

# The World is your oyster

The choice of pearl jewellery, both in terms of design and in relation to the type, size and colour of pearls employed, has never been greater but keeping up with the latest developments can be tricky. JIB spoke to pearl expert Trevor Ellis of Nexus Pearls to discover what's new.

"The culturing of pearls is a constantly evolving process. The Japanese made a huge turn in the wheel of evolution when they perfected the process in the early 20th century, but in the last 15-20 years the Chinese have taken over their mantle and moved it on again and we are now seeing pearls in sizes, shapes and qualities that simply didn't exist twenty years ago," Trevor told JIB.

One of the main developments has been in the production of freshwater pearls which were traditionally considered inferior to their salt water cousins. "Freshwater pearls used to be small and shaped like rice crispies - but now thanks to new techniques and the hybridisation of mussel varieties to create bigger types - they can be up to 16mm in size and perfectly round, so to the untutored eye it can be difficult to distinguish them from the larger South Sea varieties and this is undoubtedly having an impact on the market," explains Trevor.

All cultured pearls are created by introducing a foreign body or nucleus (either a solid bead or some tissue) into the mantle tissue of an oyster or mussel. The creature then coats this with layers of mother-of-pearl or 'nacre' - a substance which occurs naturally inside its shell, to create a pearl. This process happens naturally in the wild and prior to pearl farming was responsible for the creation of

the now increasingly rare natural pearl. Generally speaking, the deeper the layer of nacre the greater the lustre of the pearl and the more its value.

"Freshwater pearls are wonderfully adaptable and seem to offer more possibilities in terms of shapes and sizes than pearls of seawater origin," says Trevor. One example of this is the fact that freshwater pearls have stolen the clothes of the Akoya pearl and can now be created using a mother of pearl bead nucleus.

Another interesting example of their adaptability is the now popular 'Keshi' pearl. Keshi pearls ('Keshi' means poppy seed in Japanese) are highly irregular in shape and resemble nuggets of hot metal dropped into water. They are produced in both oysters and mussels, as a by-product of the culturing process, but the Chinese have now discovered that if after harvesting a crop of pearls they return the mussels to the water they will create a second crop of Keshi pearls, without the need to introduce a new nucleus.

"It seems that the mussel has a cellular memory and continues to do what it did when the previous pearl was present despite the lack of the nucleus. This means that the second harvest of Keshi pearls is far closer to a natural pearl than one that has been nucleated," explains Trevor.



Chinese workers harvesting pearls © Nexus Pearls

## Colour

Once upon a time pearls were small and creamy or pinky white, now coloured pearls are all the rage. So where do these new colours come from? The answer is different types of oyster or mussel. The 'Black Lip' oysters of Tahiti and the Cook Islands give deep black/green, aubergine and pewter shades, while the 'Gold Lip' and 'White Lip' oysters give, as their names suggest, more golden or silvery pearls. South Sea pearls - the most valuable of all - tend to be silver/white to creamy champagne and gold. While Akoya (the original cultured pearl) tend to be white/pink/cream to silver grey. Freshwater pearls are generally white but can naturally be pink, peach, lavender or salmon.

However not all pearl colours are natural. At the cheaper end of the market some pearls are dyed or stained to produce different colours and the use of silver nitrate and other techniques to produce greys and blacks is common practice. Some pearls are also being irradiated or heated to create darker fancy pearls but it is too early days to know what the long term effects of this are likely to be.

With so much choice, how can the non-specialist manufacturer or jeweller know what pearls to

buy? "It all comes down to choosing a well-informed supplier you can trust. Some pearl suppliers, including ourselves, are happy to provide sales training and information to help staff get to grips with new developments. The market has never been stronger and consumers are undoubtedly open to the exciting new options available," says Trevor.

