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Chanel clutch from the Gift Guide

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This Christmas, could the decanter be poised to make a comeback as the latest trend in luxury tableware? One person who is determined to make this happen, sooner or later, is Maximilian Riedel, the dynamic young president of the famous Austrian glass company. Riedel is, of course, best known for its magnificent stemware, which has transformed the way we drink and enjoy wine. Now it seems this 11th-generation Riedel is hoping to do the same for decanters.

His passion began in 2004 when he designed his very first crystal decanter; 10 years later, he's still a man on a mission to persuade oenophiles everywhere of the practical and gustatory benefits of decanting – except even more so. “I firmly believe that wine must be decanted because it makes such a difference to what you are drinking – whether it's young or old, red or white, still or sparkling.” Of course, he would say that, wouldn't he. But what isn't quite so expected are the revolutionary, modernist designs and techniques he has begun to create in the past few years.

What Riedel latched onto was the notion of recasting the decanter as an exciting, eye-catching *objet d'art* in its own right. “Essentially, I wanted to create stunning shapes that can act as decor for a living room as well as a great conversation piece for the dining table.”

He was also one of the first glassmakers to step away from moulded decanters, which, in turn, enabled him to move to more free-form shapes. One of his most



From far left: Riedel lead-crystal Eve decanter, £495. Linley crystal Trafalgar Port Hogget with walnut and stainless-steel base, £695. Lalique crystal Fleur du Désert decanter, £1,400

Decanters are not only being recast as playfully intriguing *objets d'art*, their funky forms are also bringing out flavours and aromas at a faster rate, finds John Stimpfig

AERATES & GRACES



successful is the striking Eve decanter (£495, pictured on previous page) with its coiled, cobra-like body. It's tempting to think that this exquisitely tactile decanter is primarily about its daring design and appearance, rather than its practical application. In fact, it's the other way around. Riedel's philosophy has always been to follow the Bauhaus approach, where form follows function. "It's why we call our glasses 'tools' and 'instruments'. And it's the same with our decanters," Riedel adds.

For instance, he claims that the shape of the Eve aerates wine much more quickly (up to 17 times faster) and more efficiently than a traditional decanter by "double-decanting" the wine in the belly of the vessel. Each time you pour a glass you have to give it a clockwise rotation, which increases the aeration by creating a partial vacuum. "To be honest, I didn't plan this in the design, it just happened by accident," he admits. Nonetheless, Riedel has since patented the technique.

Riedel says he has no idea how many decanters he has designed in the past few years. "But we have about 52 in the range now." They come in all shapes and sizes, including some double magnums, and range from \$24 up to \$2,400 for its more exotic, limited-edition pieces.

Self-evidently, Riedel has a particular penchant for serpents, having produced several variations on the theme, including his limited-edition Titanoboa, as well as the Mamba. "I think it is because I was born in the Year of the Snake," he explains. "Also, they're just fascinating creatures and have such wonderful fluidity, which lends itself to decanter design."

There also seems to be plenty more innovation in the pipeline. Next year, he plans to produce a new Bacchus decanter based on the Chinese zodiac. "What people like is that these decanters are fun, funky yet highly functional. The objective is really to take people out of their non-decanting comfort

"Rokos has turned decanter design on its head or, to be precise, its side. Moving it into position increases the wine's exposure to oxygen"

zone so they can experience the difference it makes to a wine. Tasting really is believing."

One can only guess at the level of eye-rolling by Riedel's glassblowers in Kufstein when he presents another of his latest design concepts. But Riedel has been determined to take them out of their comfort zones too. "Usually, they tell me there's no way that this can be done in glass. But we always find a way. And because it is so difficult to do, it means we can't be copied."

While Riedel may have its own distinctive style, it doesn't hold a monopoly over eye-catching design, let alone enhanced functionality. British designer Jim Rokos has come up with a genuinely pioneering product in the shape of Rokos 13°, 60°, 104° (from £450, pictured above). This has, rather amusingly, turned decanting design on its head – or, to be precise, its side. This is primarily because Rokos's decanter can be placed at three different angles. Moreover, moving the decanter into each position increases the wine's exposure to oxygen, thereby bringing out the flavours and aromas at a faster rate. Rokos likes to compare the position of the

decanter with becoming mildly inebriated during the course of an evening. "It's fun," he says. "At 13°, the decanter is upright and sober. As more wine is consumed, you turn it to 60° and the decanter is also getting a little bit tipsy. And by the end of the evening, it sits at a relaxed 104°."

The decanter can be bought from Eurocave in London and is selling very well, according to managing director Daniel Primack. But getting hold of one does sometimes require a degree of patience. "Because of the amount of work required to make each piece by hand, Rokos only creates limited runs of 20, four times per annum," says Primack. "I just wish he could produce more."

Even rarer and more collectable are Etienne Meneau's playfully intriguing Strange Carafes, which also double up as exquisite abstract sculptures in their own right. His various vinous creations mimic human hearts, blood vessels and tree branches. "My work turns around geometry and nature. I love to put some flesh on geometrical shapes," says the Bordeaux-based sculptor.

