

The Opal Express

American Opal Society
P.O. Box 4875
Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875



**Volume #38 Issue #11
November 2005**

TO:

Some Topics In This Issue:

- Opal Storage
- Francis Lau - Pearl Farmer Write-up
- How to String Pearls
- Famous Opal – Pride of Australia

Important Info:

**Board Meeting
November 8th**

**General Meeting
CANCELLED this month
Due to the Proximity of the Opal
& Gem Show**

**Opal & Gem Show
November 12th & 13th**

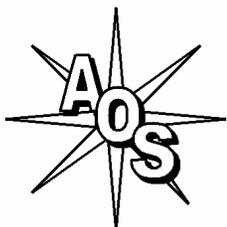
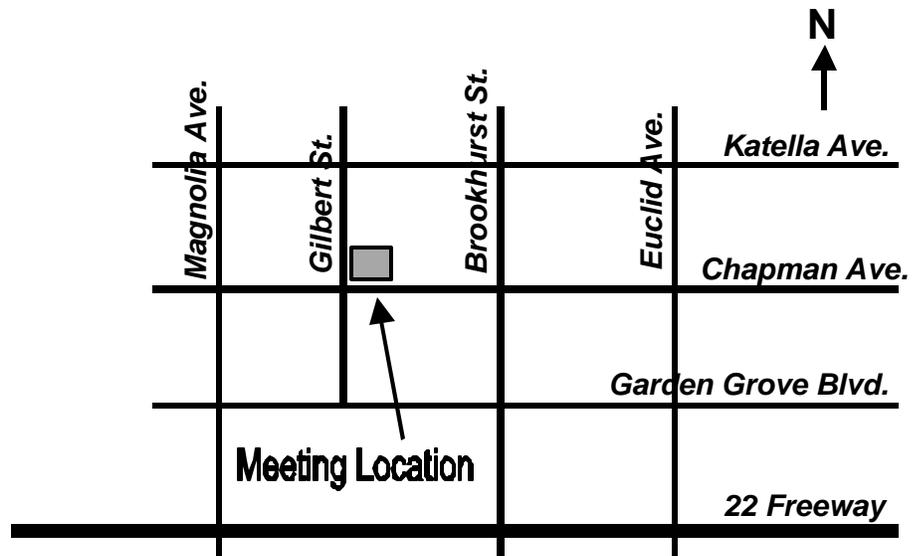
— GENERAL MEETINGS —

2nd Thursday of the Month
7:00 pm - 9:00 PM
Garden Grove Civic Women's Club
9501 Chapman Ave.
(NE corner of Gilbert & Chapman)
Garden Grove, CA

MEETING ACTIVITIES

Opal Cutting, Advice, Guest Speakers,
Slide Shows, Videos, Other Activities

November 12th & 13th: 38th Annual OPAL & GEM SHOW!!!



The American Opal Society

<http://OpalSociety.org>

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American Opal Society Membership Renewal

Thank you for continuing to support your American Opal Society!

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP		DUES / FEES)	AMOUNT PAID
DUES: SELECT ONE	All <u>US</u> Addresses including Alaska and Hawaii	\$25	
	<u>International Members</u> = All addresses <u>outside</u> of US Addresses	\$35	
ADDITIONAL BADGES = \$5.00 each (First Badge free when joining)		\$5	
ONE TIME INITIATION FEE = All <u>New</u> members		\$10	
SENIOR DISCOUNT = Age 65 or over deduct \$5		-\$5	
TOTAL PAID – DUES, less Senior Discount plus Badge plus Initiation Fee (if Applicable)			

Please make check or money order payable to "American Opal Society". Mail payment and application to:

American Opal Society; PO BOX 4875; Garden Grove, CA 92842-4875

An optional, quicker method of payment is via the **Internet** using **PayPal.com**. To pay, just log onto your PayPal account and "Send Money" to the AOS account, **editor@opalsociety.org**. There is no transfer charge!

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NAME BADGE ORDER FORM:
PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WISH IT TO APPEAR ON YOUR BADGE using up to two (2) lines of text for your name, nickname, or name of your opal related business.

MEMBERSHIP ROSTER and NEWSLETTER MAILING: The AOS publishes a membership directory once per year in its Newsletter, the *Opal Express*. Your name will be included. Please check what additional personal information that you want listed for other members. If it is different from the information above, please note that on the application.

Address Phone E-mail Website E-Mail the Opal Express Newsletter instead of Postal Mail

Include my name & address on a list provided to the Dealers selling at our Annual Opal & Gem Show.

Please sign here: _____ Date _____

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Editor-Jim Pisani

Please address all inquiries and exchange newsletters to:

The Opal Express C/O

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E-mail: editor@opalsociety.org

Are Your Dues Due Now?

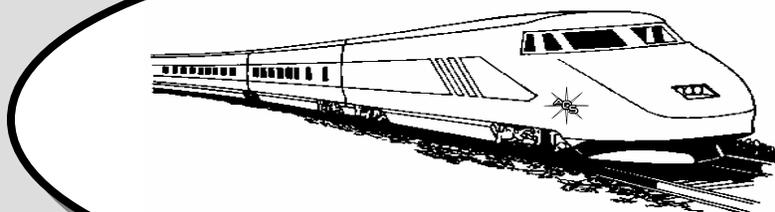
PLEASE CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL. If your label shows the current month/year your dues are DUE NOW. If the date is older, your dues are overdue.

A Renewal Grace Period of two months will be provided. If your dues are due now you will receive two additional issues of the newsletter. Please note, however, that as the system is now set up, if your renewal is not received you will be AUTOMATICALLY dropped from membership thereafter. It is your responsibility to assure your dues are current.

