

Exotic beauty of Tahitian pearls

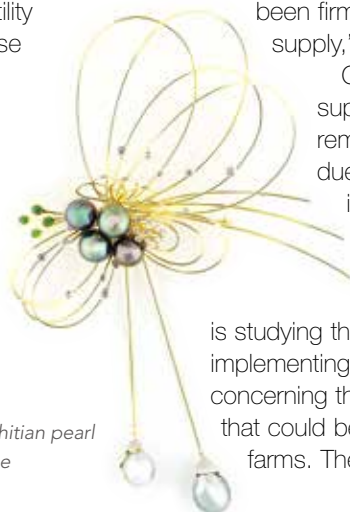
Prized for their incredible lustre and colour, Tahitian pearls feature prominently in the contemporary luxury lines of leading high-end brands, independent designers and ateliers.

One Hong Kong-based jewellery maker that is drawing attention is Tai Hai Yang Ltd, which is making waves with its Ariake Collection. The collection features Tahitian pearls hand-painted with pure gold and silver powders. According to the company, the painting, unlike enamel, is not dried by heat but hardened through a polymerisation and oxidation process. This method does not only take time but also requires controlled conditions since a slight change in temperature or humidity will result in an entirely different colour.

Another Hong Kong-based pearl company that has proven its mettle in jewellery design is Rio Pearl, which has nabbed top prizes at competitions for its statement pieces set with baroque Tahitian pearls.

"Tahitian pearls are versatile, and it is this versatility that enhances these gems' appeal to a wide range of consumers," said Ida Wong, general manager of the Tahitian Pearl Association in Hong Kong (TPAHK). "Designers and

The award-winning Tahitian pearl accessory by Karen Lee



jewellers love Tahitian pearls because of the richness of the material. They can create virtually every design that they can imagine, especially with baroque pearls."

Jewellers are also offering collections across a wide range of price points, she continued.

"What's exciting is that we are seeing designers creating edgy, trendy pieces set with Tahitian pearl centre gems," Wong said. "Their collections are sophisticated and timeless but contemporary at the same time. Tahitian pearl jewellery also has that elegance and lustre, which can stylishly and seamlessly take your outfit from day to evening."

The association is expecting Tahitian pearl demand in 2017 to remain stable, bolstered by the growing awareness of bolder and more fanciful collections.

Extremely tight supplies of top-quality goods, however, are anticipated to continue driving up prices. "The prices of large-sized, top-round gems have always been firm due to limited supply," Wong said.

Going forward, supply, in general, will remain a challenge due to the shortage in the availability of baby oysters. "The government of French Polynesia is studying the feasibility of implementing a regulation concerning the volume of pearls that could be exported by pearl farms. The goal is to push for



Tahitian pearl tiara created by Robert Wan Tahiti for the Ms. World China pageant



A pair of long Tahitian pearl earrings embellished with gold from Tai Hai Yang's Ariake Collection

the production of quality pearls," she said.

In 2016, only 10 tonnes of Tahitian pearls were exported due to baby oyster shortages – down 37.5 percent compared with 2010's 16 tonnes. "It comes as no surprise that prices remain high, especially for top-quality Tahitian pearls, which account for approximately 2 percent of the overall production," Wong said.

She also noted that although buyers from Greater China remain partial to round-shaped Tahitian pearls, many are raring to launch collections set with baroque and circle pearls. "Dragon's Pearl recently highlighted a necklace set with baroque Tahitian pearls in its advertisement," she said. "Rio Pearl also launched Toucan-inspired pieces using baroque pearls." **JNA**