Made in borosilicate glass, just 12 Grand Coeur decanters (pictured far left) were numbered, signed

Clockwise from far left:
Etienne Meneau limited-edition borosilicate-glass Grand Coeur carafe, €3,000. Michel Drappier crystal Carafe Drappier Vide, £115. Rokos borosilicate-glass 13°, 60°, 104° decanter, from £450

and sold at €3,000 apiece. Recently, Meneau's artistic credentials were underpinned by his Carafe No 5, which featured in an exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art under the title *How Wine Became Modern*.

Does this trend signal the eventual design demise of the traditional decanter? Riedel believes so, and is gradually phasing out some of its older, more conservative products. "We sell 60,000 decanters a year around the world. For the past four years, our funkier designs have been easily outstripping the more traditional versions. Despite the fact that we have 120 glassmakers, we can't keep up with demand. Right now, there's a four-month waiting list."

But not everyone is convinced. Baccarat Harcourt (whisky decanter pictured overleaf, £575), Linley and Lalique continue to design and handcraft some delightful heritage decanters, which they insist are as popular as ever.

Lalique has brought in the American wine critic James Suckling to design its 100 Point Range (from €100), based on a traditional ship's decanter. "They've been hugely successful," says CEO and enthusiastic wine aficionado Silvio Denz. (Indeed, Denz is so passionate about wine that he has bought a number of top-drawer Bordeaux châteaux, including Faugères and Lafaurie-Peraguet.)

In addition, Denz is a decanter collector and owns around 40 (mostly classic Lalique) both for display and



They have become genuine collectors' items in their own right – people line up whole sets in their dining rooms

for different wine styles. "I know it's unusual, but it's by no means uncommon in the fine-wine world." Recently, Lalique has struck upon a new design twist that has caught the attention of its loyal collectors. For the past few years, it has produced runs of just 1,000 decanters per annum, each with the same base but a different, unique stopper (example pictured on opening page, £1,400).

"These have become genuine collectors' items in their own right, too," adds Denz. "I've seen people line up whole sets in their dining rooms." He also points out that, just like a René Lalique-designed original, the ranges continue to hold their value on the secondary auction market, especially at Sotheby's and Christie's specialist sales.

For wine purists, the size and shape of the decanter is usually the determining factor in the choice of vessel for any given wine. "If you have a delicate, older wine, you want a narrower shape so the aromas don't dissipate too quickly," Denz continues. "If you are serving a young, new-world wine, or a nubile champagne, you want a broad-based decanter that exposes the wine to oxygen and brings out the flavour."

However, the subject of decanting champagne has become such a fashionable and contentious issue among wine cognoscenti that the champagne oenologist Michel Drappier decided to create the first bespoke decanter, the Carafe Drappier Vide (€115, pictured on previous page), that is specifically designed for fizz. "It was a

difficult and delicate balancing act. Champagne needs air to breathe and develop the aromas, but without losing too many bubbles." Drappier ingeniously designed a decanter with an appositely rounded bottom, which is also kept cool by sitting in its own wooden base, and allows for the smooth movement of the decanter. "Plus, you can put it in an ice bucket," he points out.

Even more recently, Linley has come up with a new and rather clever crystal decanter specifically intended for port. It too comes equipped with a rounded bottom for an equally practical reason. This has little or nothing to do with improving the flavour of the port, and

everything to do with making sure that it is continually passed to one's left around the table. The intention was to prevent it from getting stuck halfway

around and giving rise to the much quoted question, "do you know the bishop of Norwich?", which invariably gets it moving again. With a delightful sense of wit and irony, Linley has also christened it the Port Hogget (£695, pictured on opening page). It sounds like the perfect Christmas present. ♦

Left: Baccarat crystal Harcourt whisky decanter, £575

TALK OF THE TABLE

Baccarat, www.uk.baccarat.com and see Harrods and other stockists. **Champagne Drappier**, 3-5 Blvd de la Madeleine, 75001 Paris (+331-4297 2020; www.champagne-drappier.com) and stockists. **Etienne Meneau**, +335-5681 2758; www.the-strange-decanter.blogspot.co.uk. **EuroCave**, 57 Chiltern St, London W1 (020-7935 4679; www.eurocave.co.uk). **Harrods**, 87-135 Brompton Rd, London SW1 (020-7730 1234; www.harrods.com). **Lalique**, 47 Conduit St, London W1 (020-7292 0444; www.lalique.com) and see Harrods and other stockists. **Linley**, 60 Pimlico Rd, London SW1 (020-7730 7300; www.davidlinley.com) and branch and see Harrods. **Riedel**, 0844-800 1143; www.riedel.com. **Rokos**, 25 Queen's Gate Gdns, London SW7 (020-7589 7935; www.rokos.co.uk) and see Eurocave and other stockists.

ETIENNE MENEAU

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