

The pristine waters of Australia's north-west  
Photo credit: © Paspaley

# The five virtues of Australian South Sea pearls

For decades, Paspaley Pearling Company has been recognised worldwide as the producer of the finest Australian South Sea pearls. Paspaley is also the originator of a rigorous grading system that ensures that only the most beautiful pearls are offered for sale, and that pearls are always consistent in quality.

After harvest in the pristine waters off north-western Australia, the domain of the wild *Pinctada maxima* oyster, the destiny of each pearl is in the hands of the company's highly accomplished pearl graders. Specialists in their field, they assess each pearl individually, meticulously scrutinising them according to the "Five Virtues" of Australian South Sea pearls – namely lustre, complexion, shape, colour and size.

The combination of these virtues ultimately determines the worth of each Australian South Sea pearl, and makes Paspaley Pearling Company the most reliable source for beautiful pearls.

## Lustre

Lustre refers to the behaviour of light interacting with layers of pearl nacre – the pearlescent organic material that forms the body of the pearl. Natural lustre is everlasting and should not be confused with the superficial shine of treated pearls that generally diminishes over time. Pearls of exceptionally high quality exhibit a phenomenon known as "orient," a combination of translucence overlaid with a subtle play of colour on the pearl's surface.

## Complexion

A pearl with a flawless surface is exceptionally rare. Pearl quality is influenced by the number and size of imperfections and their degree of visibility. Clearly noticeable imperfections will significantly compromise a pearl's allure and value.

## Shape

Australian South Sea pearls form naturally in an almost infinite variety of shapes, from rounds and drops to circles and

baroques. A pearl's shape does not affect its quality, but demand for a particular shape can have a bearing on value. Pearls of perfect symmetry such as round and teardrop shapes are particularly rare and desirable.

## Size

Australian South Sea pearls typically have very thick pearl nacre and range from 8mm to 15mm and sometimes even larger. The thick nacre guarantees that their beauty will endure for generations.

Larger sizes sometimes exceeding 20mm are occasionally found and such pearls are highly prized. Larger pearls are typically more valuable due to their rarity.

## Colour

The array of natural colours of Australian South Sea pearls typically mirrors the overtones of the pearl shell. Colour, like shape, is a very personal choice, and the popularity of a particular hue influences a pearl's value. Australian South Sea pearls are typically white, silver, cream or gold.

For more information on Australian South Sea pearls, Paspaley has created a website set to launch in the coming months. Email enquiries@apcpearls.com.au for an alert upon launch. JNA



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