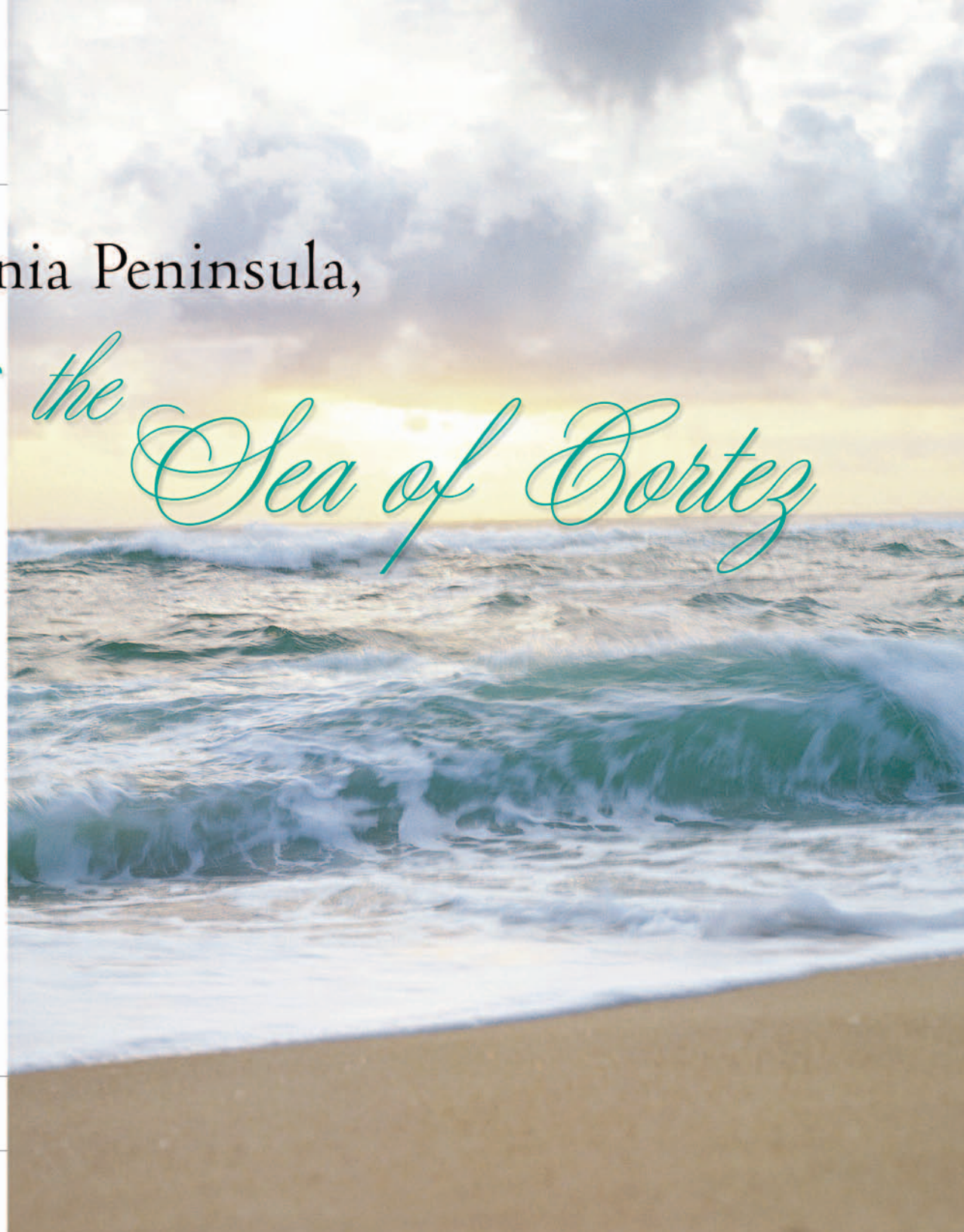

Padre Eusebio Kino,

the Baja California Peninsula,

& the Sea of Cortez

During the second half of the seventeenth century, the Spanish, having failed to colonize Lower California through military expeditions, decided to try a different approach—using the Catholic Church to convert the native population. In 1681, due to circumstances he could not have foreseen, a young Italian Jesuit novitiate, Eusebio Kino, found himself sailing from Europe to Mexico to help Spain in this endeavor. Because of his skills in astronomy and mathematics, Kino came to be critically important for Spain's first missionizing expeditions to Lower California, and through his early experiences there Kino became deeply dedicated to the people and geography of the peninsula. In fact, over the next 30 years, it was Kino who set Europe straight on the geography of Lower California, the Sea of Cortez, and the *Pimería Alta* (now northern Sonora and southern Arizona).

