



Fine, Sustainable Pearl Jewellery at

# Qlassico

by Priyanka Elhence

Trendsetting celebrities and famous jewellery houses the world over are increasingly favouring sustainable jewellery.

Saltwater Akoya, Tahitian, and South Sea pearls make Qlassico a sustainable, fine jewellery line that focuses on protecting the environment.

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- Chee Sheun



Qlassico, a Malaysian fine jewellery brand, believes that the value of jewellery goes beyond adornment. Rather, fine jewellery should be a source of inspiration and aspiration for women.

Pronounced as “Classy-Co”, Qlassico was founded in 2018 by sisters, Wong Chee Sheun and Wong Chee Yue. Growing up in a family of goldsmiths, the sisters coined the name of their brand from the word “Classy”, to embody the style, elegance, sophistication and significance that fine, quality jewellery holds for them. And instead of using the ‘C’, the ‘Q’ represents the Queen that they believe every modern woman should be.

Over 90% of pearls on the market today are cultured and produced through careful cultivation rather than harvested from wild molluscs. Pearl farming is one of the most sustainable forms of gemstone production, as it benefits marine ecosystems by requiring clean and pristine aquatic environments. Qlassico’s commitment to sourcing pearls from reputable manufacturers extends beyond just ensuring quality, as the brand is also committed to making positive environmental, social and economic impacts. Studies show that pearl farming helps protect the environment by keeping the water free from pollution. In areas where pearl farms are well-maintained, they help preserve ecosystems by using eco-friendly methods that protect the coral reefs as well as provide a safe and healthy environment for molluscs to thrive in.

This aligns with Qlassico’s commitment to ethical sourcing and environmental responsibility, appealing to consumers who prioritise sustainability. By offering alternative sources of income, pearl farming supports sustainable livelihoods, while working alongside tourism and fishing industries to benefit the (farming) community as a whole.

“As a fine jewellery company committed to responsible sourcing, we procure our pearls from manufacturers specialising in premium saltwater pearls, often at trade shows, who obtain their pearls directly from pearl farms in particularly renowned sources such as Akoya pearls from Japan, Tahitian pearls from French Polynesia, and South Sea pearls from the Philippines,” says Chee Sheun. “With cultured pearl farming, we can grow pearls without harming wild molluscs, which helps keep their populations healthy and protects the oceans.”

Pearls have long been associated with femininity and empowerment, making them a natural choice for Qlassico’s target audience of modern, inspiring women, symbolising strength and elegance. “Moreover, pearls possess a classic beauty and timeless allure that transcends trends and fads. Their inherent sophistication adds a touch of refinement to any piece of jewellery, appealing to individuals who appreciate understated elegance.”

Pearls are also highly versatile, effortlessly transitioning from day to night, from casual to formal occasions, making them suitable for a wide range of settings. “This versatility ensures that our pieces remain relevant and wearable in various contexts. The natural lustre and iridescence of pearls set them apart from other gemstones. Their subtle shimmer adds a touch of glamour without being overpowering, appealing to those who appreciate the understated beauty of natural materials,” shares Chee Sheun.

As part of its commitment to combating climate change, Qlassico also contributes 1% of its revenue to help fund next-generation carbon removal and support the development and scaling of carbon removal technologies. Removing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere is critical to counteract climate change, and Qlassico is also part of Stripe Climate (<https://climate.stripe.com/JEl8FE>), a coalition of businesses dedicated to accelerating carbon removal efforts through initiatives such as Climeworks and Charm Industrial. A fraction of every purchase from Qlassico helps scale new carbon removal technologies and the early adoption of these technologies helps drive down costs.

“There’s a myth that sustainable fine jewellery solely pertains to its environmental impact. But people don’t realise that it’s hard to track where the materials for fine jewellery come from. Without proper records, it’s tough to know if gemstones and metals were sourced ethically. But now, there are new ways to solve the issue of traceability in gemstone sourcing. Blockchain technologies can help trace where each gemstone comes from, starting from when it’s mined. For example, when a gemstone is mined, information about it, like where and when it was found, is recorded on a blockchain digital ledger. This information stays with the gemstone as it’s cut, sold to a jeweller, and eventually bought by a customer. So, customers can be more confident that their jewellery is responsibly sourced and authentic. While this technology is still not widely accessible, the jewellery industry is increasingly adopting these efforts to ensure transparency and ethical practices,” says Chee Sheun.

