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# Promoting and Protecting the Pearl for 40 Years

## Pearl Scene

**Posted:** October 3rd, 2006 02:44 PM PDT

In 1957, at a little restaurant on West 47th Street, a group of about 15 cultured pearl dealers got together to discuss problems arising out of the fast growing popularity of cultured pearls. Jewelry industry leaders like Louis Borelli, Jack Felsenfeld, Joseph D'Elia, the Goodrich brothers, Frank Mastoloni, Sr., Willie Arnold, Victor Ferrante, Jack Bienenfeld, Lou Rodin, Rene Schiff, Harry Robin, the Sand brothers, Adolf Kibitz,



© Photo by John Parrish

**Necklace with Tahitian and akoya pearls from Baggins, (877) 33-PEARL.**

Ernest Reuter, Edward Slutsky, David Bazellel, and Simon Liberman founded the Cultured Pearl Association to protect and expand the market for cultured pearls in America.

The Cultured Pearl Association has earned a leadership role in the jewelry industry, setting high standards for cultured pearls. In 1959, the association was instrumental in establishing a quality control and pearl inspection office in Japan. The following year the association, in conjunction with the Japanese Exporters Association, started a public relations campaign handled by TelePress Associates, to promote the beauty and rarity of cultured pearls.

From its inception, the Cultured Pearl Association has also been active in consumer protection. "The association has battled against deceptive advertising, preventing the use of terms like Majorca pearls, instant pearls, star of Siam pearls, premature cultured pearls, and the cultured pearl look to describe

imitation pearls," says Frank Mastoloni Sr., a former president and founding member of the association.

Today, as the Cultured Pearl Association of America approaches its 40th anniversary, the world of cultured pearls has expanded beyond the hopes of those industry pioneers, building on the foundation that they created. The pearl world has gotten larger, with the popularization of cultured pearls from Tahiti, China, Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

"When I entered the world of gemstones and cultured pearls 27 years ago it was all about Japanese akoya and a few interesting items from the South Seas," says Betty Sue King of King's Ransom, Sausalito, California. "Black pearls from Tahiti were in limited supply and were very pricey. Classic rounds with a few bohemian biwas tossed into the arena for variety was about it. Now pearls abound in colors. Lavender, pink, peach, blue, pistachio, golden, and chocolate to list but just a few of the exciting colors, notwithstanding overtones glowing with gold, bronze, and silver finishes. No longer simply rounds and baroque, petals and coins are the evolving lexicon of shapes."

The Cultured Pearl Association of America has gotten larger too, with more than 50 members whose influence and reach extends across the globe. Under president Sonny Sethi of Tara & Sons, New York, the association has undergone a reorganization in the past year to shift its focus to helping retailers promote pearls.

The association started with a new logo and a new director of marketing, Kathy Grenier, who also handles marketing for Imperial-Deltah, East Providence, Rhode Island. The association also produced a celebrity-packed *"Portraits in Pearls"* consumer guide to help retailers inspire their customers to become pearl collectors.

"We are in transformation and committed to a resurgence of a solid association where we can provide materials to support foundational pearl education for retailers and additionally multi-use collateral material to be shared with consumers," Grenier says. "Interest and enthusiasm is on the rise, people know how we really care and are creating an association that is doing good things to help members, sponsors, retailers, and sales associates to look at their pearl business in a new way."

Next year, the association will launch a pearl education CD and a retailer newsletter on pearl merchandising, trends, selling techniques, visual displays, and creating a successful pearl destination store.

"The Cultured Pearl Association will help create a dynamically growing pearl market for the next 40 years, too," says Sethi.

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