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Kino attained international fame as a cartographer, and his maps provided the first-ever accurate delineations of the Pimería Alta region. During his years there, Kino established two dozen missions and *visitas* (outlying mission stations). He made close to 50 exploratory expeditions, gaining the nickname, “the Padre on horseback.” He could equally have been called, “the Padre who dreamed of crossing the Sea of Cortez,” because throughout his years in the Pimería Alta he dreamed of a sailing fleet that would ply the waters of the Gulf to supply a string of missions he envisioned in Lower California. However, despite repeated attempts and continual petitioning of his superiors, bureaucracy and circumstance prevented Kino from living this dream.

When Father Eusebio Francesco Kino died in 1711, Spain lost one of her most courageous explorers and brilliant scholars. Kino died at the age of 66 in a mission he had founded at Santa María Magdalena de Buquivaba, a town in northern Sonora now known as Magdalena de Kino, where his bones are enshrined today.

Many books and scholarly papers have been published about Father Kino, but here is a look at the good Father that might be new to you. I want to tell you the story of Padre Kino’s 25-year love affair with the Sea of Cortez and the Baja California peninsula—

a largely unrequited love. But, let’s first place the good Father in proper historical context.

New Spain

Not long after Columbus discovered the New World, the influence of Spain began spreading throughout Mexico. Belief in a sea passage through North America connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (the fabled “Strait of Anian”) led Spain to assign Hernán Cortés to the first explorations of western Mexico. Cortés made five expeditions to the Pacific Coast between 1527 and 1539, including a failed attempt to colonize Lower California at Bahía La Paz in 1535.

Although Cortés crossed the Gulf of California numerous times, he never saw the northernmost Gulf. He assigned exploration of the north to his deputy, Francisco de Ulloa, who sailed to the uppermost Gulf in 1539. Ulloa was the first European to set eyes on that region and, presumably, to recognize California as a peninsula rather than an island. He named the Gulf *El Mar Vermejo* (the Vermilion Sea) after the color of the water, but shortly thereafter the name was changed to *Mar de Cortés* (Sea of Cortez). A year later, Captain Hernando de Alarcón also sailed to the upper Gulf in support of a land expedition of Francisco

Vásquez de Coronado. Alarcón actually navigated up the Colorado River, perhaps as far as its confluence with the Gila River. However, as fate would have it, news from Ulloa and Alarcón of the peninsular nature of Lower California did not reach most European cartographers, and it continued to be depicted as an island on most early European maps of North America.

Although Cortés failed to establish a military colony for Spain in Lower California, he did bring back the first sea pearls from the New World. The beautiful pearls were enough to keep the Spaniards coming back to the peninsula for another 200 years (see “Harvesting the Sea of Cortez,” page 42).

Lower California

Now, fast-forward nearly 150 years to 1681, when 36-year-old Eusebio Kino landed on the eastern shore of New Spain and traveled to Mexico City to wait for direction from his superiors. The fledgling missionary’s first assignment—issued by the Viceroy of New Spain himself, Don Tomás Antonio de la Cerda y Aragón, Conde de Paredes—was to join an expedition under the command of Admiral Isidoro y Atondo, Governor of Sinaloa and the Californias, to cross the Sea of Cortez. Selected because of his mathe-



A palm canyon in the Sierra Giganta.

matical and astronomical skills, Kino held the official title of “Royal Cosmographer for the California Expedition”—in other words, astronomer, surveyor, and map-maker. They were to explore the southern reaches of Lower California, and in April 1683 the expedition set out, in part to find the fabled pearl beds reported by Cortés and other Spanish explorers.

They sailed from Mazatlán and made landfall near Bahía La Paz, the original site where Cortés had landed, and here Atondo declared authority over the land in the name of King Charles II. However, like Cortés, Atondo and Kino found it impossible to establish a colony because of the unfriendly Natives, inaccessible freshwater sources, and lack of easily obtained food. On a second expedition in October 1683, they landed further north, near the stunningly beautiful Bahía Concepción, where they found both Natives and freshwater sources more amenable. Here, Kino established the first, albeit short-lived, mission in Lower California, which he named San Bruno. Here, he also established the first vineyard in the Californias.

