

MANSION

Cutting-Edge Design

A band of innovative European designers is updating hand-cut crystal for a new generation

BY KATRINA BURROUGHS

FIVE YEARS AGO, hand-cut crystal looked incongruous in the contemporary home. The words “lead crystal” were shorthand for fussy, fusty and antidesign—the generations-old wedding present gathering dust in a cabinet somewhere. Then, a new wave of creatives rediscovered its charms, and revitalized the tradition with a fresh set of patterns and forms. With the arrival of this year’s new lines—designs inspired by punk rock, mismatched attic finds and even the streets of Manhattan—cut crystal is officially a modern living must-have.

“The beauty of crystal is all about light refraction and depth of cut,” says British designer Jo Sampson. “It’s interesting to retain the cut, which makes it traditional, but [to] invent a contemporary form.” Launched in January, her Rebel collection for Waterford marries the non-conformist spirit of 1970s counter-culture with the opulence one expects from a firm with its roots in one of the longest glassmaking traditions—originating in Ireland in 1783.

The perception of what cut crystal can be has changed, she adds. It’s moved away from conventional stemware for the table to more standalone pieces for the home, to be appreciated in their own right. “Crystal’s time has come, because there’s a new way of buying,” says Ms. Sampson, who also created a range of jazzy London Desktop Bars for Waterford, with faceted crystal side panels, a built-in tray, and barware (from *€11,000*; waterford.co.uk). “We were conditioned to buy sets of eight. That made it feel inaccessible,” she says. “Now our lifestyle is more eclectic. We don’t buy sets; we choose things that don’t match, but sit well together.”

Cutting-edge designs are emerging Europe-wide, as the traditional glassmaking heartlands of Bohemia, Scandinavia, France and Germany put a twist on crafts of the past.

The standout launch from Swedish maker Orrefors this year is the Street decanter, featuring a grid pattern borrowed from New York’s streets (*€199*, scp.co.uk). In the Czech Republic, Lasvit, which specializes in lighting installations and sculptural furniture, is producing innovative crystal designs such as the Homune table. Designed by Michael Young, its sculptural base consists of 36 individually handblown, interconnected

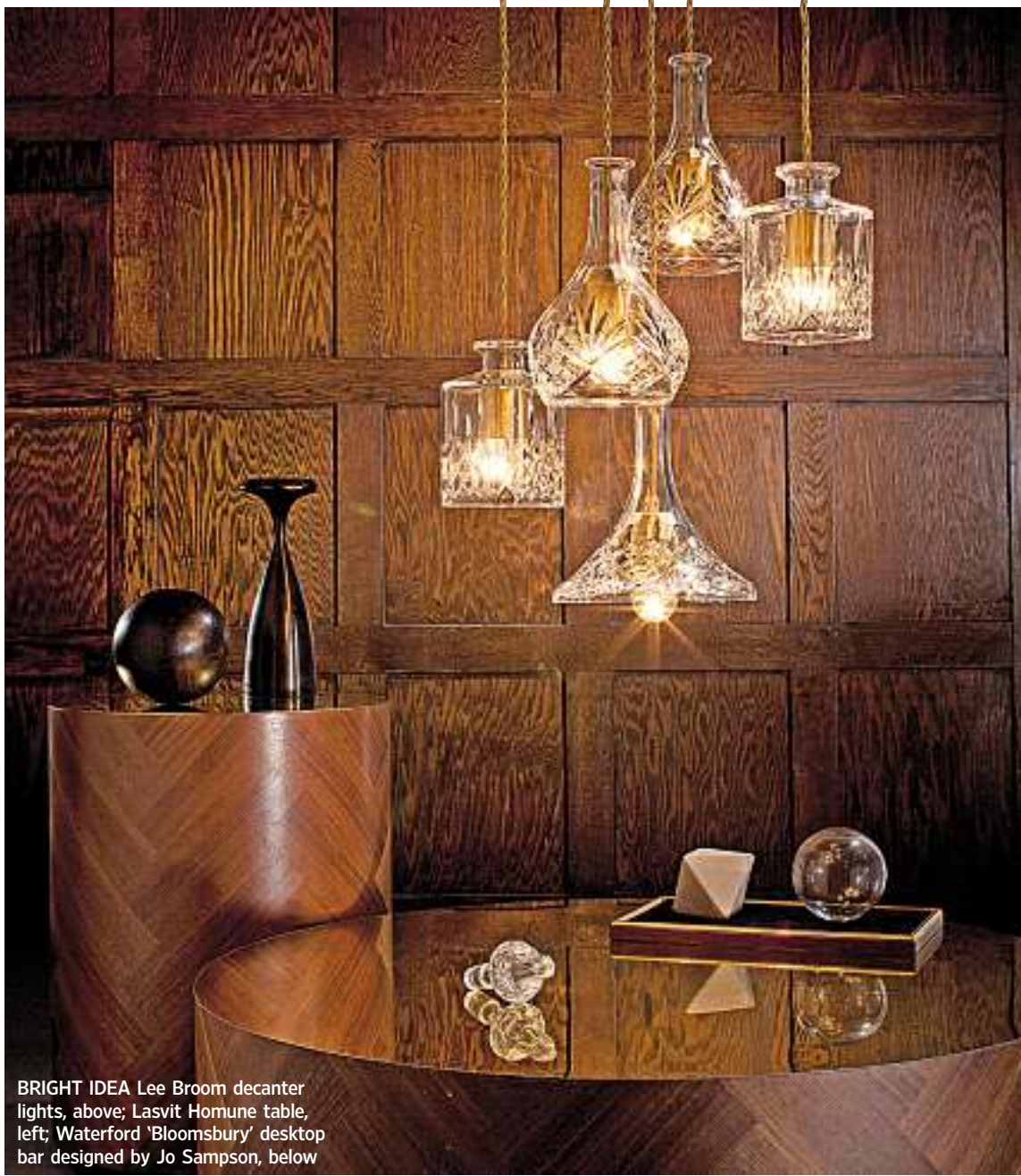
elements and a crystal tabletop (from *€24,000*, harrods.com).