Thank you,
The Editor

The Opal Express

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Opal
Society



November 2005

Volume 38 Issue 11

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A Message from Your President

Dr. Walt Johnson

In a few days will be our 38TH Annual Opal Show in Anaheim. Many of you may be asked to volunteer some time at the reception desk. Many thanks to those who have volunteered to help set up and take down the show.

Some members have questioned whether we really need the show, and the answer is a resounding YES! It brings in new members, exposes the opal society to the public, and provides an opportunity for opal-loving people to get together. A profit is not made due to the high cost of putting on the show, but it is a service provided to the many members who attend.

A new item in the show will be a sale of used lapidary equipment during a silent auction. Among the items are 4 kilns, 4 centrifugal casters, 3 tumblers, 1 faceting machine, 3 electronic cleaners, 1 diamond (upright) combination unit, and one 24" diamond saw. Good Luck!

Hope to see many of you at the show.

Members Only Website Password

To log onto the website's members only area at: http://opalsociety.org/aos_members_only_area.htm type: Name: "member" and Password: "harlequin".

November General Meeting Cancelled

General Meeting is CANCELLED this month due to the proximity of the Opal & Gem Show two days later. Please come to the show!

Volunteers Needed for Opal & Gem Show

We need volunteers to help at the show next month. Help make our main fund raiser a success! Please contact Fran Todd at (310) 987-0642 or email: toddle@aol.com, or come to the November meeting. You may also just show up at the Opal & Gem Show. Volunteers get into the show free!

**IT'S HERE!!!
DON'T MISS IT!!!**

The American Opal Society's 38th Annual **ANNUAL OPAL & GEM SHOW**

The Largest Opal Show in USA!

Sat. & Sun., November 12 & 13, 2005

Saturday 10AM - 6PM

Sunday 10 AM - 5PM

Opal and Gem Dealers from around the USA and Australia.

Rough and Cut Opals; other gemstones; jewelry & supplies.

Huge Raffle many prizes of gemstones, jewelry, tools, etc.

Free Opal Seminars on Saturday & Sunday with Paid Admission.

Silent Auction on some great deals of used lapidary equipment.

Free Demonstrations on gem cutting, jewelry making, etc.

Same Location Since 1991:

Clarion Hotel Anaheim Resort
616 Convention Way ANAHEIM, California
Close to **DISNEYLAND**

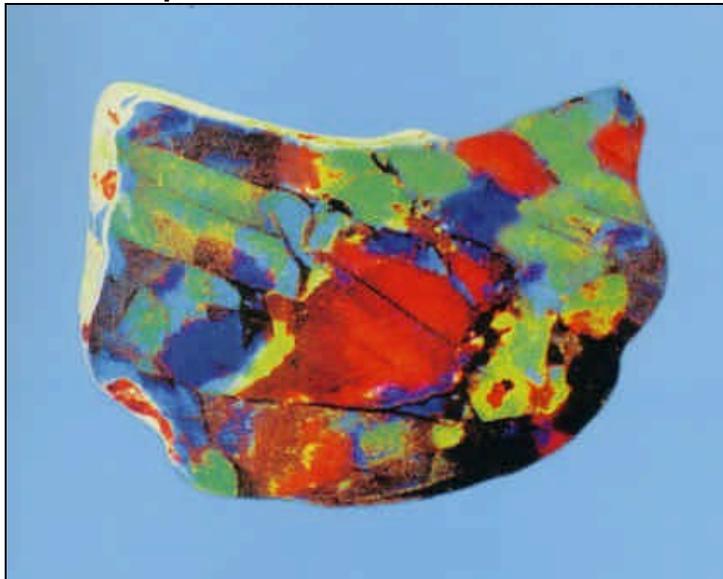
One block South of Katella on Harbor Blvd.
near the Anaheim Convention Center

Interested Dealers should contact Fran Todd at:
Phone: (310) 987-0642 or email: toddle@aol.com

Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, February, 2006.

The American Opal Society will have an information booth in the Galleria section of the Tucson Convention Center. We will be able to meet with opal lovers from all over the world. If you are in Tucson during that time, please come and spend some time at the booth.

Famous Opals - "Pride of Australia"



Pride of Australia Opal
(information courtesy of Altmann & Cherny)

'Pride of Australia', also known as 'Red Emperor', was found in 1915 by Tom Urwin and Snowy Brown at Phone Line (off Fred Reece Way).

The Pride of Australia is shaped like the continent. The 2" x 3" opal has black and blue veins interlaced with brilliant red streaks. By 1954, it had toured at least five World Fairs as "the greatest opal of Australia, and therefore the greatest opal in the world."

This double-sided gem cut to a 225 carat stone that just fit into a tobacco tin.

There were two distinct colour bars. The one on the back was much lighter and almost harlequin, totally different to the main bar of dark, rich flashes of colour. Ernie Sherman bought 'Pride' plus another three stones from the miners for £2000 around 1920. It was the highest price ever paid for four black opals.

The 'Pride of Australia' was valued in 1931 at £2000 on its own, and was sold in the 1950s from



Dr. Hubert Eaton examines his "Pride of Australia" opal with the Collector of Customs while guards look on.

the Percy Marks Collection, Sydney.

In 1954, Dr. Hubert Eaton was the President and Founder of the world famous Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, CA, and owner of one of the most important gem collections in the United States.

Percy Marks, Ltd., located in Sydney, Australia, was home to the opal when Dr. Eaton was craving for his collection. This firm was supposed to have the greatest opal collection in the world. The Pride of Australia was sitting in the display window when Dr. Eaton arrived.