West of San Bruno rose the beautiful but imposing mountain range known as Sierra Giganta, perhaps named because

of its sheer size, or perhaps because it was thought to be the home of giant Natives, a myth that may have stemmed from the enormous cliff- and cave-paintings scattered around the region. On his 39th birthday, August 10, 1684, ten months after arriving at San Bruno, Kino received word that he was to take his final vows in the Company of Jesus. Elated by his full commission to the Jesuit order, Kino and Atondo celebrated as adventurers do—by setting off on an expedition, this time to find a pass through the Sierra Giganta and across the “island” of California to the Pacific Ocean. Two weeks later they reached the Pacific at a site known today as San Gregorio. It was the first time Europeans had ever crossed the Baja California peninsula by land!

As time went on, however, the colonists found the mountainous terrain of the San Bruno region inhospitable agriculturally, and they came to rely more and more on supplies shipped from Sonora and Sinaloa. Furthermore, the famous pearls that Cortés had found in the lower Gulf proved to be scarce in this area. Kino and Atondo tried several times to sail north in the Gulf to search for better sites on the “island” for colonization, but every attempt was foiled



by circumstances of weather or bureaucracy. On one such attempt, winds drove their ship ashore in Sonora in the land of Seri Indians, and thus the site later came to be called Bahía Kino.

In 1685, due to their faltering successes, the San Bruno colony was ordered to return to the mainland. However, his brief time in Baja California had given Kino a deep respect for the land, the Native people, and the beautiful and bountiful Sea of Cortez. Memories of those times tugged on Kino's heart for the rest of his life, and he continued to petition to be reassigned back to that harsh dry peninsula. A longing to return also drove him to spend many years exploring for a convenient "missionizing route," either by sea or by land, from the Pimería Alta to Lower California, and Kino's most famous explorations in the Southwest grew from this longing.

In the Pimería Alta

When Kino arrived back in Sonora, Spanish settlements were already scattered among the indigenous peoples (e.g., Ópatas, Yaquis, Mayos, Pimas). When he entered the Pimería Alta, his attraction to the Sea of



A reproduction by Nicolas de Fer circa 1720 based on Kino's 1691 map, "Teatro de los trabajos," shows the early persistent view of the peninsula as an island. This reproduction from Paris appears in *Kino and the Cartography of Northwest New Spain* by Ernest J. Burrus.

Cortez led him to request permission to begin establishing missions first along the coast of Sonora, beginning in the Seri territory he had recently seen. Although his request to return to the Gulf was granted,

circumstances kept him from the sea he loved. The Alcalde Mayor of Sonora, Antonio Barba de Figuera, convinced Kino's superiors in Mexico City to assign him to the interior, where de Figuera suspected the



La Concepción de Nuestra Señora de Caborca church, in Caborca Sonora, was built on the site of one of Kino's original missions. It was designed by the same master architect who built San Xavier del Bac in Tucson.

Piman people might be scheming to cut off the Spanish advance to the north.

Thus it was that Kino established what came to be his home for the rest of his life in the foothills of the Sierra Madre

Occidental at the Piman village of Cosari, which he renamed *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores del Cosari* in honor of “Our Lady of Sorrows.” The first Jesuit missionary to take up residence in northern Sonora, Kino worked throughout the area for 24 years,

Kino convinced Manje
to help him build the ship
of his dreams to explore the
Sea of Cortez
and deliver supplies
to future missions across
those waters.

from 1687 to 1711. Using the mission at Dolores as his home base, Kino crisscrossed the Pimería Alta time after time, blazing new supply routes, establishing new missions, and mapping the area for New Spain. Many times he traveled a route from Sonoyta, across a track that eventually came to be known as the El Camino del Diablo, toward the confluence of the Gila and Colorado Rivers.

In 1690, Mexico City sent the Jesuit Padre Juan María Salvatierra to inspect Kino's progress. Kino and Salvatierra immediately became comrades, both being explorers at heart. During this visit, Kino told Salvatierra of his passion to cross the waters of the Gulf and return to a missionary life in Lower California. Kino even talked Salvatierra into supporting the construction of a boat that could deliver supplies from Sonora to the missions he imagined strung along the peninsula.

In 1693, not long after winning over Salvatierra, Kino also met and befriended the military commander Juan Mateo Manje. It took Kino no time at all to convince Manje to accompany him on exploratory sojourns to the northwest in search of a possible land passage to Lower California. He also convinced Manje to help him build the ship of his dreams to explore the Sea of Cortez and deliver supplies to future missions across those waters. The following year, they actually began building the ship at Caborca, planning to transport it to the mouth of the Río Concepción. Then, once again, fate intervened to blunt Kino's dreams. In June 1694, Kino received a letter from Father Juan Muñoz de Burgos, a high-ranking *Visitor* (traveling dignitary) from Spain, forbidding him from completing the ship. It seems the Jesuit Order was determined to keep Kino in the Pimería Alta.



