



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Peony earrings in 18k white gold, diamonds, conch pearls, and mother of pearl inlay, SARAH HO

Atollo conch precious pendant, ALESSIO BOSCHI

Enchanted Orchid ring in conch pearl, ANNA HU

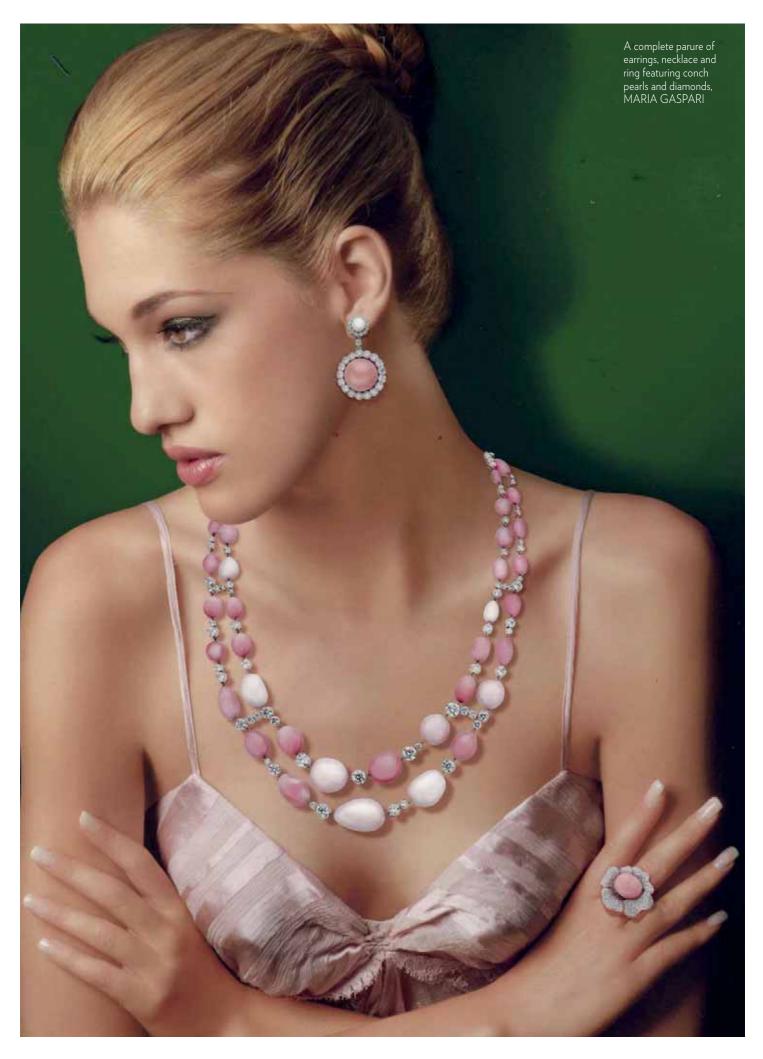
mongst a sea of pearl varieties, there lies an unusual combination of rarity and beauty. The conch pearl, often referred to as the pink pearl, and its naturally-occurring features are intriguing.

Produced in shells of Caribbean queen conch molluscs, this pearl is not a result of layered nacre but of calcareous concentration, thus making this gem incomparable.

