

Wardrobe Essentials

Little Black Dress Meets Little Black Gem

(NAPSA)—It's been more than 80 years since Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel, the pioneering French fashion designer, popularized the little black dress (LBD), which has become a wardrobe essential for women everywhere, in all corners of the globe. The LBD, as it is often called, exists in many variants and can be worn on almost any occasion calling for style and elegance.

Like the LBD, the little black gem—otherwise known as the LBG—is classic yet versatile. The gorgeous and varied LBG collection consists of diamonds, pearls, opals, onyx and other unique stones, ranging from the most affordable to the most precious gems available. No matter what their price, these stunning stones connote affluence while complementing the LBD, as well as many other colors and styles of clothing.

Although some black gems, such as the cultured black pearl, are now reaching new heights in popularity, the use of black stones in jewelry can be traced back to biblical times. A large onyx stone is said to have graced the gem-laden breastplate of Aaron. Black stones were also in the spotlight in the 19th century when Queen Victoria, mourning the loss of her husband, Prince Albert, commissioned the crown jewelers to create entire parures



Necklace of 12.5mm-15mm Cultured Black Pearls with 18K clasp. Photo by Robert Weldon © GIA

out of carved jet, a fossil coal also known as "black amber." During the same mid-19th century period, black onyx and other dark stones were extremely fashionable. Later, during the "Roaring Twenties," style-conscious women in the United States wore long strands of jet beads extending from the neckline to the waistline.

Today, the black diamond represents the ultimate LBG. According to the Gemological Institute of America (GIA), the world's foremost authority in gemology, black diamonds get their color from the presence of numerous inclusions, often consisting of graphite. Due to the dense concentrations of these dark inclusions, sometimes

lining the stone's cleavages and fractures, black diamonds are generally opaque and difficult to cut. Some notable black diamonds are the Black Star of Africa at 202.00 cts. and the Black Orloff at 67.50 cts.

Near the top of the LBG list are natural black pearls, which represent one of the rarest and most exotic of gem materials. In the 1960s, however, a black-pearl-culturing industry was initiated, and today, cultured black pearls play a prominent role throughout the international jewelry community. Tahitian cultured pearls are among the most popular of the black pearls. Known for their deep luster, these pearls can range from a soft dove gray to a deep midnight ink color.

Other LBG stones to look for include shimmering tourmaline, glassy obsidian, and hematite, which is a favorite of lawyers because it is fabled to bring the wearer success in litigation. No matter which LBG wearers may choose, they can be assured that it will meet their requirements for versatility and style—proof that the little black dress has finally met its match.

To learn more about the wide range of diamonds, pearls, and beautiful gemstones of any color, visit the GIA Web site at www.gia.edu, or call GIA at (800) 421-7250.