

Shells are the new pearls

Trend Forecasting by Vitor Ramos





Shells are the new pearls



Throughout history, humanity has been fascinated by the beauty and mystery of the sea.

During the Age of Discovery in the 15th century, tales of sea monsters were part of the narrative brought back by those who returned to shore. Curiosity – or fear – filled the minds of both the travelers and those who remained on land.

These maritime odysseys inspired plays, books, and stories that soon became part of popular imagination.

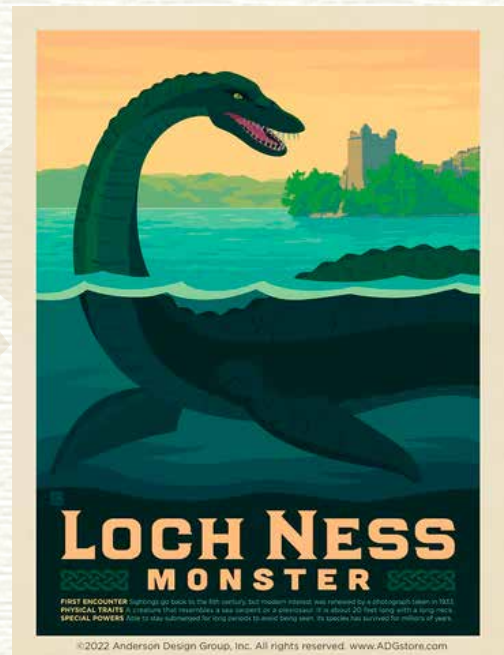
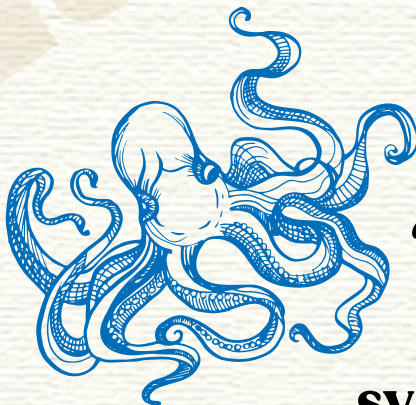


Illustration from Anderson Design



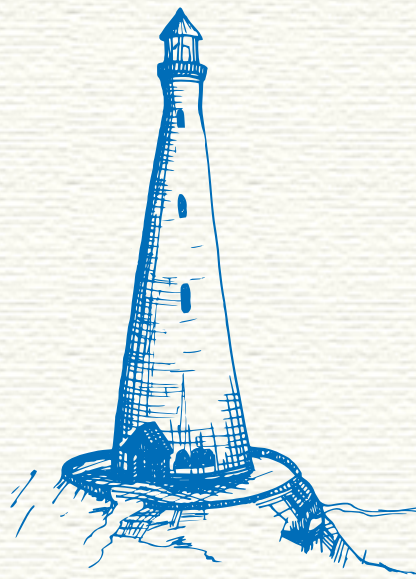
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Beyond myths and fables, the sea has always evoked a sense of the divine. From the Egyptians to the Greeks, from the Yorùbá to the Indigenous cultures of the Americas, water is consistently portrayed as a higher force.

No matter the name – Poseidon, Neptune, Iemanjá – the sea's mysteries and gifts are woven into the symbolic heritage of many societies.



In Brazil, it's common to greet the New Year by jumping over seven waves, a ritual to welcome good energy for the months ahead.



Bringing elements of the sea into everyday life is nothing new.

Throughout history, the symbolism of the ocean – expressed through shells, pearls, fish, and organic shapes – has found its way into art, interior design, and fashion.

In the Rococo period (18th century), shell-like motifs and marine-inspired curves shaped European furniture and interiors, reinforcing an aesthetic of luxury and softness.

Later, during the Art Nouveau movement (late 19th to early 20th century), nature took center stage with aquatic figures and wave-like forms becoming protagonists in architecture, jewelry, and illustration.



Left: Art Deco Shell Design Watch in 18ct Yellow Gold
Right: French Dore Bronze Art Nouveau Nautilus Shell Lamp

In recent years, this maritime imaginary has been revived and reimagined by a new creative generation – one that looks to the past through a contemporary lens.

In a time marked by the search for ancestry, balance, and reconnection with nature, symbols of the sea have resurfaced, not merely as aesthetic choices, but as powerful narratives.

Elements like shells, scales, and pearls began to reappear in editorials, collections, and coveted objects.

By 2020, the market started showing clear signs of a shift toward the sea as an aesthetic reference. Pearls, in particular, took center stage in major fashion collections – crossing gender lines and finding their way into the masculine wardrobe. Necklaces, rings, and pearl-embellished garments brought this timeless element back to the core of contemporary style.



Pearls appeared in both minimalist, delicate compositions and bold, maximalist statements.

Celebrities like Harry Styles, A\$AP Rocky, and Pharrell were seen wearing them at award shows and in fashion editorials – reinforcing their versatility as symbols of sophistication, gender fluidity, and reconnection with nature.



Shawn Mendes, Harry Styles and Jaden Smith

By observing social media and the market, a new shift became clear in 2024. Little by little, shells began to take the place once held by pearls – finding their way into decor, fashion, and even pop culture, as seen in the oceanic set design of Beyoncé's Renaissance Tour in 2023.



Set design for "Virgo's Groove," Renaissance Tour, 2023.



“Little by little, shells began to take the place once held by pearls”



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Without a doubt, shells are poised to become the defining symbol of the summer – and the consumer goods, fashion, and content industries are already translating them into new visual and sensorial languages.

There's a timeless quality to the shell's essence; its organic shapes, delicate textures, and neutral tones align effortlessly with a contemporary aesthetic that values nature, craftsmanship, and simplicity.

This fascination with shells follows the same logic behind the growing popularity of fabrics like linen and cashmere: materials that evoke quiet sophistication, offering a tactile sense of calm, longevity, and understated elegance.



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Business Applications

The rise of shells as a visual and symbolic trend reveals deeper cultural, aesthetic, and emotional movements – directly influencing consumer behavior. More than just a visual code, this is an imaginary that can be translated into product strategy, branding, storytelling, and experiential design.

In the following sections, we outline actionable opportunities across different industries, highlighting tactical paths and key insights.

You've reached the end of the open content. To access the full analysis and receive a tailored study for your business, get in touch with our team.





Let's Talk

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