## Five reasons to think pearl

- With the current high price of gold, pearls are great value and provide stylish jewellery at competitive prices.
- Ethical jewellery is in the spotlight and pearls have great 'green' credentials as to farm pearls successfully the water must be completely pollution free.
- Pearls are naturally beautiful without the need for faceting or cutting.
- If they are looked after carefully, regularly re-strung and cleaned using only mild detergent pearls will last forever.
- Pearls offer are versatile and offer plenty of opportunities for complementary add-on sales.

### TYPES OF CULTURED PEARL

AKOYA	The original cultured pearl from Japan. Sizes are relatively small, 2-10mm and colours tend to be pale - cream, white/pink and silver.
SOUTH SEA	These valuable pearls from Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines are larger 10-22mm and range in colour from silvery white and cream to champagne and gold.
TAHITIAN	Tahitian pearls from French Polynesia and the Cook Islands are naturally dark, colours include black/green, aubergines and violet as well as browns and gold. Sizes are 8-18mm
FRESHWATER	These generally nucleus free cultured pearls are mainly from China. They come in many different shapes and sizes and in colours from white, peaches, pinks and lavender. Sizes 2-16mm or larger depending on the variety.
KESHI	Irregularly shaped 'blobs' of pearl that resemble hot metal dropped into water - Keshi can measure up to 20 mm across. Colours tend to be dependent on the mussel or oyster variety.



### PEARL QUALITY

The quality of a pearl depends on five criteria:

LUSTRE	This refers to the sheen of pearls. A good pearl should be deeply lustrous – the deeper the coating of nacre the better the lustre will be.
TEXTURE	Good pearls should ideally be flawless without any blemishes or dents
SHAPES	Pearls can be many different shapes but the most common are button, drop, round, oval and baroque (or irregular). Shape does not influence quality but perfect examples of each shape are more highly prized, although this is a matter of taste.
SIZE	The size of a pearl is measured in millimetres and tends to depend upon the size of the original nucleus and the time the pearl has had to develop.
COLOUR	Colour is a matter of fashion and personal choice. Deeper colours especially browns and greens are currently popular.

## HIGH SUMMER FROM MARTICK

Pride of place in Martick's new pearl collection for the 2007 summer season goes to this beautiful carved conch shell rose on a string of 10mm classic white pearls.

This pearl collection is the ultimate romantic accessory for the wedding season and is being embraced not simply by brides but by all women who want something a little different from their jewellery.

"Women have always valued the soft luminosity of pearls which so flatters the skin. Indeed, wearing the right size and colour pearls can take years off the wearer by illuminating the face as Queen Elizabeth the First, who wore ropes of them, famously discovered," says the company's MD, Julie Martick.

"Wearing pearls is certainly preferable to the modern anti-ageing alternatives such as botox, especially now there are such fantastic new pearls coming from the Far East in every shade imaginable," she says.

At Martick these pearls are mixed, matched and cleverly combined with silver Murano glass and/or semi precious stones to make brilliantly hued and beautiful adornments ideal for low summer necklines.

RRPs for the pieces featured are approximately £150 for the large necklace, £75 for the small and £25 for the earrings

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## NEXUS – THE FRESHEST NAME IN PEARLS!

2007 is turning out to be a very eventful year for the young Birmingham-based company Nexus Pearls.

Nexus Pearls started 2007 in style with its first ever stand at Spring Fair Birmingham. "We were very pleased with the response we had to our ranges", says director Trevor Ellis. "We picked up lot of new business both nationwide and overseas, and found particular interest in our high quality large freshwater cultured pearl and Tahitian cultured pearl strands. Our unusual and contemporarily designed jewellery pieces also received a lot of attention."

Established in 1998, Nexus has grown rapidly since the purchase of its four storey premises in Birmingham's historic Jewellery Quarter in 2005. The company is the Quarter's only dedicated pearl specialist, offering a range of strands from freshwater to South Sea, an extensive collection of clasps, pearl jewellery and loose pearls. In-house design and manufacturing are also carried out on the premises. It also benefits from Birmingham's manufacturing and supply status, attracting custom from all over the country.