To Dr. Eaton's dismay, the opal was not for sale. Dr. Eaton chose several other opals and told the firm that he wanted all of these opals plus the Pride -- if the Pride wasn't thrown in with the deal, then there would be no deal. Dr. Eaton wrote in a letter to his assistant, "Well, to cut a long story short, after quite a time, it ended by my going to the bank and getting a draft payable to Percy Marks, Ltd."

Some say the price was £150,000, but Greg Sherman reckons not more than £50,000 was paid for this mostly green-shot-with-orange black opal. 'Pride' was later stolen from the new owner, Forest Lawn Memorial Cemetery, Los Angeles.

From

http://www.1earth.com.au/jewelry/opal/pride_of_australia.html

Opals & Mineral Oil – Orchid Digest

Here is a recent thread of discussion from the Orchid Digest on that topic that comes up again and again - how to store opals. The Editor

From: Kevin P. Kelly

I'd like to share a few quote from something I recently read:

"Always immerse opals into a compound of mineral oil as these stones will dry out and the result will be internal fractures."

K Kelly

From: Carol J. Bova

Kevin,

If you're sharing this because it's so wrong, I'd be interested in knowing if the source is recent or from an old book or article.

If you're asking should it be done: No! Please do not do that!! Not unless it's unstable opal you intend to keep in mineral oil for permanent display like some Virgin Valley Nevada opal.

There are many types of opal, and each has differing percentages of water as part of its structure. After it has been mined, stable opal reaches an equilibrium after losing some water, and does not fracture. "Cracky" or unstable opal, will show cracks throughout the entire piece no matter what you do. Other opals, like Virgin Valley, Nevada, or Mexican fire opal, may or may not crack, or they may become stable after some trimming.

If uncertain about how to handle any given opal, rough or cut, contact someone who works with it on a regular basis. If you don't know someone personally, please try here, or through the American Opal Society. www.opalsociety.org.

Carol J. Bova

The Eclectic Lapidary <http://www.eclecticlpidary.com>

From: Hans Durstling

> "Always immerse opals into a compound of mineral oil as these stones will dry out and the result will be internal fractures."

Absolutely not. (No doubt there'll be a hundred other posts to the same effect)

Opals can be microporous. Get oil in there it will in time yellow. Opals contain 2 or more percent water as a natural constituent; some can dehydrate over time. Normal wear promotes rehydration. Absorbed oil would hinder this.

A similar perhaps even more pernicious old wives tale is that opals should be stored in glycerin. This as I understand it is

ANNOUNCING A SILENT AUCTION

AT THE
The American Opal Society's 38th Annual
ANNUAL OPAL & GEM SHOW
Sat. & Sun., November 12 & 13, 2005

Used lapidary equipment

Among the items are:

4 Kilns

4 Centrifugal Casters

3 Tumblers

1 Faceting Machine

3 Electronic Cleaners

1 Diamond (Upright) Combination Unit

One 24" Diamond Saw

downright hygroscopic and may actively deplete the opal of its natural water content.

Desiccation can lead to crazing. Some types of opal are more prone to this than others. Virgin Valley opal tends to craze almost the moment it comes out of the (wet) ground. Mexican opal is somewhat prone to crazing. A common and recommended practice with Mexican opal is to leave it in a hot dry place - on a radiator, in a sunny window, or similar, for six months to a year before cutting it. If it hasn't crazed by then chances are it won't. Australian and Brazilian opal are about the most stable.

That slight percentage of water incidentally is also why it's not recommended to keep opals in a safety deposit box as these are often climate controlled for extra low humidity.

Opal dealers do generally keep their rough in water but mainly for visual effect.

If your cut opal is and has been in good condition the best practice is to treat it gently, wear it often, and apart from that just leave it be.

Cheers, Hans Durstling - Moncton, Canada

From: Gerald

K. Kelly and my fellow Orchidians

I once worked at a jewellery company who NEVER bathed their Opals in any kind of oil or liquid to prevent cracking. So it was up to this setter (me) to inspect EVERY Opal before being set. If I didn't, it was MY responsibility. The manager retorted; "Oh, we don't need to do this, our Opals are fine", yeah sure, till they crack under heat and dry conditions and who's to blame?

Of all of their larger Opals that were never used too often, rest assured most of them had hairline cracks in them, prior to setting. Take this information from Kelly and me, for these Opals of wisdom...

Gerry!

From: croussel

Hi, Just a short note on the effects of any oil on opal, it does nothing. It's just another myth out there, if opal is cracky it is just that, and nothing you can do will stop it in the long run. The only way to avoid this problem is to educate yourself as you would with any other gemstone and try and deal as close to the source as you can or build up a good client, customer relation with a reputable opal dealer, quality opal is expensive and you will get what you pay for.

Australian opal is the most stable but there is some very low grade problem material out there in the market place sold by unscrupulous dealers and that is the case with all gemstones, Once again its EDUCATION, EDUCATION AND MORE EDUCATION.

Bye Christine - from the Ridge where is summer is nearly here.

From: Peter W. Rowe

> I once worked at a jewellery company who NEVER bathed their
> Opals in any kind of oil or liquid to prevent cracking.

