Shell secrets

Ever wondered why shells look as good as they do? University of Queensland researcher Dr Daniel Jackson may have found the answer. In a collaboration between UQ's School of Integrative Biology and the University of Göttingen in Germany, Jackson has discovered a gene found in the tropical abalone that controls the striking blue and red colours found in the mollusc's shell. "This is the first gene shown to play a role in molluscan shell patterning," Jackson said. "It was a chance discovery that arose from a project where genes from specific tissues are randomly sequenced, so it was quite fortuitous. This gene is also distantly related to a gene family found in vertebrates, of which humans are a member, so it provides insight into how the evolutionary process can create new roles for old genes."