

Vail Daily



- Vail Daily file photo/Dominique Taylor

Pearl expert visits Karats in Vail Village

Jeweler Koji Kawamoto answers Vail Daily's 7 questions

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VAIL, Colorado — Koji Kawamoto the pearl man is coming to Vail. For the past 20 years, Kawamoto has studied and sold pearls. The sea-born treasures are his life expertise. Kawamoto hails from a Japanese family who harvested pearls for generations. He's learned and taught the pearl cultivation trade and now flies around the world for trunk shows, carrying a collection of pearls whose variety would rival even a museum's collection. This weekend, Karats in Vail Village hosts Kawamoto and his trunk full of sea marbles Friday, Saturday and Sunday from open to close.

Kawamoto brings with him all types of pearls in different shades, from the black, green and purple Tahitian pearls to the traditional lustrous white Akoya pearls to the feminine-hued South Sea pearls and the asymmetrical baroque pearls. But not every pearl looks good on every woman, Kawamoto says.

Meet the pearl master

What: Trunk show with pearl expert Koji Kawamoto
When: Friday through Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
Where: Karats in Vail Village
More information: Call the gallery at 970-476-4760.

"Choosing the right strand for the woman is an art," says Dan Telleen, owner of Karats.

You have to consider skin tone, color of teeth, color of eyes, whites of eyes, hair color and even the personality of a woman. Lucky for the ladies (and gift buying men) Kawamoto is an accomplished matchmaker. He'll be on hand this weekend to answer any questions and to help pair the pearl with the girl.

1. Vail Daily: What's the most common question you're asked at trunk shows?

Koji Kawamoto: Is it fake or real? People want to know how you can tell. You pick up the two end pearls and rub them together. If it's too smooth, it's not real. Real pearls have a grittiness when rubbed together that they've never been able to synthesize.

2. VD: What's your favorite aspect of the pearl business?

KK: Matchmaking. I'm here because I can pick the right one. A lady walks in and I say, 'this is the pearl for you' and finding the right strand can make people really happy, and I can look at their smiles, which makes me happy.

3. VD: What advice would you give a to a man who wants to buy pearls for his wife or girlfriend this gift-giving season?

KK: First, I ask him if his wife or girlfriend has any pearls. If he says no, I say the Japanese Akoya pearl because it's the most classic pearl. It's the white-pink pearl, and if she doesn't have any pearls, this is the one to start with. If she does have pearls, I would suggest the Tahitian black pearl or South Sea pearl, maybe big-size freshwater pearls. And if you have all of these, then you need a multi-colored strand in white, gold and Tahitian, all the different colors mixed together. Sometimes, after I talk to the husband, I can guess what his wife would like, by his atmosphere, the way he talks, I can picture her.

4. VD: You will help customize pearl pieces. What's the most interesting request?

KK: Some sushi chefs asked me to thread a single baroque-shape pearl on a leather thong that they wear around their neck. I've been asked to put pearls on sexy underwear, too.

5. VD: How do you like to see pearls worn, on a necklace, dangling from the ears?

KK: As a pearl specialist, I like the pearls to be worn in a simple way.

Pearls and simple gold, so that the beauty of the pearls is outstanding.

6. VD: How do you wear pearls?

KK: A gray Tahitian pearl, usually baroque shape, worn up high around my collar.

7. VD: There's a perception that pearls are expensive. What is your collection's price range?

KK: I have \$100 earrings and a \$50,000 strand of multi-colored pearls. There's something for everybody, I can match their budget. I want people to feel free and to come in.

Cassie Pence is a freelance writer based in Vail. She also does marketing work for Karats. E-mail comments about this story to cschnell@vaildaily.com.

What's for dessert? Pearls!

Friday, Saturday and Sunday La Tour will serve a special chocolate dessert paired with a strand of Koji Kawamoto's pearls. Diners are invited to wear the pearls while indulging in their sweet finale, and if the mood strikes, they can purchase the pearls, too. For more information, contact La Tour at 970-476-4403.

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