

Spring / 2014

# LUXURY

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*the*  
CUTTING  
EDGE





# GLASS ACT


DESIGN

FAMOUS FOR SPECTACULAR  
CONFECTIONS COMMISSIONED  
BY CZARS, EMPERORS, KINGS  
AND QUEENS, THE GREAT  
CRISTALLERIES ARE  
COLLABORATING WITH THE  
FINEST CONTEMPORARY  
DESIGNERS TO PRODUCE NEW  
CUTTING-EDGE COLLECTIONS

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Anyone staring into a crystal ball to determine the next big trend in luxury interiors might not be hugely surprised at what they see. Crystal. A lot of it. And in decidedly contemporary shapes. After a long period gathering dust, unfashionable ornamental pieces of yesteryear are being packed away to make room for a new and glimmering generation of designs, and with them, a new generation of collector. From Baccarat to Waterford, the world's oldest crystal companies are embracing contemporary design and branching out beyond the chandelier to explore new ideas.

As these cristalleries know better than anyone, this is an ancient material with a luxurious and eccentric history. Baccarat, which this year celebrates its 250th anniversary and has for most of its history relied almost exclusively on commissions from royalty, nobility and heads of state, fondly remembers the gargantuan chandelier it made for the Maharajah of Gwalior. The Indian king commissioned the piece, then built an entire palace around it, simply to show it off. When the ceiling collapsed, he called for it to be rebuilt, this time testing its strength first by suspending an elephant from it.

Baccarat's history is full of similarly heavyweight projects, as a leisurely peruse through its appropriately hefty commemorative coffee-table book, *Baccarat 1764: Two Hundred and Fifty Years* (published by Rizzoli) will testify. There are the dressing tables made for princesses, 12ft candelabras for czars and glassware ordered for a banquet for King Louis-Philippe of France in 1841, a design that has evolved into the house's iconic Harcourt range today.

Over the past decade, Baccarat has been working with the likes of Philippe Starck, Jaime Hayon and Arik Lévy to cut crystal a place in contemporary design, while Ettore Sottsass and Jeff Koons both created chandeliers and tableware. Now, as a little birthday present to itself, Baccarat is branching out with a new, less conventional (but still collectable) product. Paying homage to the kings, queens and castles that have made up its history during the past 250 years, the Japanese design studio Nendo's Harcourt chess game is a captivating example of art and craftsmanship. With contrasting cuts highlighting the different pieces in the game, the board itself serves to illuminate the pieces.

Baccarat, whose factory has been based since its inception in the eponymous French village in Lorraine, may hold the crystal crown in France. But during the past century it has seen many a contender vie for it. Saint-Louis, which has been devoted to the production of crystal items since 1829 and was responsible for the concept of a set of glasses for the dining table (a good business move if ever there was) has been happily creating 'everyday crystal' for years alongside its more fantastical pieces. Today, Saint-Louis's master glassmakers and glasscutters fashion designs by the avant-garde likes of Kiki Van Eijk (see her stunning Matrice lamp on page 18).

Another French crystal house in the news lately is Lalique, with its



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new series of vases by Zaha Hadid. The partnership between the master glassmakers and the world-famous architect and designer has resulted not only in a decidedly alien aesthetic, but a fresh approach to the medium overall, says Lalique's creative director, Marc Larminaux, who saw in the architect a spark of the crystal house's original founder. 'I believe she has the same philosophy as René Lalique,' he says. 'I have a feeling if he was working today he would do something like this, it fits in some way with the art nouveau philosophy of his time, inspired by nature and its way of organising shapes, the geometry... it's a way for us to step into contemporary design.'

Crystal is the heart of the Lalique brand, says Larminaux, who explains that the possibilities stretch far beyond its traditional uses in ornaments and chandeliers. 'We want to offer the possibility of home decoration and furniture, so we established Lalique Maison, and our interior architecture service in the past few years... we are unique in offering crystal wall panels, and today we're able to do some very large panels to construct the space. We are also interested in using crystal to adorn the body: perfume and jewellery. We're moving back into high jewellery, quite a challenge but very exciting for us.' Hadid's pieces are the latest flagships in the company's art department.

Over in Austria, Lobjmeyr is in its sixth generation as a family business. Like Baccarat, a frequent purveyor to the imperial court, this esteemed company is a proud pioneer of Austrian/Bohemian crystal production but is now initiating some seriously stylish collaborations with a new generation of designers. Lobjmeyr's latest launch is the Ripple light, designed by London based, RCA-trained duo, Poetic Lab. While the illustrious Austrians are more used to creating impressive chandeliers, these small lights, contained in a small bubble of rippled glass, are no less compellingly beautiful, casting hypnotic shadows like water on the walls.

Over in the Czech corner, Moser credits its founder Ludwig Moser (1833-1916) as 'one of the most outstanding personalities of glass manufacturing in the world'. Once the court suppliers of emperors, shahs



and kings, today the company's leading edge comes from its ability to produce ecologically friendly lead-free crystal, in iconic colours. This year, a key launch comes courtesy of Czech designer Ctvrtník Jan. The Tangram vases (shown on the cover), he says, are inspired by the ancient Chinese game of the same name. 'I stretched the geometric Tangram shapes into three dimensions and began toying with a few triangles and blocks to develop geometric vases, composed of different volumes turned slightly to each other. By pulling the diagonal shapes and sharp angles I created a game of vistas and colour transitions.'

The House of Waterford, in its namesake city in Ireland, has (like many Irish companies) endured its share of trials and tribulations over recent years, but a heritage that dates back to 1783 and a fond place in the hearts of many have not only kept it afloat but taken it from strength to glittering strength. Its vast chandeliers hang in prestigious locations from Westminster Abbey to Windsor Castle and it is responsible for the 2,688 crystals that make up the famous 11,875lb New Year's Eve Ball that is dropped each year in New York City's Times Square, but what is now getting the company noticed is new collectables from John Rocha and Jo Sampson. Sampson's Couture is a limited-edition collection of objets d'art in crystal, copper and turned wood that can be combined to form striking silhouettes. Not a chandelier, but still deliberately designed to make a statuesque statement. And there's more to come from Irish crystal, launching at Rossana Orlandi's influential gallery during Milan's Salone, April 8-13, is new company, J. Hill's Standard. Taking their cues from the established crystal brands - they're working with leading designers, and the first collection will feature pieces by Martino Gamper and design duo of the moment, Scholten & Baijings.

Collectors, take note: between them, these companies are proving that a bright future for crystal is on the cards. Just beware of glassy imitations, as with all the magic arts, charlatans abound. ■ [baccarat.com](http://baccarat.com); [hillstandard.com](http://hillstandard.com); [lalique.com](http://lalique.com); [lobmeyr.at](http://lobmeyr.at); [moser-glass.com](http://moser-glass.com); [saint-louis.com](http://saint-louis.com); [waterford.co.uk](http://waterford.co.uk)