Theresienthal, the German glassworks founded in the 19th century, has conceived contemporary gems such as the Aden jewel box in vividly colored crystal with a “pineapple cut” lid (from *€361*, theresienthal.de). In January, France’s oldest glassmaker, Saint-Louis, unveiled a range of impeccably modern marble and crystal hybrid pieces called Quadrille. It includes vases, candlesticks, a pedestal table and, the highlight, a crystal-base tray topped with a slab of Carrare marble (*€1,324*, available from April; amara.com). And Baccarat, the 251-year-old

French glassworks famous for its supernova-sparkly chandeliers, recently launched an Everyday Baccarat range. The set of five tumblers, each with a different pattern, mimics a mismatched group of heirlooms and playfully brings the tradition of inherited pieces of cut-crystal bang up-to-date (*€330*, available from mid-April; baccarat.fr).

While the historic manufactories have raised their game, there are also stellar newcomers on the scene. Anike Tyrrell and her husband, Christopher Kelly, set up J Hill’s Standard last year in County Waterford, Ireland, building on the region’s reputation for cut crystal. “The brief to our designers has been to approach the formal design language in a new way that would feel relevant to a whole new generation,” Ms. Tyrrell explains.

The couple takes pride in preserving traditional skills, but challenges the cutters to extend their repertoire beyond the familiar wedge and flat cuts to create layered, graphic patterns. Their Elements series, a range of mix-and-match drinking glasses—designed by Dutch duo Stefan



BRIGHT IDEA Lee Broom decanter lights, above; Lasvit Homune table, left; Waterford ‘Bloomsbury’ desktop bar designed by Jo Sampson, below

clockwise from left, Lee Broom (2); Waterford; J Hill’s Standard (2); Gareth Gardner; Kristina Hrabetova

Scholten and Carole Baijings in their distinctive, delicately graphic style—requires a particularly meticulous approach (from *€160*; jhills-standard.com). “Each piece can be handled six or seven times whilst the design is layered up, in slow steps,” says Ms. Tyrrell.

Cut crystal’s new cool edge is partly due to the type of talent being drawn to the medium, and their clever subversion of the material’s traditional usage. British product designer Lee Broom, who’s known for taking time-honored crafts and reinventing them for contemporary homes, has been creating lighting in crystal since 2010. At the Milan Furniture Fair in April, he will show a cut-crystal version of the fluorescent tube.

Mr. Broom’s fascination with the material began with a restaurant project. “I wanted to display a collection of vintage decanters, and also to make an interesting alternative to crystal chandeliers,” he says. “I looked at the decanters and thought: I wonder if I can turn these into light fittings?” When he launched his Decanter light in 2010, it was made from upcycled vintage pieces—but the supply was limited.

“After 18 months we’d depleted the sources in Europe, so we had the crystal made from scratch,” he says. “Going to the factories inspired me—anyone who’s seen crystal being blown or cut will know, it’s a theatrical experience.” In 2012, Mr. Broom put into production the hand-cut Crystal Bulb, turning a disposable item into a design feature worthy of intrigue.

CRYSTAL THAT ROCKS

COOL CUTS // J Hill’s Standard has a variety of contemporary styles (1), including Cuttings (large tumbler, *€130*) and the Elements series designed by Dutch partnership Stefan Scholten and Carole Baijings, with mix-and-match drinking glasses and decanters in patterns showcasing the duo’s graphic style (*€545*). jhillsstandard.com

LIGHT BULB MOMENT // The current interiors craze for bare bulb-style lighting can partly be laid at the door of Lee Broom’s Crystal Bulb (2), made in the Czech Republic. The designer launched the light, which is hand cut with patterns inspired by vintage whisky glasses and decanters, in 2012 and it has become an interiors best seller. *€119*, leebroom.com

HEART OF GLASS // The motifs of punk rock and the historic skills of lead-crystal cutting come together in Jo Sampson’s Rebel collection for Waterford, available from April. Sparky star of the collection is the Dog Bowl, (3) a 16 cm diameter dish that rejoices in faceted studs (like punk-era dog collars) and a 24-karat gold band. Blown and hand cut in Slovenia. *€135*; waterford.co.uk

SHINE ON // The strength of Baccarat is its historic archive, which is adapted for every new generation. Louise Campbell’s 2013 take on the glassmaker’s classic Zénith chandelier. Using crystal interspersed with little lampshades, her 37-light Zénith Nervous chandelier is a lesson in witty extravagance. *€105,000*; baccarat.fr

