

# NORTHERN MICHIGAN'S MAGAZINE Traverse

## BEST EATS 2008

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**SUPER-SECRET** SIGNS OF SPRING p.63

**KING PONG'S** LAIR p.15

**RECIPE:** HUNGARIAN MUSHROOM BISQUE p.57

*Salt & pepper,  
chocolate-chipotle  
and basil ice  
cream from  
Feast, Petoskey ▶*



# Up North

PEOPLE NATURE ARTS NOSTALGIA BUZZ WISDOM CURIOSITIES



## Q&A Pearl of A Girl

Elizabeth Blair-Kirby,  
Harbor Springs

**E**lizabeth “Dilly” Blair-Kirby says there are two kinds of women in this world: diamond girls and pearl girls. A passionate member of the latter category, Blair-Kirby’s been a longtime pearl jewelry designer for Neiman Marcus, and in December she opened a pearl salon, Elizabeth Blair Fine Pearls in Harbor Springs. We stopped in to see what’s happening in the pearl world.

**You go by Dilly. What gives?** It’s a Welsh nickname for Elizabeth. It was also the name of a character in a short story my mom read in a women’s magazine when she was pregnant with me. The story was written by Pearl Buck.

**So your pearl connection goes back to the womb?** I’ve loved pearls since I can remember. I wanted them when I graduated from kindergarten. I finally got them for high school and college graduation. Maybe I was a mermaid in a past life.

**How did you get into making a career out of them?** I got this fluky opportunity through a headhunter to work for a pearl salon after college. A sorority sister of mine also worked there. She went to Tahiti and brought these pearls back. No jewelry stores were buying unfinished pearls then so I started mounting them up. The business took its own course.

**What is a pearl salon?** It’s an atelier, or workshop, where clients come in and try on various pearl combinations, and I design something especially for them. You remember those *Color Me* ▶

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## Up North

### ▶ Pearl of a Girl, CONTINUED



*Beautiful books? It's like that. Different pearls look different on different skin tones. I help you find the ones that make you beautiful.*

**Is there an official name for a pearl jewelry designer?** Pearlster? Pearlmeister? Pearlarooni? Oystress?

**You deal only in cultured pearls—why?**

Natural pearls are very rare and expensive, and cultured is where the industry is now. There aren't divers randomly opening up thousands of oysters—which kills them—just to get two or three natural pearls anymore. The culturing process is to spawn pearls in little nurseries, grow them, monitor them, the conditions around them. It's like grapes in a vineyard. But whether you get a good pearl or a bad pearl, that's up to the oyster.

**Besides being the name of Johnny Depp's boat in those *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, what's so cool about black pearls?**

They only come from the black-lipped oyster. It's a species indigenous to Tahiti, and it has black pigmentation in the shell—the mother of pearl—that creates the black body color of the pearl. The oyster's mantle and the plankton in the water give it its sheen. Men love them. I do a lot of the single black pearl on a black steel chain or on cufflinks and shirt studs.

**What's hip in pearls for the ladies?**

Super-long strands—bellybutton or lower. It's really sexy. Or tons of really short, layered strands on the neck. Or, with the big sunglasses everybody's wearing, you need a tidy look—one big pearl in each ear. It's classic, regal, old money, Old World. Very Jackie O. I hand-make a special earring back that makes those big, juicy studs sit high and not droop in the lobe. It's the Wonderbra for ears.

**Do you have a favorite pearl?** I really love

baroque [not perfectly round] pearls. They used to be cast off as imperfect, but now they're really prized because everyone wants organic and natural looking. I've always loved them, so I have a huge stash of them. So I am really happy.—L.T.

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