

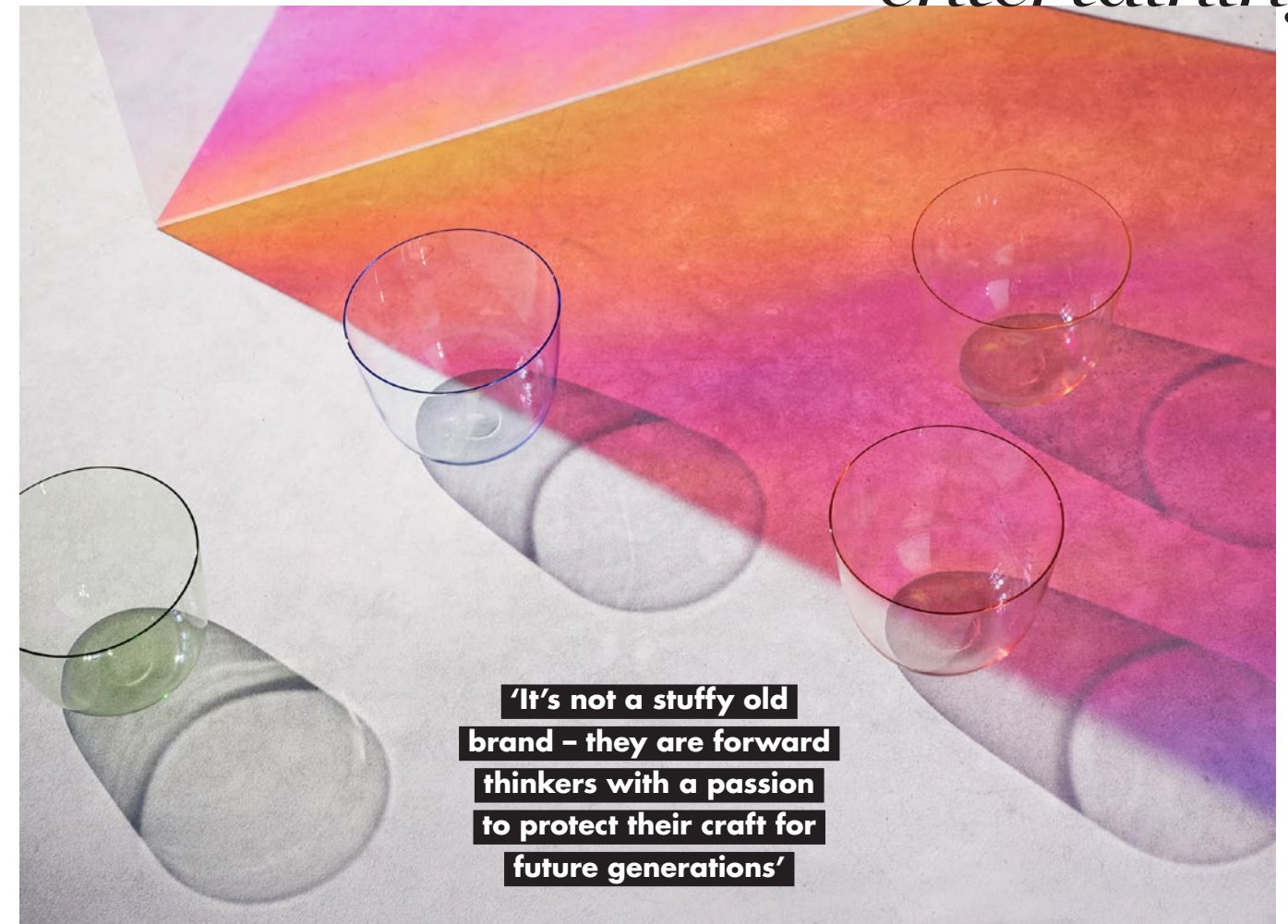
Raise a glass

The bicentenary of revered Viennese crystal glass-maker Lobmeyr is a chance to propose a toast to timeless design, traditional craftsmanship and sixth-generation family values

WORDS FIONA MCCARTHY

It is hard to pinpoint exactly what makes a piece of J & L Lobmeyr crystal so special. It could be the weightlessness of the wafer-thin, lead-free 'muslin' glass that the brand has been using to craft its collections since 1823, made as the Romans first did, explains Leonid Rath (one of the three sixth-generation cousins running the brand since 2000), 'with a mix of quartz sand, soda and potash, to lower the melting point, and lime to add strength'. Perhaps it is the tactile beauty of its perfectly proportioned coupes, sensually curvaceous carafes or bubble-like domed candy dishes. Or maybe it is simply that behind the delicate, ethereal nature of every Lobmeyr piece, there is, in fact, an inherent elasticity and robustness of construction that makes it perfect for everyday life.

