

The Galveston Daily



LUSTER IS THE VALUABLE ASSET:
... Joan Fox and pearl expert Lee G. Cass Jr.

TIPS FROM A VISITING EXPERT

Japanese Patience Reason Modern Wife Wears Pearls

By **BARRETT TEMPLE**
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Equipped with a "basic black dress" and a string of pearls, today's woman can go just about anywhere and feel right at home.

And today, according to Lee G. Cass Jr., pearl expert in town for two days, pearls are within the reach of anyone's pocketbook.

"In ancient times, pearls were treasured and were too rare for the purses of any other than royalty," he said.

"Thanks to the exceptional patience of the Japanese in discovering the process called culturing, pearls are within the reach of anyone."

Cass arrived in Galveston Monday and will be at E. S. Levy & Co. all day today showing the pearls of the Imperial Pearl Syndicate, Inc., offered for the first time in Galveston.

Biggest Question

Cass said the question most often asked by people unfamiliar with pearls is "Are cultured pearls real pearls?"

The pearl expert explained that cultured pearls are definitely genuine — the wild pearl is formed quite accidentally when a foreign particle becomes lodged in one special tiny area of the oyster's body, while the cultured pearl is

started when man implants a tiny pellet into the oyster.

"No expert can determine whether a pearl is "wild" or "cultured" unless X-rays are employed," he said.

Cass explained that pearls are presently cultured in Australia, Indonesia and Japan. These countries are good for pearl culturing because a cheap and ready labor force is available to do the work.

Two To Six Years

"It takes two to six years after seeding to produce a pearl," he said.

"The oysters have to be taken out of the water regularly and scraped by hand. If the temperature of the water goes down to 42 degrees the oysters go dormant so the oyster rafts have to be taken south to warmer water."

In addition, the oysters have to be guarded day and night as there is no way to mark them and thieving and piracy are common.

Cass said that often the curious are perplexed by the wide price variation of pearls. The most important factor is the pearl's lustre, he explained.

"The more lustrous the pearl the more beautiful it appears," he said.

"Unfortunately for the pocket-book, the most lustrous pearls are the rarest."

Next in importance to lustre is the size of the pearl. Again, Cass explained, the larger pearls are the rarest.

"Very large pearls come from very large oysters. As a pearl is formed with layer after layer of microscopic nacre increasing in size, it eventually kills the oyster just as a tumor does in the human body. When an oyster dies the pearl quickly disintegrates, becoming spongy and brownish within 48 hours."

One question has the experts stumped — why do pearls have different hues and colors?

"We are still completely in the dark," Cass said.

"It could be the temperature of the water during one of the layerings of nacre, different food the oyster eats or any one of a combination of factors."

Match Complexion

The range of hues available makes it possible to match the complexion tones of the pearls' owner.

"The ultimate aim is to have the color of the pearls complement the skin tones. When this is done, the pearl's lustre is seemingly enhanced and really comes alive," Cass said.

"One of the duties of a consultant like me is to attempt to match the color as well as the style of the necklace to the wearer's best advantage."

In recent years Imperial Pearl Syndicate has introduced the baroque pearl to America.

"They are the irregular, not the round ones, which have gained a raft of whole-hearted devotees," Cass explained.

He said that of every 100 oyster pearls harvested after five years of careful cultivation, three are round, 45 baroque and the rest unsalable.

"This preponderance of baroques affords us the opportunity to be very selective in that field and use only the most lustrous ones. Hence, longer lengths, multiple strands and other unusual fashion creations are possible without astronomical prices attached."

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