Um, Gerry - some folks would consider that the proper way to do it. Remember that soaking an opal in water won't, with the exception of rare hydrophane opal, actually replace any dried out water content *(the cause of crazing in some opal). Obviously, while an opal is under water, it won't dry further, but that protection ends the instant it's removed from the water. If the opal is of a type prone to crazing, soaking only prolongs the wait until it happens, and delays the effect only by the amount of time the thing is immersed, no longer. Not much protection. . Some of us might suggest that it would be better to find this out about an opal while it's still in the jeweler's or opal dealers hands, before it gets sold to a customer who'll then be unhappy. I know several opal cutters who routinely put newly cut stones just into storage in their safe, nice and dry, for months or even a year or so, figuring that this way, any stones prone to crazing will do it before being sold. Weeds out the bad stones...

And oil. All that does is get it oily. It won't even completely stop the drying of the opal, though it will slow it. And again, the effect is only while the opal is actually immersed. A thin film of oil won't stop it from dehydrating, if it's an opal prone to that problem, which not all are. Now, I'll grant one benefit from oiling an opal. If the stone is a bit scratched up and scuffed, a little oil wetting the surface may make it look a bit shinier. But repolishing it would be a better treatment for this problem.

Some writers have suggested that a much better protection for opal is a really good polish, as this is thought by some to tend to seal the surface some. I tend to doubt this, but I'd give it more credence than water or oil soaks.

Old wives tales die hard. But I'm a bit surprised to see you still quoting one. This is simply a case of traditional lore that's just not useful in the real world. Check any of the available professional level gemological literature on opals if you doubt this.

Peter Rowe

From: cosmo accessories

Then I'm really confused, because that was the exact advice put out in Lapidary Journal some time ago-there was an issue discussing the photography of opals, and in that article they said to do that. Which is what I did with some opals in raw form that I have.

So now what?

Miachelle

From: Noel

> ...quality opal is expensive and you will get what you pay for.

Unfortunately, this ain't necessarily so. I've had some pretty expensive stones that cracked just the same. That's why I generally keep opals for a year or more before I set them.

I like to say, you don't necessarily get what you pay for, but you definitely don't get what you don't pay for.

Is it a sign of being over the hill when you start quoting yourself?

Noel

From: Kevin P. Kelly

> If you're sharing this because it's so wrong, I'd be interested in
> knowing if the source is recent or from an old book or article. If
> you're asking should it be done: No! Please do not do that!! Not
> unless it's unstable opal you intend to keep in mineral oil for

> *permanent display like some Virgin Valley Nevada opal.*

My posting was meant as a provocation because it's so wrong. It's a quote from a book from an author presenting himself as an expert.

I've been cutting opal for about 25 years of and selling opal in jewelry retail for some fewer years. I've heard more nonsense about opal than any other material. Perhaps it's because opal is so mysterious and displays such a wonderful variety of colors that it attracts fanciful stories and has had legends grow up about it.

One example: an intelligent woman said she was concerned about buying opal earrings because she heard that if she went from a warm room to a colder room while wearing the earrings that the opal would fracture. This was from a well educated person.

I started cutting really low grade opal because it was what I could afford. When I started out dealers often sold material in bottles containing glycerin. The R.I. of glycerin is close to that of opal and will cause any fracture to disappear. If you buy rough opal, buy it dry. Water or other solutions are disguises.

Finally, good opal is good opal. I can't remember any piece I've cut, in recent memory developing fractures or crazing. Actually I attribute my luck to a discerning eye and reliable dealers when I buy the rough.

If you read something that know to be wrong; what do you do? Is it: "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything."?
Kevin Kelly

From: iceflow

Exactly for photography you can oil opal to show color flash better me I do not alter what my client will see with their naked eye just my personal preference

Teri - An American Cameo Artist - www.cameoartist.com

From: Peter W. Rowe

> *Then I'm really confused, because that was the exact advice put out in Lapidary Journal some time ago-there was an issue discussing the photography of opals, and in that article they said to do that. Which is what I did with some opals in raw form that I have. So now what?*

Mineral oil is fine, if you wish, for storage of uncut opal rough. Won't prevent or in any way affect future crazing of the opal, but won't hurt it either, in MOST cases. Some opal might absorb some oil, but most won't. And oiled opal looks wet, which with rough, can help you see the colors. So it's great for photography, giving you time to set up the shot without the opal drying off as it would if you were futzing around with just wetting it with water under photo lamps. But make no mistake. Oiling the opals is just a storage stopgap, not any sort of real prevention for crazing or treatment for it. For photography, though, it makes a lot of sense to me. The argument against oiling ROUGH opal would be that a small number of stones might absorb some oil and could discolor, and that by storing rough in a way that tends to prevent crazing, you're only increasing the chances that stones you eventually cut from the rough will end up crazing, wasting your cutting time. Stored dry, if it's going to craze before you get around to cutting it, then at least you're not spending time cutting the stuff if it's going to craze later anyway.

Peter

From: Richard W. Wise

I can only say amen to everything Peter has said about oil and opal. The play of color in opal is the result of water vapor in the tiny gaps between round colloidal spheres that form the structure of opal. Think of the gaps when pool balls of equal size are put together in a rack. The four round surfaces do not quite match up leaving a tiny diamond shaped gap. The actual color is dependent on the size of the spheres which dictates the size of the gap

between them. The oil myth comes, no doubt, from the fact that a bit of oil when rubbed on the surface of an opal that has been abraded over time by the dust in the air, will mask the tiny abrasions and restore, to a degree, its former play of color.

Opal that is mined in wet fields has a tendency to craze simply because it never really had the opportunity to become stable through a drying process that takes many millennia.

I have only had one parcel of black opal that crazed but opal will do some odd things. I bought a parcel of boulder rough from a Yugoslavian miner in the Queensland outback and had it cut in Winton. There were two pieces of opal in matrix, fiery veins that ran through the ironstone matrix. One, I set and sold and within a week the client brought it back. All the color had turned to white patch. This is called "cottoning". The second piece cut from the same rough, I kept for several years and it remained as bright and colorful as the day it was cut.