Nexus also contributes to the promotion and development of pearls through its sponsorship of design competitions with the Birmingham School of Jewellery.

It is also strong on education and the development of point-of-sale information for retailers.

"We believe a lot of retailers are left bewildered, if not a little worried about the changes in the pearl market, particularly with developments and improvements in freshwater culturing, such as mother of pearl nucleation and nucleus free second harvest techniques" explains Trevor. "We spend time bringing them up to speed on these changes and helping them to profit from - rather than be afraid of - these evolutionary factors."

This year has also seen the forging of a joint venture for Nexus with a Chinese company based in Zhuji, the home of freshwater cultured pearls. This offers exciting new opportunities which Nexus will be developing over the coming months, in preparation for its international launch at IJL, where they will be on stand C245. The joint venture offices will be based in the new International Pearl and Jewellery Centre, in Shanxiahua just outside of Zhuji, when it opens this autumn.

"This is tremendously exciting both for us and for our customers. Having this association in China and being right at the heart of the new developments that are taking place there is will undoubtedly enable us to offer even more in terms of size, quality, variety and value" says Trevor.



### Latest designs

Nexus's summer collection is full of fun and colour. Many different types and shades of pearl are mixed with a range of precious metals, diamonds and coloured stones, as well as with various shades of leather, to create a comprehensive range of both fashionable and more traditional jewellery with wide appeal. Pieces include both stud and drop earrings, pendants, a huge choice of necklaces and many wristwear designs. RRP's range from £99 to £10,000.00 and beyond.

Nexus can also work with clients to help create bespoke pieces, and the company also offers a redesign and restringing service. If you would like to view the range, please call to arrange an appointment with a representative, who will be more than happy to visit your premises.

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*Pictures show:*

1. Black Tahitian cultured pearl and leather thong pendant in 18ct white gold with cognac diamonds and green amethyst. RRP £569.

2. Naturally pink, freshwater cultured pearl and leather thong pendant with 18ct white gold, amethyst, rose quartz, blue topaz, chalcedony and pink tourmaline RRP £559.

3. Keshi pearl and 14ct white gold necklace with a 'cascade' drop of diamonds. RRP £669.

4. Rows of naturally coloured freshwater and Tahitian pearls. RRP's from £49.

5. Baroque, multi-colour freshwater cultured pearl necklet with a two colour 18ct gold clasp.





## BLACK BEAUTIES

Nina Breddal, which has 30 years experience of manufacturing pearl jewellery, has extended its selection to include necklets of large size pearls together with optional pendant accessories. The pendants clip easily on and off the necklets to provide two very different looks when worn. The company anticipates high demand this summer for extra large black and multicolour

pearls. This stunning 9-10mm 'Peacock' pearl necklet has a RRP of £290 while the gold dropper pendant with 0.17ct diamond is £280. Matching earrings with 0.10 ct diamond in each setting are £270.

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## RED, VOGUE, BRIDES AND MORE...

Not only do retailers selling Amanda Cox Jewellery's popular 'Lily Collection' find that their customers keep coming back for more, they also have new customers beating a path to their doors thanks to the company's regular advertising campaign on behalf of stockists, in three of the UK's top glossy magazines.

The Lily Collection, which is available in both silver and gold, combines peacock black, silver grey, natural pink and white pearls in many shapes and sizes. New pieces are frequently added to the range which is now 28 pieces strong. There are rings,



earrings, bangles and bracelets to chose from, as well as more unusual pieces such as a tiara and a hairpin and cufflinks and tie tacks for men.

RRPs range from approximately £36 for a silver tie tack to as much as £2000 for a gold necklace.

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## LONG TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE



Samuel Jones Pearls is the oldest importer of cultured pearls in the UK.

The company specialises in cultured pearls and holds a vast stock meaning that it can supply any requirements from just one inch to an opera length of 60 inches, depending on budget.