Founded by Josef Lobmeyr Sr when he and his wife Aloisia opened a glassware shop in the heart of Vienna 200 years ago, Lobmeyr's designs quickly garnered favour with Austrian and European royalty. Today, every piece of glass is still blown, cut, engraved and polished entirely by hand at the firm's Salesianergasse workshops in the city. What makes Lobmeyr's crystal special – and different to heavily cut and polished British lead crystal, for example – comes down to 'a lot of little things,' enthuses Rath. 'We blow a thin layer of molten



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glass into wet beechwood moulds (hand-cut using paper templates) so that the steam rising up through the pores of the wood acts like a cushion, ensuring the glass doesn't touch the mould. That creates Lobmeyr's perfectly even and brilliant finish.' Where a glass has a stem, it is blown separately and attached by hand, because, says Rath, 'if we pulled it out of the top, it would be a long bubble, which you could never clean'.

With each successive generation, new ideas have always been key, he adds. 'It is always exciting to explore our craft, but the most important thing is that everyone involved in the making of our pieces understands the ideas of the designs – that they feel them, like our customers will feel them.' Whether designed in 1825 ('Drinking Set No 1') or in 2023 (Sebastian Menschhorn's bobbly 'Poppea' goblets inspired by 17th-century Nuremberg glass chalices), every piece exudes the brand's innovative design and endless curiosity.

These qualities can be seen in the triangular 'Ambassador' martini glass (first designed in 1925 by the Austrian architect Oswald Haerdtl) and the rounded, delicately coloured and surprisingly contemporary 'Alpha' drinking set by fourth-generation Lobmeyr guardian Hans Harald Rath in 1952, as well as the 33 incredible 'Starburst' chandeliers (the brand also creates lighting) which hang in the lobbies and grand auditorium of the Metropolitan Opera in New York. These chandeliers



Opposite 'Drinking Set No 4' designed by Josef Lobmeyr Sr in 1856 **This page, from top** 'Alpha' tumblers by Hans Harald Rath, £54; 'Neo' tumblers by Martino Gamper, from £142; 'Garden of Paradise' carafe, £176, and tumbler, £118, by Tatiana de Nicolay, all by Lobmeyr at Abask

were also designed by Hans Harald Rath, the current generation's talented grandfather, in 1966.

Among the brand's many fans is Abask, the UK-based online design emporium. 'Lobmeyr has an unrivalled heritage, balancing elegance and beauty with modernity,' says buying director Bryony Sheridan. 'It's not a stuffy old brand – the family are forward thinkers with a passion to protect their craft for future generations.' Some of Abask's best-selling Lobmeyr designs include the 'Patrician' drinking set designed by Austrian architect Josef Hoffmann in 1917 (co-founder of the Viennese Secessionist Wiener Werkstätte design movement) – 'so versatile you can use it on a minimalist table or blend it with a maximalist, bohemian vibe,' says Sheridan – and illustrator Tatiana de Nicolay's intricately hand painted 'Garden of Paradise' tumblers and carafe. To mark Lobmeyr's landmark 200th anniversary, Abask has commissioned an exclusive set of designer Martino Gamper's 'Neo' series of engraved, hand-painted and gilded whiskey tumblers, 'to shine a light on the incredible skills and aesthetic that we cherish from the brand,' enthuses Sheridan.

'We are happy when someone chooses a piece of Lobmeyr not because it was something that their parents owned, but because it reflects their own personality and taste,' says Rath. It's that which will see the brand succeed into the next 100 years and beyond. lobmeyr.at; abask.com