Usually, if unstable, the opal will craze fairly quickly. If you are buying from an honest dealer he will normally take back any stones that craze.

Richard - www.rwwise.com

From: Kevin P. Kelly

> *Exactly for photography yo can oil opal to show color flash better me I do not alter what my client will see with their naked eye just my personal preference*

Are you saying that you personally oil opal for photography? Or not?

Re: [Orchid] Opals & Mineral oil

From: Ian W. Wright

I may be off course here but has anyone tried the stuff they use to repair chipped windshields with? Its a kind of very thin epoxy I think which seeks out and fills even the tiniest of cracks. I would think that this may strengthen the opal and seal the edges where any further water can escape from.

Best Wishes,
Ian W. Wright Sheffield UK

From: iceflow

I am saying I do not oil for photography Or any other reason. If I wish to see a bit of opal rough better I wet it with water which does no harm no foul before I cut into it and at times I use a baby food jar of water and a true light to view it to see how I wish to proceed. I buy opal rough from miners for carving and get all kinds of stuff :)

Teri - An American Cameo Artist - www.cameoartist.com

From: Greg DeMark

Ian,

I don't think there is anything that will stop an Opal from crazing if that is what that Opal was going to do anyway.

As for the windshield material, I am not familiar with what they are using but some gem cutters use a material called OPTICON which does exactly what you were referring to. It fills even the thinnest of cracks in a gemstone.

If anyone uses this material or any sealer or filler material please be sure to disclose this when you sell the Gemstone.

Greg DeMark - greg@demarkjewelry.com, www.demarkjewelry.com

From: Teresa Masters

Kevin,

One comment within your reply to the wonderful Peter Rowe touched me.

> *An aside: it annoys me to no end that when applying to juried shows. I get no credit for the lapidary work. Is lapidary less skillful than metal work in jewelry? There usually is a separate metals category; jewelry is often a combination of metal and stone.*

I am also a member of USFG Faceter list. I have long asked them why the cutter is never given credit in the sale of jewelry. Same as you Lapidary comment. If the jewelry is sold under the name of XXX, then it is only right YYY be listed as faceter. Of course if it is lapidary work, that too deserves attention and mention. IMHO Terrie

Here's my two-cents-worth on how to store opal: There is no good reason to store any opal in oil or glycerin. In fact, quality opal stores fine dry. If you are to store opal in a liquid, use only water. You may need to store opal in water if it is a known problem opal to prevent it from drying out; e.g. Virgin Valley opal, some Mexican opal, etc. Don't store opal in a safe deposit box dry. JJP - The Editor From the Orchid Digest from <http://www.ganoksin.com>, dated 9-21-05 to 9-27-05. Printed with permission of Ganoksin.

+++++
October Speaker - Francis Lau - Pearl Farmer

By Russ Madsen

For those in attendance at our October meeting, Francis Lau's presentation was a treat! Francis Lau is a member of the Monterey Park Gem Society and describes himself as a pearl farmer. His talk gave us a look at pearls from the inside out so to speak. We were informed about pearl structure, pearl formation and many aspects of the business of pearl farming.

Francis started in the pearl business forty years ago based in Hong Kong as a buyer for a Swiss firm. After some years he established his own pearl farming operation in China.

Francis noted it is possible to grow pearls in fresh water bodies in the United States such as the Mississippi River. But these growers mainly produce shells from which spherical nuclei are created and exported for implantation by pearl farmers abroad.

Labor costs for full-cycle pearl farming in the United States are not competitive. Workers in China receive USD \$50 per month up to at most \$100 to \$120, and feel lucky to earn this much working on a pearl farm. In the US by contrast labor may be as high as \$3,000 a month per worker.

PEARL AS AN INVESTMENT Right away Francis advised everyone never buy pearls as an investment; buy pearls because you like them. The pearl market is greatly influenced by supply and demand. The world supply of pearls can be boom or bust depending on weather and many other growing conditions. As supply fluctuates pearl prices vary greatly from year to year.

Growing methods are improving leading to ongoing improvements in quality. There is no longer any mentionable difference in value between farmed pearls and "natural" pearls. And very few commercial pearl divers are obtaining "natural" pearls because there is no motivation to take the risks of diving other than to support tourism.

FACTORS INFLUENCING QUALITY OF PEARLS There are several factors to consider when determining the quality of a pearl: the most important is luster - not shape, nor size. Pearls with great luster literally glow with beauty. If everything else is equal, round is ordinarily the preferred shape although a baroque pearl can also be desirable if its shape is balanced and appealing.

Pearls occur in a range of colors from black to (uhm) pearl. The least desirable color is pasty yellow.

It is important to look for and FIND flaws. Francis pointed out that one of the telling characteristics of imitation pearls is that they have no flaws because they are manufactured. You don't want to find a lot of flaws but do make sure a pearl exhibits natural aspects such as slightly uneven coloration or slight surface variances or striations in the nacre. Don't scratch a pearl against your teeth. This may indicate a pearl is real but it damages the pearl's nacre.

WHY DO PEARLS HAVE LUSTER? Nacre is the crystalline coating of calcium carbonate formed on an implanted nucleus by an oyster or mussel (mollusks). Luster describes reflection of light from the crystals of calcium carbonate in the nacre. Question: What is the

best light to judge pearls? Francis advised bright light is best but any type of light can be used if you have experience.