It also has a fantastic range of South Sea and Tahitian pearl rows and a comprehensive range of 9ct and 18ct pearl jewellery which is particularly popular with the bridal market.

The company offers an approval system and a restringing service.

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## INSPIRED WITH PEARLS

Since 1975, Curteis has designed quality pieces for the retail jewellery sector and enjoyed enviable success as a result. Over the last two years, it has undergone a significant re-brand of its core collection and its retail sector image.

Whilst the company continues to supply a core output of various chain products - essentials - during 2005 it turned its focus toward the strengths of its in-house design team to create new lines in direct response to the needs of today's customer. The result is - inspired - a stylish range of gold and silver design-led, craft-based product with a comprehensive range of 18ct designs. The 2007 catalogue includes a selection of products that feature freshwater pearls and are perfect for the wedding season. Pictured is the 'reflection' collection in which subtly etched leaves, luxuriously reflect creamy white and lilac freshwater pearls.



## A NEW DAWN IN PEARL JEWELLERY

Stunning 12mm South Sea pearls are at the heart of the prize-winning Dawn Collection from the Birmingham company Phoenix England a division of F&L (UK) Limited.

Fittingly for jewellery in which the pearl is the hero of the piece, the intricate beauty of a coral reef was the inspiration for Fei Liu the Chinese born designer who created this unusual collection. 'Dawn' scooped first prize in the prestigious 2007 Kayman Award. It was also awarded the title 'Buyers Choice' in a further competition at Spring Fair which was judged by visitors to the show.



One of the real selling points of the Dawn Collection is its versatility. The pearls, which are of a very high quality, vary in hue from dramatic deep peacock green to softest pinks, creams and golden yellows. The 18ct gold used also comes in a range of colours with a choice of either white, yellow or a dramatic 'black' being used to create a number of very different looks. The precious stones too come in different palettes with purple amethyst and pink sapphires being used to create a subtle pastel mauve/pink effect and orange garnet and yellow citrine to create a stronger more fiery appearance. Diamonds are added to give added pizzazz.

Dawn, as the Kayman judges, agreed is "intricate and beautiful and has a wonderful fluidity

when being worn. It is real old style glamour brought bang up to date."

"Initial feedback from our retailers has been extremely positive and we know that Dawn is creating something of a stir amongst women who want that little bit more in terms of design and originality from their jewellery," says Fei Liu.

Dawn in by no means the only pearl collection to be offered by Phoenix Design. Its recently launched 'Sweet Rose' range in which baby pink and cream pearls are mixed with a three dimensional diamond rose motif is proving a real hit for the bridal market.

The collection includes rings, earrings, bracelets and necklaces. RRP's range from £300 to £3000.

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## PEARLS OF WISDOM

Holts of Hatton Garden, which was established almost 60 years ago, is legendary for its stock of coloured gemstones; but did you know about its pearls?

Holts stocks an extensive range of pearls, from seed pearls, to Tahitians, to conch. If your client has broken their string of pearls, or has lost a pearl earring, Holts also offers a matching service to help track down elusive pearls to complete the set.

### Pink conch

The company currently has in stock a number of interesting and unusual items including beautiful pink conch pearls. These exhibit the typical wavy 'fire' structure on their surface, which is almost like silk. Since these extremely rare items came into stock recently they have provoked great deal of interest amongst customers seeking the rare and exquisite.

Large pearls are another speciality and current lines include naturally golden and large cream pearls, ranging in size from 14mm-18mm in diameter. These include a number of pairs of pearls, which would be suitable for creating earrings.

### Technical services

Another plus of Holts pearl service is the wide range of technical services it offers to aid its customers in all aspects of working with pearls. Its in-house lapidary team can drill, fill and cut pearls to meet individual requirements and can also make existing holes wider so that retailers can do their own restringing more easily.

