

THE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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CELEBRATING
30
STYLISH
YEARS

ELLE DECORATION

ROOMS THAT
CHANGED
THE WORLD
ERA-DEFINING
DESIGNS
ICONIC
ARCHITECTURE
DIRECTIONAL
TRENDS

THREE
DECADES of
EXPLORING
STYLE in the
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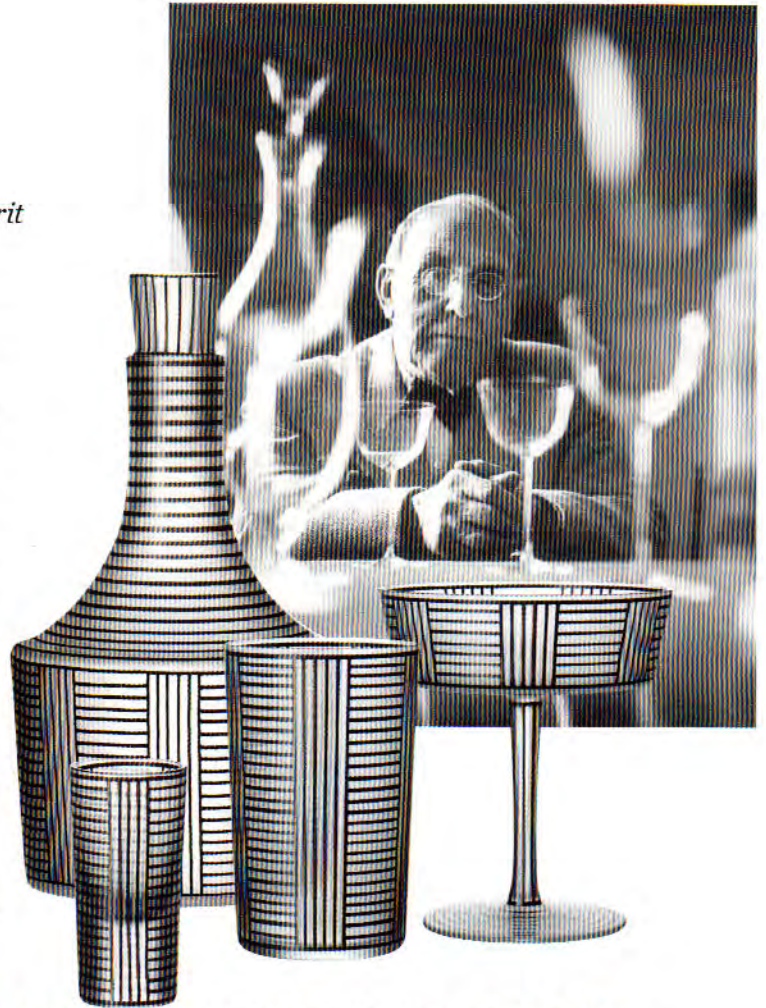
LOBMEYR

The crystal brand mixes craft heritage with Modernist spirit

If there's one design that sums up what makes Austrian crystal brand Lobmeyr unique, it's Josef Hoffmann's 'Serie B' drinking set of 1912 (right). Hoffmann was a co-founder of the Wiener Werkstätte, the Viennese design collective that preceded the Modernist and Art Deco movements. He loathed excessive decoration, prioritising simplicity and functionality. 'Serie B' is one of his finest achievements, its thin-black-striped pattern (created using varnish and the metallic mineral bronzite) the antithesis of traditional, heavily cut crystal drinkware.

Established in Vienna in 1823, the Lobmeyr firm was almost a century old when Hoffmann's design was unveiled, but it had always been a radical presence in the industry. Founder Josef Lobmeyr was a pioneer of Austria's now-famous crystal tradition while his son Ludwig, who later took the helm with his brother Josef, also had a knack for spotting the next big thing. In the 1850s, the firm invented 'muslin glass', an incredibly delicate yet strong material hand-blown to just one millimetre thick. Excellent for drinking wine, it was also remarkable for its unadorned beauty. In 1925, designer Oswald Haerdtl used it to make a spherical candy dish that's so timeless it could have been created yesterday – many designs in Lobmeyr's current collection are made of muslin glass.

Ludwig Lobmeyr also presided over the invention of the world's first electric chandelier in 1883, which was an international sensation. As well as drinkware and vases, lighting has long been an important element of his brand's output – the workshop has



DESIGNS ARE STILL MADE IN THE TRADITIONAL WAY: GLASS IS BLOWN BY HAND, THEN CUT AND POLISHED ON UP TO 15 WHEELS

more than 10,000 cast models – with traditional cut-crystal designs sitting alongside modern creations. Among the latter, the 'Starburst' chandeliers designed for the lobby of New York's Metropolitan Opera in 1966 stand out, both for their brilliance and their similarity to the futuristic 'Sputnik' styles of the time.

In addition to being a born innovator himself, Ludwig Lobmeyr brought several other talented designers into his stable. Alongside Josef Hoffmann, there was the architect Adolf Loos, whose 'No 248' drinking set of 1929 has a cut pattern just around the base (like Hoffmann's 'Serie B', it's still on sale). More recently, Lobmeyr has worked with New York-based artist Ted Muehling, Amsterdam duo Studio Formafantasma and Danish-born British designer Ilse Crawford, whose balloon-shaped 'Normal-Special' pitchers, vases and tumblers are among its latest launches.

Today, Lobmeyr is run by the Rath family, close relatives of the founders, who have been involved with the brand since its early days. The designs are still made in the traditional way: glass is blown by hand, then cut and polished on up to 15 wheels (each tumbler passes through 24 pairs of hands before it goes to stores). Even the most contemporary wares are made using these techniques – including the new 'Scotch' whisky decanter and tumblers by Robert Sadler, whose linear cut pattern is inspired by strips of sticky tape. In its stark simplicity, this design is a direct descendant of Hoffmann's iconic black stripes. *lobmeyr.at*

WORDS: ANN BRADFORD



From top Josef Hoffmann, 'Serie B' drinking set by Hoffmann, 'Starburst' chandeliers, 'Normal-Special' vase by Ilse Crawford, 'Scotch' decanter and tumbler by Robert Sadler