CARING FOR YOUR PEARLS Unlike diamonds and most other gemstones, the nacre of pearls is an organic substance made by an animal. It is fairly reactive and for this reason proper care is very important. To clean pearls, Francis cautions wipe only with a wet (not dripping) CLEAN cloth towel. Never put pearls in an ultrasonic cleaner and NEVER use commercial pearl cleaning products or any other chemical-based cleaners.

Chemicals WILL change a pearl's luster, usually for the worse and chemicals can also cause a pearl's color to change. This is another reason not to spend too much on pearls. All pearls are always susceptible to color change.

HOW ARE PEARLS FARMED? First, it must be understood the best nacre is usually achieved in 3 years. Harvest too soon, the nacre will not be fully developed. Wait too long, the nacre becomes too old turning yellow and/or becoming dull and discolored.

On the other hand, waiting to harvest means longer exposure to natural risks during the time of pearl formation. These risks include typhoons, water temperature becoming too hot or too cold, oxygen starvation by plankton/red tide, infection by bacteria and aging.

Mollusks live 10 to 12 years but produce fine nacre only in their early years. Therefore pearls are grown only for three years maximum by any one generation of mollusks. Beyond three years the mollusks age, quality of their additional nacre goes down, pearl size does not increase and nacre color goes to an unattractive shade of yellow.

Mussels, oysters and abalone all produce essentially the same nacre (calcium carbonate). However, salt water mollusks and fresh water mollusks have significant differences both in how they are implanted and in how many pearls each animal will produce.

Pearl farmers must use calcium carbonate as the nucleus for salt water mollusks while small bits of mantle tissue are used as nuclei for fresh water mollusks. Anything else will be rejected as the animals will be uncomfortable much like we feel if we get sand in our eyes. And yes that is plural - nuclei - for fresh water mollusks. Francis Lau noted most salt water oysters typically grow only a single pearl although Koyo oysters can give 2 to 7 pearls; fresh water mussels can grow as many as 30 to 70 pearls per shell. This is because salt water animals will expel any additional implantations while their freshwater counterparts readily accept many implants.

Every two or three weeks the containers of growing mussels must be pulled up and the animals' exterior surfaces cleaned to prevent bacteria infection and parasite growth.

Implanting salt water oysters requires technical skill. The nucleus must be placed such that the oyster will not flush it out. Fresh water mussels are much easier as they do not flush out implants. Their shell is all nacre and each animal can produce many pearls.

It is never necessary to pry open mollusks and check their health because they will open by themselves if they are experiencing trouble. If they are closed they are ok.

Francis now farms his pearls in rice fields. He gets very high quality pearls and the mussels are very safe from disease. He buys his mussels from a laboratory which specializes in raising them for the pearl farming industry.

HOW DO PEARLS GET THEIR COLORS? It is not possible to control color. Pearl colors are a result of natural processes. Pearls form naturally in colors of yellow, lavender, cream, pink and black. After harvesting, pearls are sorted by color. They are also treated with stabilizing chemicals and cleaned with bleach to remove dirt and stains.

If colors are natural, not controlled, and the pearls come from many different mussels, how do pearl strands show such consistent color? Francis stated after pearls are stabilized and bleached they are '**enhanced**' (don't say dyed) to obtain consistent color.

HOW IS SIZE ACHIEVED? Nacre ordinarily grows approximately .15 millimeters per year. Therefore to get a 10 mm pearl, use a 9 mm nucleus and grow for three years. The nacre will be about .45 mm thick and the final diameter therefore will be 10 mm or about 1 mm greater than the 9 mm nucleus. As you can see, achieving accurate size requires one to plan carefully. 10 mm is the maximum possible to grow most pearls.

The exception is south sea pearls. South sea pearls can be larger because they are started with a 10 mm pearl as the nucleus. The resulting pearl is used to start another growing cycle. It is possible to implant a pearl into a new shell three times. Growing these larger pearls involves significant risk because a pearl which is already marketable must be used and thus exposed to all the risks noted above for a total of approximately 9 years.

WHAT ABOUT SHAPE? Because natural pearls and cultured pearls are physically the same in all important aspects and round (cultured) shapes fetch greater value than baroque (natural) shapes, Francis uses predominantly round nuclei producing round pearls. He did have strands of baroque and button shaped pearls on display which showed very good luster and were quite beautiful.

ARE THERE PEARL SIMULANTS? While it is possible to create manmade nacre, to do so scientists must duplicate the natural environment of a pearl farm. Therefore simulants (versus outright imitations and fakes) are very expensive to manufacture in laboratories and do not appear in the world market.

HOW TO MAKE MONEY IN THE PEARL BUSINESS? Use everything!!! (1) Sell pearls; (2) raise commercial fish in the same body of water; (3) once old mollusks are beyond pearl growing age their flesh is too tough for human consumption - therefore make it into pet food; (4) use the now-empty shells for jewelry, inlay, buttons, beads etc.; (5) grind leftover shell remnants into calcium pills to be sold at health food stores. Use everything!!!

HOW DISTINGUISH IMITATION FROM GENUINE PEARLS		
Characteristic	Imitation	Genuine
Feels to touch	warm to touch	cool to touch (always)
Examine the edges of the hole	rounded (made in a mold)	sharp and crisp (drilled)
Overall appearance	too "perfect"	somewhat flawed
Weight	light "plastic" feel	heavy "natural" feel

In a final comment Francis Lau reiterated how important it is to understand that prices in the pearl market fluctuate wildly because supply changes so much from year to year. Buy pearls because you like them. Francis Lau can be reached with questions about pearls at 626-573-2453. Thank you for a great evening, Francis.