In the meantime, Manje's own explorations to the north brought word to Kino of a "great river eight day's ride north of San Xavier del Bac." Kino and Manje soon mounted a new expedition, following the Santa Cruz River north from Tucson to the Gila River, where the Indigenous People lived in large villages. Here, they found the ruins of Casa Grande; the first written description of Casa Grande came from this expedition. Kino and Manje suspected the ruins must be part of the "Seven Cities of Cibola" for which Coronado and Marcos de Niza had searched in vain.

Despite these wondrous discoveries, Kino continued to be driven by his passion for Lower California, and late in 1695 (at the age of 50) he rode to Mexico City where he argued once again for re-establishing missions there. Arriving in Mexico City on January 8, 1696, he discovered that Rome had finally agreed to his request and had recommended to the new Provincial, Father Juan de Palacios, that Kino be assigned six months per year in Pimería Alta and six months in Baja California. Kino was elated! Kino and Salvatierra enlisted the aid of Father Juan de Ugarte, and the three of them concocted a plan for the conversion of Lower California and sent it to Rome. Rome accepted the plan and was so supportive that in 1697 they assigned Kino full-time to

Lower California. To Kino, it seemed to be a dream come true, and once again he began planning for a fleet of ships that would sail the Sea of Cortez.

So it was that ten years after the founding of Dolores, Kino followed the Río Yaqui to the coast to meet Salvatierra, to begin their

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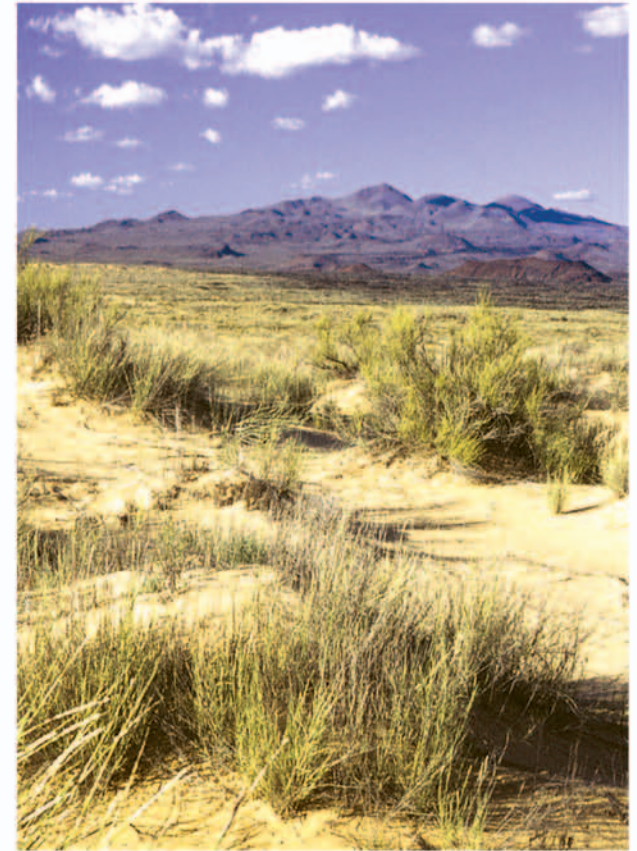
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new adventure to the west. However, as Kino neared the meeting place, a courier appeared on horseback with a message from the Viceroy and Provincial in Mexico, a message that ordered Kino to cancel his California plans and return to the Pimería Alta immediately. Local authorities had overridden his assignment from Rome. They needed him



Pinacate Peak, from which Padre Kino first gained visual evidence that Lower California is a peninsula, not an island.

more in Sonora than in Lower California! Kino was heartbroken. Salvatierra made the journey across the Gulf on his own to found a new mission at Loreto, the first "permanent" mission in Lower California.



Abalone shell with outer layer removed to expose the nacreous layer.



Kino's 1702 map of the Sea of Cortez and Baja California peninsula. From Kino and the Cartography of Northwest New Spain, by Ernest J. Burrus.

