

Collecting



GLEAM TEAM

Mother-of-pearl is just that: the shimmery lining of a mollusk shell that can generate the prized jewels of the sea. But it's also eye-catching in its own right. Lightweight and delicate, the material has been used for centuries to fashion all kinds of covetable items—from intricately carved creations to stunning sculptural pieces, like the vessel up top, which was crafted by sanding away a nautilus shell to reveal its inner glow. Dishes were often shaped from one piece, as some ancient creatures actually produced sheets measuring more than a foot across. Today the pearlescent medium is harvested on seafood farms rather than being taken from wild oysters, clams, and mussels in Asia and the Caribbean. Older, more ornate objects go for thousands, but other deep-sea treasures surface online for about \$50. Wrap one for Mom, and light up her world.

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