+++++

How to Knot Pearls or Restring Pearls

I thought a good treatment of how to knot pearls would be beneficial to those members who got some great pearl bargains from Francis Lau last month. JJP – The Editor

Yes, you CAN learn how to knot pearls or restring your own pearl necklaces... You just need practice and the right materials.

Here we will attempt to **give instructions** on how to restring pearls... On this page is one method... Here is another simpler method you may like to also try... (<http://www.karipearls.com/how-to-restring-pearls.html>)

The best way to learn how is to watch it being done. If pearl necklaces, or bracelets are worn often so the silk thread is **soiled** (which weakens it), and it seems that you need jewelry cleaners, if the silk thread is **broken**, if the **clasp** is broken, or if you want to **upgrade** the clasp.

You have **two choices**: Professional services, which will be done well and right... and **for a price**.

Or...

You can **attempt it yourself**. After all, if it **doesn't turn out** the way you like, try it again, or take it to a jeweler. Yes, it **is** possible.

If your strand is **valuable it is recommended** that you have a professional reknit it for you.

However, after some **practice on a cheaper necklace**, maybe an artificial pearl necklace...

(It seems we all have a **few** of these in our jewelry boxes that need a new clasp or something... I just visited my 84-year-old mother and restrung four necklaces for her... she has a huge jewelry collection... and even came with us on our last pearl overseas buying trip!) You may want to **give it a try**.

The **present clasp** can be used if you're happy with it.

We've found that **Michael's Craft store** carries a wide variety of clasps to help you get started in learning how to knot pearls.

OK... Let's get started. First things first. Wash your hands - that way the white silk thread will stay white while you learn how to knot pearls, plus it's easier to work with those pearls with squeaky clean hands.

Needed Supplies

1. **Beading needle**, which is a **very fine** needle which fits through the hole in the pearl. It makes learning how to knot pearls possible, but one lady I know makes her own needle out of beading wire, simply by folding it over and cutting it into a point.
2. **Silk thread**. This comes in a variety of colors, but the most common is white. (*Interesting side light on silk thread... we were in Lapland in northern Norway recently and the Laplanders make vibrant colored fringe for their shawls out of silk thread. We were even loaned Laplanders outfits to wear to a wedding... great fun.*)
3. A **match or lighter** for burning off the loose ends of the silk thread.
4. Something to keep the pearls in as you learn how to knot pearls or restring them... a **non-rolling** surface or tray (a large piece of felt or foam works well)... you'll want to keep the order of the pearls, especially if they are graduated in size. Another option with graduated pearls is to have the string and needle ready and thread each one on as you take them off.
5. **scissors** for cutting apart the necklace and for cutting the new silk thread. Here's a source for the needed supplies while you learn how to knot pearls.

Steps For How To Knot Pearls Or Restringing Pearls

1. **Assemble supplies**. This is a job which should be finished at one sitting... not left half done... pearls can easily get misplaced and lost. Having the supplies at hand in the beginning will aid this process in learning how to knot pearls.
2. **Thread needle**, making sure your silk thread is **plenty long**. The tiny knots which are tied take more thread than usually anticipated. It's very frustrating to be almost finished tying the knots on a necklace to find out there's not quite enough string... then it must be started all over again. Silk thread is **not expensive**, so be generous with your strand, **at least three times** the length of your necklace. Threading the needle is a **Three Step process**.
FIRST: Take about **10** inches of silk thread, cut it off and separate it into 4 strands.
SECOND: Take **one** of these thin strands and **thread it through the eye** of the beading needle, tying a knot so it makes a loop or circle through the needle's eye. This loop will hold the silk thread that actually is used to restring your pearl necklace or bracelet. Keep this loop on your needle as you will use it over and over again, until, of course, it becomes weak and breaks. It's like enlarging the "eye" of the needle into one big loop.
THIRD: Cut off a **generous** (at least three times the length of your necklace) strand of silk thread, double it over and put the loose ends through the fine loop you've already made, pulling them through far enough to avoid them easily slipping out. Don't

worry... silk thread is **not expensive**... yes there will be some waste... but nothing to amount to much. If you can't get cheap silk thread contact me using the form at the bottom of the page. Your needle is **now threaded**. Now for the fun part of how to knot pearls.

3. Cut off one of the clasp ends and **loop the silk thread around it**... no need for a knot here, simple thread the beading needle and silk thread through the hole in the clasp and reloop back through the "hole" in the thread... Presto... 1/2 of the clasp is attached. You're coming along fine in learning how to knot pearls. Keep up the good work!
4. **Remove pearls** from necklace by cutting the old silk thread. This can be done, one at a time, starting at the same end where clasp was removed, in which case, the pearl will be strung immediately on the thread. **Or** the pearls can be removed all at once, being careful to lay them in the same order. If they were knotted, you'll need to cut between each one... otherwise, they may all come off too quickly, so be careful not to let them fly away from you.
5. **String all pearls on the thread**. There should be plenty of extra thread. So at this stage, your pearls are literally "restrung", but wait... you're not finished yet.
6. At this point the **needle should be removed and a double knot tied at the end** where the thread has 2 loose ends. This prevents the pearls from slipping off while you tie knots.
7. Starting at the end where the clasp has been looped on, **tie a knot** close to the first pearl. I find it helpful to **hold the loop down** on the pearl and tighten. This is where **practice** comes in handy. It's not as easy as it seems to keep these knots close to the pearl. After a few tries, or maybe a few necklaces of experimenting, you'll develop a system which works for you. Don't expect your first necklace to have tight fitting knots... only practice brings this.
8. After a **nice tight knot** is tied between each pearl, thread on the remaining 1/2 clasp, tie a good double knot, cut the thread and flick with a small flame to melt the small loose ends. *It's happened to probably all of us, to hold the flame just a second too long... and POOF... it burns through, undoing the knots on the clasp... ruining your whole job. If so, smile, and repeat process... a sense of humor is a good thing to keep with you when learning to how to knot pearls or restring pearls.* **CONGRATULATIONS**... You've just completed your first knotting or restringing.