Ever drawn to the west, in 1698 Kino mounted a new expedition to survey the northernmost coastline of the Gulf. Upon reaching the Pima village of Sonoyta, he heard of a great river to the northwest, even larger than the Gila, which was said to empty directly into the sea. (This, of course, proved to be the mighty Colorado River.) The Sonoyta villagers urged him to visit the Pinacate, and to climb to the top of Santa Clara Peak (now known as Pinacate Peak) to view the upper Gulf. He did that, and following the horizon with his telescope, he traced the gigantic Bahía Adair stretching away to the northwest, sinking into a distant haze at the Colorado River delta, and rising again as the Sierra San Pedro Mártir in northern Baja California. Although he couldn't be certain, he felt strongly that Lower California must not be an island at all, but a peninsula. His ambition to find a land route to Lower California grew even stronger.

Kino returned to Dolores and enlisted Captain Manje to mount a major expedition with some 90 pack animals and a host of Native scouts and vaqueros. Early in 1699 the expedition departed, moving up through the Altar Valley toward Tucson, then cutting westward

along the southern flanks of the Baboquivari Mountains to Sonoyta, from whence the party traversed the infamous Camino del Diablo. From a high peak in the Gila Mountains, near Yuma, Kino saw the junction of the Gila and Colorado Rivers. Yuman Indians from the Colorado River Valley brought them gifts, among which were exquisite, gigantic, pearlescent-blue shells that reverberated in Kino's memory.

From this trip came
 one of Kino's most famous maps
 of the
Pimeria Alta
 region and
 Lower California.

These were the shells of abalone, the same giant snails he had seen 15 years earlier when he and Atondo first crossed the Baja peninsula to the Pacific shore. Because Kino knew abalone did not occur in the Sea of Cortez, these

shells reaffirmed his suspicion that the land of Pimería Alta stretched all the way to the Pacific shores of Lower California.

Kino made the California approach again several times from 1699 to 1702, with and without Manje, but circumstances prevented them from crossing the Colorado River or tracing it south to the Sea of Cortez. During the first 1701 expedition, the party nearly died of thirst in the sand dunes of the Gran Desierto (on this trip, Kino again viewed the upper Gulf from the top of Pinacate Peak). Finally, early in 1702 the persistent Padre successfully traveled all the way to the Colorado River. Probably the first European to cross that river, Kino followed it to the swamplands of the delta, far enough to be certain that Lower California was not an island, but a peninsula. From this trip came one of Kino's most famous maps of the Pimería Alta region and Lower California.

In 1706, two other Italian Jesuits, Fathers Domingo Crescoli and Gerónimo Minutuli, joined Kino in a journey toward the central Sonoran coast. Leaving Crescoli at Caborca, Kino and Minutuli continued on to explore the coast, and while there, Kino revisited the bay that is now named in his honor in the land of the Seris. With his new Italian friends, Kino cooked up one last scheme to build a fleet of ships

that would sail the Sea of Cortez, using Isla Tiburón (named Santa Inez by Kino) as a stepping stone to move supplies from the mainland to the missions being built by Salvatierra in Lower California. Kino never realized this dream, but 14 years later Ugarte did build his own famous ship, the *Triunfo de la Santa Cruz*.

In 1711, Kino left Dolores for what he hoped would be the trek that finally mapped the entire upper Gulf, providing detailed cartographic proof that Lower California was a peninsula. During a stop-over at the Piman village of Buquivaba, Kino dedicated a new chapel to his patron saint, St. Francis Xavier. The night of the dedication—just after midnight, March 15, 1711—the good Father fell ill and died. However, before departing on this fateful final voyage, Kino had drawn the most accurate map ever of the Sea of Cortez, labeling Lower California “Penisla de California” [sic].

After leaving San Bruno in 1685, Kino never again sailed across the Sea of Cortez. But the region to the west tugged on his spirit, driving him to make discoveries and see lands that no European had ever seen before. **S**

Native American necklace of abalone. In the collection at Mission San Francisco de Asis (also known as Dolores Mission), San Francisco, California.



These were the shells of *abalone*, the same giant snails he had seen

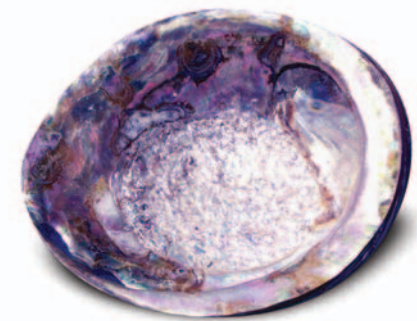
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Abalone shell showing inner, pearlescent layer.