

SUMMIT + MAUI DIVERS JEWELRY



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# TWILIGHT TREASURES

## THE QUEST FOR CORAL THAT PUT MAUI DIVERS JEWELRY ON THE MAP

**FOUR HUNDRED METERS BELOW** the deep blue surface of the Western Pacific Ocean, ornate spires of red and pink reflect wan sunlight. Their colorful contrast against the indigo gloom comes only because of the extreme clarity of the waters off the Oza Banks, some 160 kilometers south of Okinawa. It's 1963, and Japanese coral draggers, who have exhausted the fisheries closer to their shores after a century of destructive harvesting practices, have made a find that will reinvigorate the industry.

Then, in 1965, Japanese divers make a second find on the Milwaukee Banks in the Emperor Seamounts, 800 kilometers northwest of Midway Island. And in 1969, Taiwanese boats discover even more precious coral banks on other Emperor Seamounts. During this period in the 1960s, almost 230 tons of pink coral (*C. secundum*) worth over \$4 million are harvested collectively from these areas. But the practice of coral dragging is unsustainable and it's only a matter of time before this supply, too is exhausted.

Seven years before, in 1958, some 3,800 kilometers southeast of the Emperor Seamounts, the former whaling town of Lāhainā, Maui, is home to a bustling undersea touring agency that provides visitors with adventurous tastes guided undersea dives beneath the surface of the dazzling Hawaiian waters. While exploring the depths of the Kaiwi Channel

that separates the islands of O'ahu and Molokai, divers Jack Ackerman and Larry Windley stumble upon something that will change the trajectory of the coral harvesting industry and the nature of fine jewelry in the islands: 'ēkaha kū moana, Hawaiian black coral, the official state gem of Hawai'i.

This unexpected find launched what is today known as Maui Divers Jewelry. Fortunately, economic interest wasn't the only spark generated by the Kaiwi Channel find, and its discovery also ushered in a new era of sustainable coral collecting.

In 1969, two University of Hawai'i scientists—geologist Ted Chamberlain and biologist Vernon Brock—set out on an expedition off of the coast of O'ahu to find a way to ethically cultivate rare, deep-water precious coral. Their endeavors led to the development of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC) and other organizations dedicated to regulating and protecting coral harvesting, as well as federal and state laws that safeguard coral colonies so that they might continue to be admired in perpetuity.

In his 2010 report, "The Precious Corals," University of Hawai'i Department of Oceanography researcher Richard W. Grigg states, "As it now stands, after 50 years of operation, the black coral fishery in Hawai'i is one of the few fisheries in the world that has remained sustainable over this period of time."

Shallow water coral colonies can live for thousands of years. The coral expands to reach the photic zone, where sunlight penetrates the water and provides nourishment to tiny plant cells called zooxanthellae, which live within most types of coral polyps. They provide the coral with foods resulting from photosynthesis which, in turn, creates a nurturing, symbiotic relationship and a healthy ecosystem in which the colonies can thrive. The primary concerns for coral reef destruction are the effects of ocean acidification, sedimentary changes and runoff, which can all lead to secondary problems like infection by pathogens that flourish in lower pH levels or in the presence of foreign particles in the water.

Precious corals grow in deeper water, in the mesopelagic or "twilight" zone, with a natural lifespan under 100 years. Hawaiian black coral lives typically from 25 to 50 years and becomes reproductive at 8-10 years. The laws governing the industry require that the "trees" be about 20 years old before they can be legally harvested. This is a key feature as it ensures that the colony is reproductive for half of its life to ensure the long term health and viability of the population.

Coral harvesting by Maui Divers Jewelry is always done following the best practices that have come to shape these laws and regulations. Maui Divers Jewelry harvests individual coral trees only after reaching a minimum 1 inch diameter base and 4 foot