### Stringing

For those who need help with their stringing, Holts' two highly experienced in-house stringers, can create all manner of necklaces, chokers, and pendants quickly and efficiently. They can also provide guidance on choosing exactly the right finding to match your pearl design from the company's extensive selection.

Holts is happy to welcome visitors to 98 Hatton Garden where they can seek advice, view its stock and discuss their requirements.



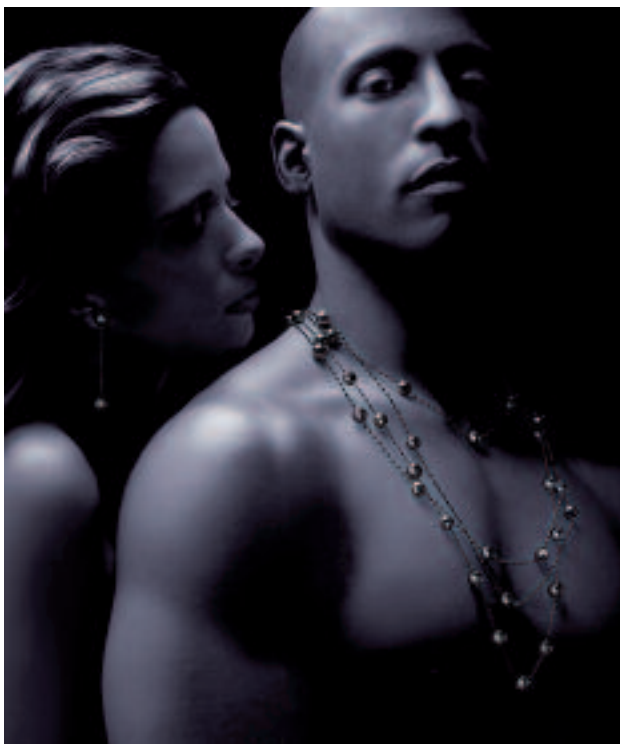
R Holt & Co. give an antique pearl necklace a new lease of life

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## GLORIOUS GELLNER TARGETS UK RETAILERS

Fashionable, aspirational and very much of now, this German pearl jewellery producer has much to offer.

"This is a serious pearl jewellery collection, which I believe will really appeal to British consumers and I am very excited about showing it to my customers," says Zeev Hershkovitz of ZeeTec the man who has recently taken on the sole UK and Irish distributorship for Gellner.

There certainly is plenty to be excited about. Gellner has an excellent pedigree. It was founded in 1967 by husband and wife team Heinz and Tove Gellner and is run today by their son Jörg. The company is proud of its family heritage and values such as responsibility, respect, trust and open communication are at the heart of the service it provides. It has a production facility in Wiernsheim, near Profheim and connections that extend from Shanghai to Moscow. Whilst its values may be traditional, there is nothing old-fashioned about Gellner's offer which is very much at the cutting edge of contemporary pearl jewellery design.

### A touch of colour

Its products can be loosely divided into two sections. On the one hand there are its high fashion lines on the other its slightly more classic mainstream collections.

For its fashion collection Gellner uses cultured pearls, strung on nylons or silks, and mixed with silver and briolette cut semi-precious stones such as quartz, tourmaline and peridot. The stones come in a veritable rainbow of exotic and vibrant colours to create a look that has real pizzazz and is modern and full of fun.

### International designers

Its elegant mainstream collection draws its inspiration from a variety of sources. As well as employing its own talented of in-house design team, the company also uses a number of international jewellery designers such as Angela Hubel, Yewn Dixon, Monika Seitter and Sabine Brandenburg-Frank, to create their own strongly-branded collections; so achieving a number of different looks and styles. Here the pearls are mixed with gold and diamonds to create stunning rings, earrings, necklaces and pendants with enduring appeal.

### Serious strands

Strands of pearls are another speciality and the choice is wide in terms of size (which goes up to the very biggest available) colour and hue. Types include freshwater, South Sea, Tahitian Akoya and Japanese 'Kasumiga-ura'.