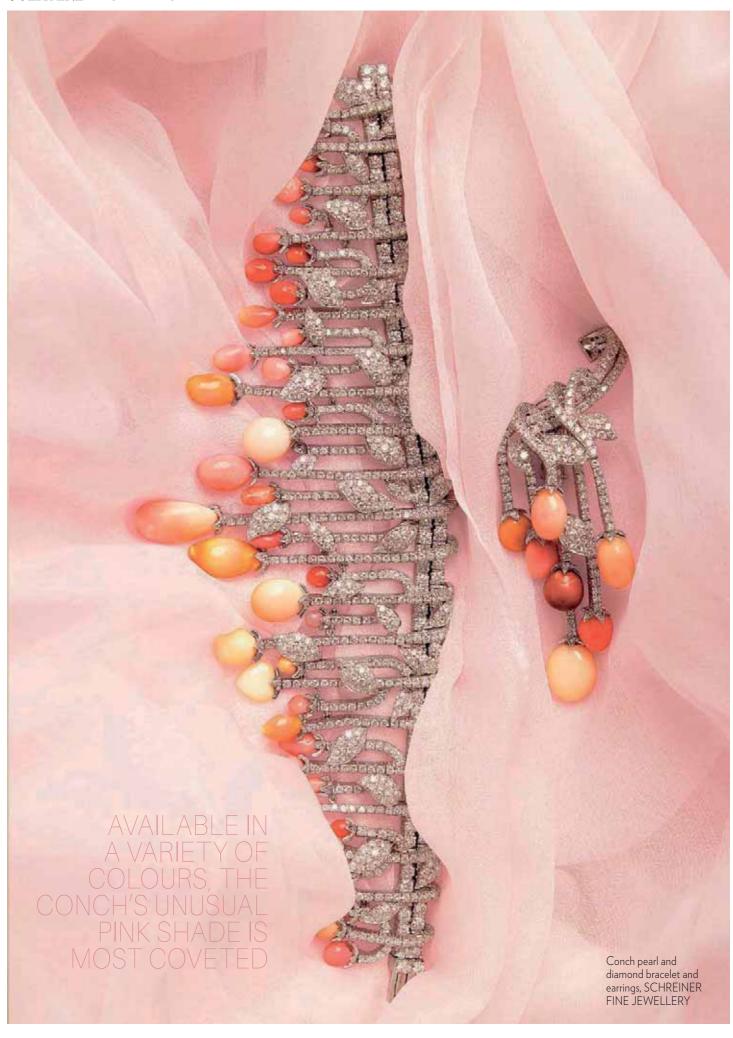
Although available in a variety of colours such as white, cream, beige, yellow, and brown, the conch pearl's pink shade is most coveted. Its flame-like surface that marks the identity of each pearl leaves no two conch pearls exactly the same. Commonly found in baroque shapes, the final form of the pearl depends on the shape of the stimulant and the movement of the shell itself in the water.

Yet, the most desired shape is spherical, while other shapes include oval, teardrop, and triangle. Conch pearls are typically found in an average of 3 to 10 carats, with rare exceptions as large as 45 carats. Ironically, the very feature that makes the conch pearl enticing also proves to be its weakness. Due to its organic origin, the pearl's pink colour tends to fade upon prolonged exposure to the sun.

Fishing for conch meat for local consumption is now a restricted practice to save the mollusc from extinction. Found only in the waters of the Caribbean and Bermuda, these pearls are fished by local fisherman. Only one conch pearl is said to be found in 10,000 to 20,000 shells, with only 10 percent of gem quality. Due to the extremely limited supply of these natural pearls, it's not surprising that conch pearls are imitated using other gemstones like pink coral, or glass and other artificial materials.



SOLITAIRE KNOWLEDGE





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Conch and quahog pearl necklace, BOGH

Necklace in 18k white gold with conch pearl and diamonds, MIKIMOTO

Conch pearl and diamond hair comb, **BOGH ART**

Conch pearl and diamonds ring, **MIKIMOTO**

Conch pearl and diamond Flower ring, Image courtesy of TIANCHENG INTERNATIONAL

Ocean ring in Paraiba tourmaline, conch pearl, cultured Pearl, and yellow diamond, Image courtesy of TIANCHENG INTERNATIONAL

Earrings with conch pearls, spinels, white gold, and copper, **HEMMERLE**

centre, but trying to source a matching set for a pair of earrings has been an uphill task for many.

Conch pearls were initially reserved for royalty. Their first recorded jewellery use date back to 1839, followed by appearances during the Art Nouveau period. After decades of absence, the pink beauties are making a comeback of late. Jewellers like Schreiner, Anna Hu, Bogh Art, and Hemmerle, as well as industry grands like Mikimoto, have produced some stunning jewels.

Mostly studded in an all-diamond approach, conch pearls have also been paired with other pink gemstones like sapphires and morganites. Occasionally, a gentle shimmer to the jewellery.

Like most pearls, the size, shape, and colour play an important role in the price of the conch. But in this rare case, the addition of distinct flame patterns adds a substantial element in the overall pricing.

Amongst the many attempts to culture conch pearls, an effort in the first decade of 21st century was the most successful so far. Dr Héctor Acosta-Salmón and Dr Megan Davis have managed to produce cultured pink pearls without sacrificing the life of the queen conch in the process. Perhaps this means that one day in the future, cultured conch pearls will be readily available to jewellery lovers all over the world.