From <http://www.karjpearls.com/how-to-knot-pearls.html>

November 2005 Gem & Mineral Shows

45 — MIDPINES, CA: Show; Mariposa Gem & Mineral Society; Midpines Community Center, Hwy. 140; Sat. 9-5; free admission; contact Audrey Kee, P.O. Box 83, Midpines, CA 95345, (209) 966-5868; e-mail: allen@sierratel.com.

5-6 — CONCORD, CA: 46th annual show; Contra Costa Mineral & Gem Society; Centre Concord, 5298 Clayton Rd.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; adults \$3, children under 12 free; 19 dealers, museum quality specimens, beads, jewelry, fossils, books, tools, 10 demonstrators, cabbings, arrowhead knapping, soapstone carving, faceting, club member exhibits, fluorescent mineral display, children's activities; contact Bill McKay, (925) 439-8195.

5-6 — OXNARD, CA: 36th annual show, "Galaxy of Gems" Oxnard Gem & Mineral Society; Oxnard Performing Arts Center, 800 Hobson Wy.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-4; free admission; 65 display cases, children's activities, dealers, demonstrators, silent auction, games, country store; contact Larry Knapton, (805) 647-8762, or Norb Kinsler, (805) 644-6450.

5-6 — RIDGECREST, CA: Show, "Treasures of the Earth" Indian Wells Gem & Mineral Society; Desert Empire Fairgrounds, 520 S. Richmond Rd.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-5; free admission; contact John DeRosa, (760) 375-7905.

5-6 — SAN DIEGO, CA: Annual show, "Gem Diego" San Diego Mineral & Gem Society; Al Bahr Shrine Center, 5440 Kearny Mesa Rd., just west of Hwy. 163 at Clairmont Mesa Blvd.; Sat. 9:30-5, Sun. 10-4; 14 dealers, 10 demonstrators, 40 exhibit cases of gems, minerals, jewelry, and fossils, door prizes, grab bags, books and magazines, free gem I.D.; contact Wayne Moorhead, (858) 586-1637; e-mail: waynem@san.rr.com.

11-13 — COSTA MESA, CA: Show, "West Coast Gem & Mineral Show" Martin Zinn Expositions; Holiday Inn-Bristol Plaza, 3131 S. Bristol; Fri. 10-6, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-5; free admission; 80 U.S. and foreign dealers, China, Brazil, Russia, India; contact Martin Zinn Expositions, P.O. Box 665, Bernalillo, NM 87004, fax (505) 867-0073; e-mail: mz0955@aol.com; Web site: www.mzexpos.com.

11-13 — SACRAMENTO, CA: 63rd annual show, "Golden Harvest of Gems" Sacramento Mineral Society; Scottish Rite Temple, 6151 H St.; Fri. 9-5, Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; adults \$4, children 6 to 12 \$1, under 6 free; contact Stan Henneman, (916) 363-5011; Web site: www.sacmineralsociety.org.

12-13 — ANAHEIM, CA: 38th annual show; American Opal Society; Clarion Hotel Anaheim Resort, 616 Convention Way, 1 block south of Katella Ave. on Harbor Blvd.; opal and gem dealers, rough and cut opals, raffle, free opal seminars, free demonstrations; contact Fran Todd, (310) 721-5614; e-mail: Toddle@aol.com; or Jay Carey; e-mail: jaycarey@charter.net.

12-13 — LANCASTER, CA: 4th annual show, "Rock 'n Gem Roundup" Palmdale Gem & Mineral Club; Fairgrounds, 2551 W. Ave. H; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; lapidary arts, crafts, jewelry; contact John Martin, (661) 916-9479; e-mail: pgmc@antelecom.net; Web site: www.palmdalegems.org.

12-13 — YUBA CITY, CA: 14th annual show, "Festival of Gems & Minerals" Sutter Buttes Gem & Mineral Society; Yuba City Fairgrounds, 442 Franklin Ave.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; free admission; demonstrations, youth activities, flint knapping, silent auction, exhibits, jewelry, lapidary supplies, door prizes; contact Charlie Brown, (916) 652-4240; e-mail: evelbru@att.net.

19-20 — VICTORVILLE, CA: Show; Victor Valley Gem & Mineral Club; San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, 14800 7th St.; Sat. 9-5, Sun. 9-4; contact Joe Kosik, (760) 241-0894.

26-27 — BARSTOW, CA: 30th annual show; Mojave Desert Gem & Mineral Society; 841 S. Barstow Rd.; Sat. 10-5, Sun. 10-5; contact Bob Depue or Beth Pinnell, (760) 255-1030.

26-27 — SAN FRANCISCO, CA: Show; Crystal Fair; Laguna Ave. and Marina Blvd.; Sat. 10-6, Sun. 10-4; contact Jerry Tomlinson, (415) 383-7837; e-mail: sfxlt@earthlink.net, Web site: www.crystalfair.com.

19-31 — PASADENA, CA: Exhibition; The Folk Tree Collection; 199 S. Fair Oaks Ave.; all days 26; handmade ornaments, jewelry, by local and international artists; contact Gail Mishkin, The Folk Tree Collection, (626) 793-4828; e-mail: mishkinftc@aol.com; Web site: www.folktree.com.

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