

Two mother-of-pearl gaming chips highlight a Donna Chambers brooch, with Chinese freshwater cultured pearls, a blue topaz cabochon, and a square cushion dyed blue agate drusy. Kabana's golden-lip oyster mother-of-pearl bracelet brackets four inlay mother-of-pearl rings: white mother-of-pearl in 14k yellow gold, black mother-of-pearl in 14k white gold, alternating black and white mother-of-pearl in 14k yellow gold, and pink mother-of-pearl set in pink 14k gold. Kabana's mother-of-pearl comes from natural-color shells harvested in the French Polynesian islands.

Mother-of-pearl is defined as the hard, smooth, pearly, iridescent nacreous layers that make up the inner surface of a pearl-producing mollusk's shell. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, the name has been around since the 1500s, and no one seems to mind that it isn't really a pearl's mother at all. In fact, it should probably be called house-of-pearl. The pearl's mother is the living mussel, for it is the living organism that lays down the aragonite and calcite that forms both the nacre of the pearl and mother-of-pearl.

History. Seashells—specifically those whose inner shells have the beauty of a pearl—have been used for ornamental purposes from as far back as 3200 B.C., as evidenced by artifacts found in ancient Egypt. The beauty of mother-of-pearl lent itself naturally to adornment in the form of earrings, necklaces, pendants, and breast plates. Its relative durability (if the shell was thick enough) made it usable for small hand tools such as scrapers, scoopers, and spoons as well as smaller smooth items such as fishing hooks and harpoon points.

Photos by Harold & Erica Von Peit, Van Peit Photography, Los Angeles.

Mother-of-Pearl