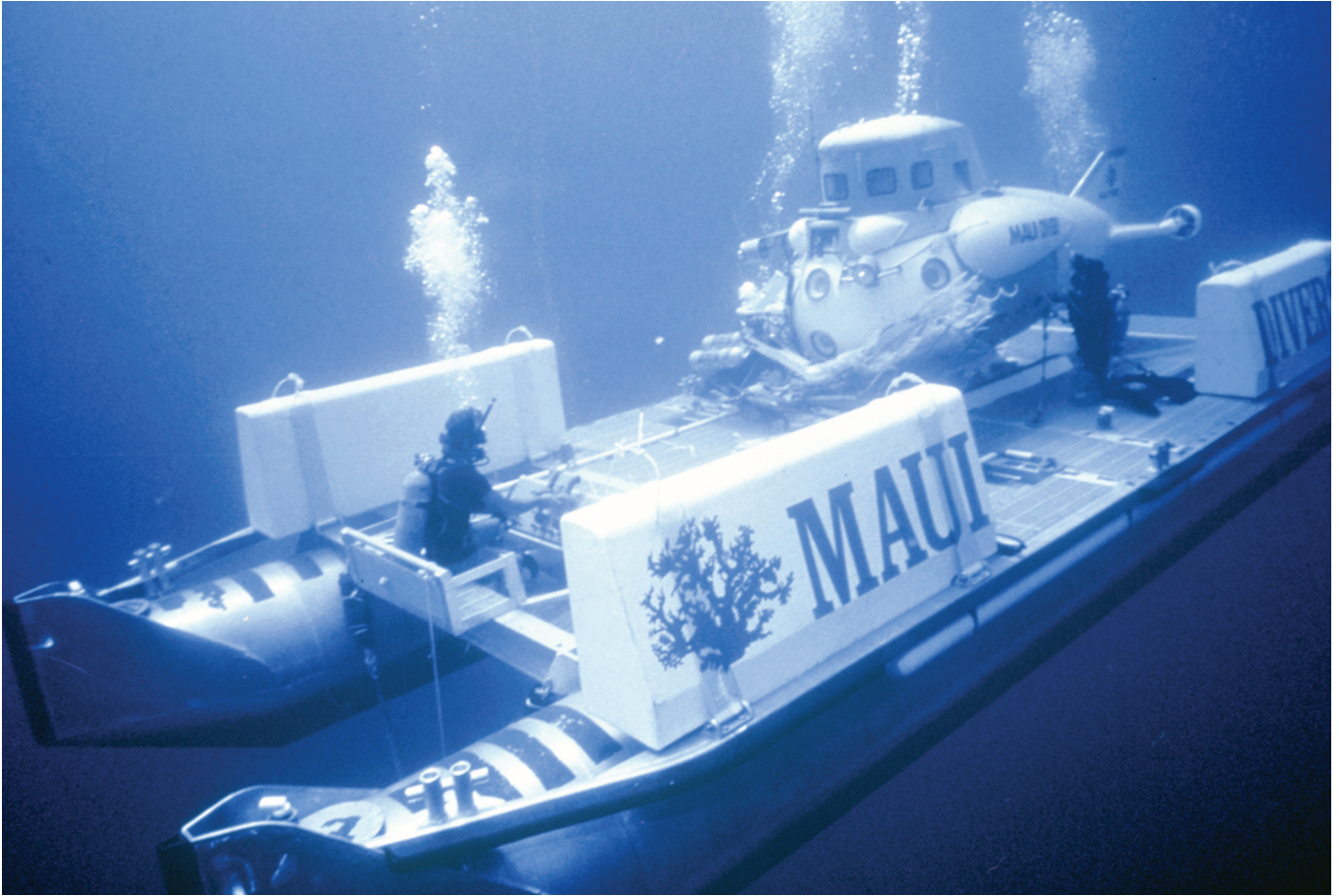


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height. To ensure the delicate balance of the ecosystem is protected, coral harvested for Maui Divers Jewelry is selected at no less than 10 years beyond its reproductive age and selectively chosen to maintain various species populations. This allows for new buds to safely bloom without disturbing the natural cycle of the coral.

With the rich find of Hawaiian black coral in the late 1950s came a responsibility to the environment. It became the goal of Maui Divers Jewelry that the beauty and nature of the Hawaiian archipelago, which they treasured, would not only be shared with the world, but preserved as well. After all, it is this natural beauty that put the company on the map.

This respect and admiration for nature leads Maui Divers to produce naturally articulated designs, crafted to stay true to the open, exploratory spirit that first attracted the divers to the sea. From the great depths of the ocean come precious pieces of coral in stunning black and gold, vibrant pink and red.

But coral isn't the only oceanic treasure the company ethically harnesses. Tahitian black pearls, South Sea pearls, Japanese Akoya pearls and freshwater pearls are other iconic staples that lure patrons with their shimmering beauty. Other naturally occurring pieces include precious gemstones such as Australian opals, diamonds and peridot.

With a deep love for marine life, Maui Divers Jewelry also offers a wide range of Hawaiian gold jewelry, crafted to represent oceanic themes. Many of the original designs of these traditional pieces date back more than 125 years to the Hawaiian monarchy.

Nature has always been an inspiring force that drives individuals to creation. Culture and aesthetics inspire a desire for the new to be discovered and cultivated. Collecting this treasure with minimal impact to the environment preserves the delicate nature of the ecosystem the to which the coral belongs, ensuring that future generations will also be able to enjoy its beauty.