Environmental sustainability in the jewellery industry helps to minimise ecological footprints and conserve natural resources and ecosystems for future generations by using eco-friendly materials, reducing energy consumption, and implementing sustainable practices across the supply chain. Likewise, responsible mining practices include rehabilitating mined areas, minimising biodiversity impact, and promoting a positive environmental legacy, while conserving water and reducing carbon emissions. Opting for sustainable packaging



and adhering to recognised certifications and standards further enhance environmental sustainability efforts.

In addition to environmental concerns, sustainability for fine jewellery also spans social and economic concerns.

Social sustainability entails ensuring safe working conditions, fair wages and ethical labour practices, particularly in mining communities, where workers may face hazardous conditions. Additionally, promoting diversity and investing in training not only enhance worker well-being but also contribute to a more skilled and inclusive workforce. Supporting community development initiatives, like education and healthcare projects, further strengthens the industry’s social impact and fosters positive relationships with workers and local communities.

Finally, economic sustainability involves a commitment to supporting artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) communities and fostering local economic development. Many jewellery materials, including gemstones and precious metals, are sourced from ASM operations, particularly in developing countries. By providing fair prices for their products, investing in infrastructure and skills development, and facilitating access to markets, jewellery businesses can contribute to the economic empowerment of these communities. Additionally, supporting local artisans and craftsmen in regions with rich cultural heritage and artisanal traditions stimulates local economies and preserves traditional craftsmanship.



To make jewellery purchases more sustainable, consider the following:

- Recycled Materials**  
 Prioritise pieces made from recycled metals and gemstones, as they reduce the need for new mining, minimising environmental impact and helping resource conservation.
- Repurposing Existing Jewellery**  
 If you inherit jewellery with sentimental value but in a style that doesn't suit you, consider upcycling it with a jeweller. By redesigning the piece using the same gemstones and metals, you can create a new, personalised piece while reducing waste and supporting eco-friendly practices.
- Longevity and Durability**  
 Well-made, durable jewellery is essential for sustainable purchases, as high-quality timeless pieces ensure longevity, reducing the need for frequent replacements and promoting a more sustainable approach to consumption.
- Supporting Responsible Brands**  
 Supporting responsible brands not only promotes industry-wide change but also drives demand for sustainable options, contributing to positive environmental and social impact within the industry.

### The difference between Akoya, Tahitian and South Sea pearls

For classic designs, designers typically favour pearls with perfectly round or elegant drop shapes for timeless sophistication. In contrast, avant-garde or contemporary designs embrace non-traditional shapes and sizes, such as baroque pearls with their irregular forms.

#### Akoya Pearls

Classic white pearls renowned for their timeless elegance, perfectly round shape, exquisite shine, and valued place in the fine jewellery market.

- Origins:** Akoya pearls primarily originate from small Akoya molluscs in Japan, typically ranging from 3 to 5 inches in diameter.
- Characteristics:** Ranging between 2-11 mm, these pearls often display round shapes and come in pristine white or cream hues with delicate pink or green overtones.

#### Tahitian Pearls

Tahitian pearls encapsulate the ocean's mystique with their unique colours.

- Origins:** Tahitian pearls from French Polynesia are produced by the native black-lipped molluscs in the archipelago.
- Characteristics:** Typically ranging between 9-11 mm, these pearls come in a stunning array of colours, including grey, black, and brown, with beautiful blue, green, purple, yellow-green, or pink overtones.

#### South Sea Pearls

Prized for their remarkable size and captivating sheen, South Sea pearls are a top choice for elegant and prestigious jewellery.

- Origins:** South Sea pearls come from the large Pinctada maxima molluscs found in the South Seas, specifically in Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Philippines.
- Characteristics:** Prized for their large size and soft lustre, they come in different colours, from white to silver (produced by silver-lipped molluscs) and yellow to orangish-yellow (produced by gold-lipped molluscs).