.

As a company with the knowledge and the experience, Jewelmer is in an excellent position to deliver South Sea pearls that are the products of expertise, environmental awareness, and harmony between the pearl farmers and nature.

It's a proposition that a woman of substance will find hard to resist, and a purchase that is bound to bring endless delight, in good times as well as bad. ❖

# THE PALAWAN PRINCESS



**B**onhams and Butterfields has auctioned off what is believed to be the world's second-largest documented pearl, a five-pound gem found off the coast of the Philippines that has been dubbed the "Palawan Princess."

The natural non-nacreous pearl was found in saltwater near the Philippines' Palawan island and "bears an uncanny resemblance to a human brain," an auction house representative said.

Both rare and immense, the gem is thought to be surpassed in size only by the "Pearl of Allah," an approximately 14-pound, 31,893.5-carat pearl that, like the Palawan Princess, was the product of the giant clam shell *Tridacna gigas* and was also found off the coastal waters of the Philippines.

The approximately 11,339-

carat Palawan Princess is a blister pearl measuring six inches in diameter and accompanied by the lower half of its original giant clam shell, which shows the point of attachment where the pearl formed. The pearl, which was on the auction block at Bonhams and Butterfields' early December auction of Natural History in Los Angeles, is valued at between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

"This is an once-in-a-lifetime look at one of nature's most unique treasures," said Mitch Jacobovic, director of EGL USA, one of the labs that was asked to examine the pearl, in a media release.

"A pearl this size is not only one of the largest ones we've ever seen, it is among the largest pearls ever seen anywhere." ♦

Source: [nationaljewelernetwork.com](http://nationaljewelernetwork.com)

"Conch" from page 4

## CULTURING THE CONCH

BOCA RATON, Fla., Nov. 9 (UPI) -- U.S. scientists say they have, for the first time, produced beaded and non-beaded cultured pearls from the queen conch (*Strombus gigas*).

Researchers from Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute say they've developed novel and proprietary seeding techniques to produce such cultured pearls.

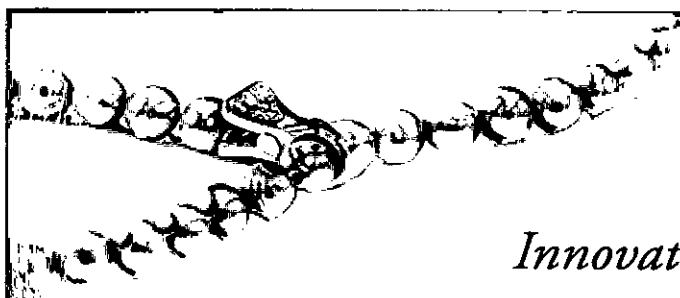
Assistant Professor Hector Acosta-Salmon and Megan Davis, the institute's director of aquaculture and stock enhancement, said they produced more than 200 cultured pearls using the techniques they developed. Prior to the breakthrough, no high-quality queen conch pearl had been cultured.

The scientists said their achievement opens a unique opportunity to introduce a new gem to the industry. They said their accomplishment is comparable to that of the Japanese in the 1920s when they commercially applied the original pearl culture techniques developed for pearl oysters.

"Perhaps the most significant outcome from our research is that the technique we have developed does not require sacrificing the conch in the process," said Davis. "The 100 percent survival rate of queen conch after seeding -- and the fact that it will produce another pearl after the first pearl is harvested -- will make this culturing process more efficient and environmentally sustainable for commercial application."

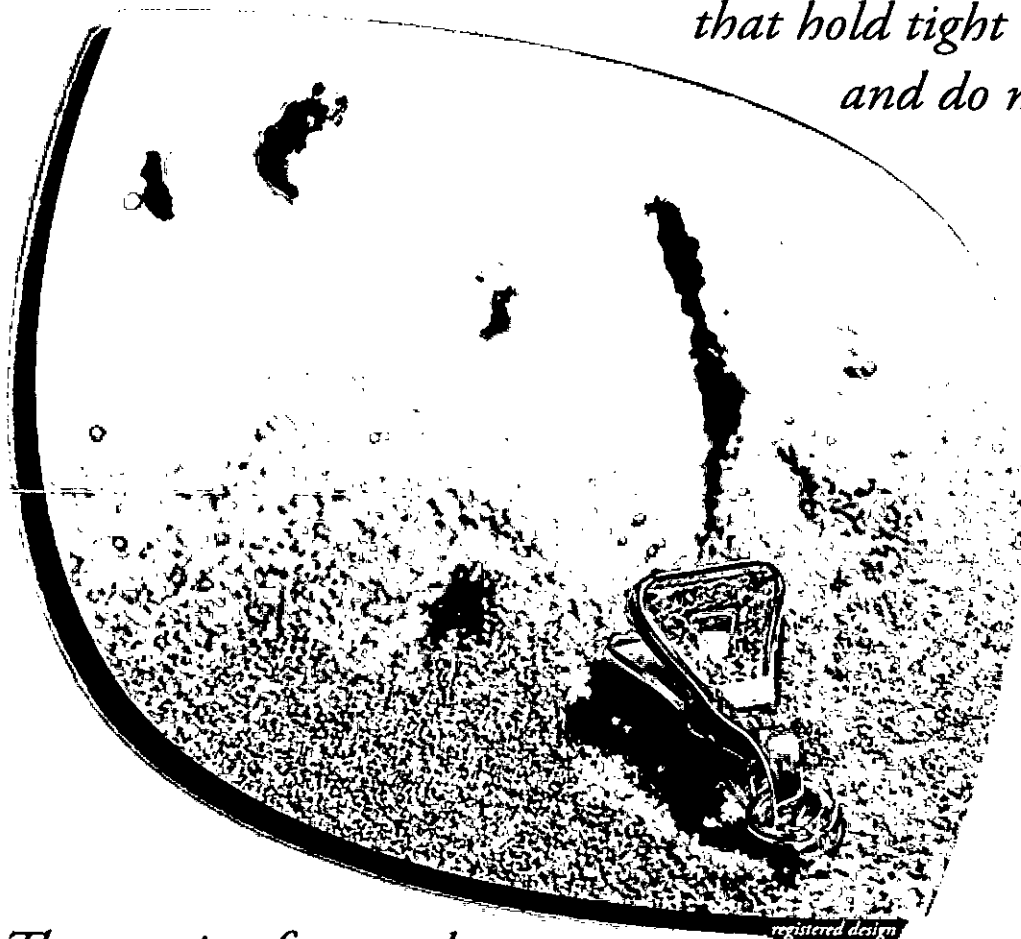
The research is to appear in an upcoming issue of the journal *Gems & Gemology*.

Source: UPI via AGTA Prism



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