While they may be diverse in terms of shape and size and shade, Gellner's pearls are united in all being of the highest possible quality. "When it comes to quality and lustre, only the best will do," says Zeev. However because of Gellner's bulk buying power, excellence does not necessarily equal expensive and many ranges are extremely competitively priced.



### Special clasps

Another strength for Gellner is its 100 strong range of interchangeable clasps. Using a special locking system pearls can be given a totally different look by simply changing the clasp. The range of clasps - which provides plenty of opportunities for add-on sales - includes stainless steel, yellow and white gold and rubber as well as diamond set designs.

"This is an truly glorious collection which also offers great retailer support in terms of excellent packaging, point-of-sale materials and even its own glossy house magazine 'Pearlmood O7' which can be customised for the individual retailer," says Zeev



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## CHOCOLATE DROPS

When it comes to this season's pearls, brown is definitely 'the new black' and for the international supplier, Euro Pearls, 'chocolate' brown Tahitian pearls whether as strands or drops are really drawing the crowds.

Euro Pearls, which is based in London's Hatton Garden, is a family-run business that has been supplying pearls to a global clientele for over 35 years. In the course of a year the company attends no fewer than 18 international trade events and thus has a truly universal view of the pearl market.

During its time in business Euro Pearls has accumulated huge specialist knowledge in its field and there is nothing that its team don't know about pearls, how to buy them, how to wear them and how to sell them. It's willingness to share this knowledge with its customers is one reason why so many of them keep coming back for more.

"We travel extremely widely and our real speciality is in buying the pearls directly from the farms and in sorting them and grading them ourselves," explains brand manager, Nicholas Brown. "Our skill and knowledge means that when we create a necklace the pearls are matched not simply in size but also in terms of their colour, quality and lustre. This ensures that our customers, and their customers in their turn, are guaranteed pearls of the very highest quality."

Whilst quality is the watchword at Euro Pearls its products are nevertheless extremely competitively priced. Its comprehensive range includes the very best South Sea, Tahitian and gem quality Akoya pearls, as well as some freshwater pearls in rare colours and sizes. "We offer our customers a wide choice of loose pearls, strands and finished jewellery at prices ranging from as little as £20 up to £200,000," says Brown.

### Baroque beauties

Keeping abreast of the latest fashion trends is another key element in Euro Pearl's success. While its new chocolate Tahitian pearls are much in demand they are very far from being the only strong story this summer. Huge, white, Baroque pearls from the Australian South Seas are also much in demand.

"We have spent a great deal of time and effort putting together a collection of baroque pearls which we believe is unrivalled in the world. We can offer strands of pearls up to 20mm in size and loose pearls of up to 30mm. These are extremely unusual and are creating a real stir, especially amongst our overseas customers," says Brown

Mixing pearls with precious gemstones is another speciality for Euro Pearls and its 2006 jewellery range using coloured sapphires is still proving extremely popular. For 2007 the company has introduced a brand new selection of diamond and pearl jewellery to wide acclaim. This includes necklaces, earrings, pendants and rings and retail prices range from £100 to £50,000. The styling is contemporary but very wearable mixing the traditional beauty and elegance of pearls in all their colours with modern design ideas and the sparkle that only diamonds provide.

"The pearl jewellery market is never static and one of Euro Pearls great strengths is its ability to always stay one step ahead. We like to think that our customers can rely on us not simply to provide them with the highest possible quality of pearl but also with a little bit extra in terms of fashion and foresight", says Brown.



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## SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED

A new patented technology from the Swiss pearl expert Goley looks set to take the British market by storm

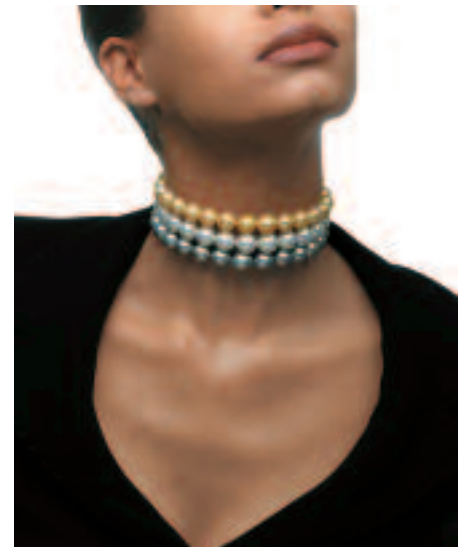
The Goley Group has been supplying pearls and gems since 1887 and has built an enviable reputation both for its high quality products and its pioneering spirit. Its cultured pearls are available from 1000 shops in 20 different countries and now - thanks to the recent appointment of the long-established Birmingham company Saunders Shepherd Group as the company's sole UK and Irish distributor - they are creating a stir here in the UK.



An exciting new departure for Goley is its Signed & Sealed® pearl necklace a patented technology in which pearls are strung on steel thread and sealed with bayonets. This eliminates the need for restringing and makes the pearls tough and versatile enough to be worn in the sea!

Each Signed and Sealed® necklace comes as a finished piece of jewellery with a detachable rubber clasp and customers can then choose from a range of alternative clasps designed to suit their various needs. The clasps are made in matt or polished 18ct white or yellow gold and some are diamond set. All designs are offered in 10mm, 12mm or 14mm sizes which makes them ideal for use with larger South Sea pearls.

Goley has a stated mission to ensure that its brand is synonymous with the very best and every care is taken to ensure that all pearls which carry the famous 'Goley Seal of Quality' are strictly controlled in terms of their type, surface condition, thickness of nacre, intense lustre and perfectly matching colours. Whether you are looking for Akoya,



South Sea, Freshwater or Keshi pearls, Goley can help you find them in many different shapes, sizes and hues.

"We know that British retailers will love the diversity, design, innovation and sheer luxury that the Goley collection delivers," says Saunders Shepherd MD John Coupland.

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## FRESH NEW LINES FROM G&A

G&A's 'Directory' for independent retailers offers plenty of new design ideas - including a modern take on some classic pearl pieces

Having spent the past 12 months fully establishing and expanding its collection, G&A is now firmly positioned in the UK market with products that range from timeless classics through to modern design-led pieces.

Many of the company's new pieces are designed in-house and manufactured in its own factories in the Far East. This enables G&A to meet the expectations of its customers and to target a variety of consumer markets at extremely competitive prices. Its newly launched 'Directory', which showcases many of its latest styles, has been well received. Exclusively for the independent customer, this publication is split into three separate sections giving customers a more focused selection when purchasing product.

'Directory 1' contains G&A's 9ct gold essentials range and the products featured are believed to be the standard lines stocked by the majority of independent customers. 'Directory 2' presents 9ct gold modern and contemporary collections, while 'Directory 3' showcases an 18ct gold collection emphasising

the luxurious quality of products throughout the company's ranges.

G&A's focus is firmly on new product and on continuing development and the fresh new look featured in The Directory clearly focuses on quality and design. Many new lines feature a variety of precious gems and it is refreshing to see pearls being used in several collections.

Head of Product Development, Sarah Robinson comments, "Pearls have once again become a popular trend and have recently featured widely at the Far East & European shows. In the past pearls were seen as being suited for classic jewellery, but we have used our experience to create refreshing, design-led pieces that complement our existing ranges."

G&A has fully taken on board the trends coming out of the shows and its striking use of coloured pearls in bronze, champagne, grey, blue & purple give the jewellery a modern twist. "It is exciting to revisit concepts and present new ideas," says Sarah.



2007 has seen many new products emerging from G&A. The company is clearly focused on the market and its latest designs have a refreshing new look and style. Further launches are expected later in the season and will be eagerly anticipated by its many stockists.

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