Iittala Stands for Lasting Design

As a company based in Scandinavia, where quality, aesthetics and functionality are important values, Iittala believes in interior design that lasts a lifetime. What started as a glass factory, now celebrates generations of essential objects that are made to enrich people’s everyday lives.

Iittala glassworks was founded in 1881. In its early years Iittala produced blown, pressed, polished, painted and etched glass according to continental models. In the 1930s, as part of the Karhula-Iittala company, it held important glass-design competitions, which resulted in, among other products, Iittala’s most best-known glass object, the Aalto vase designed by Alvar Aalto in 1936.

The first designers came to Iittala in the 1930s. Göran Hongell (1902–1973) was hired as a permanent designer in 1932. Aino Aalto was runner-up in a design competition that same year and her Aino Aalto glasses are the oldest item in the permanent Iittala product range. Göran Hongell’s post-war Aarne range from the 1940s represents modern glass, both in terms of design and manufacturing technology.

The breakthrough in Finnish design in the 1950s and 1960s also changed glassware ranges. A new kind of aesthetic and functionality affected Finnish glass while most other countries still used traditional, extensive glassware ranges. A simplified, modern design took over from cut crystal.

Path laid by great maestros

Of the Iittala design maestros, Tapio Wirkkala has designed the most glassware ranges for Iittala. Sarpaneva follows close behind. Tapio Wirkkala designed the Tapio range, inspired by the traditional air bubble motif, in the early 1950s. Sarpaneva’s i-range from 1956 also included drinking glasses but interpreted anew, the stemless glasses stood out because of their size and colour. Iittala’s current red-and-white trademark, the i-logo, was originally designed by Sarpaneva for the i-range in 1956. Kaj Franck’s Kartio glasses were designed in 1956 and are still one of the cornerstones of the Iittala range while his ceramic Taema tableware is a modern classic.

i glass, the new clear-crystal glass adopted by Iittala in the mid-1960s, provided unprecedented shine in the so-called “ice glass” born around the same time. Both Wirkkala and Sarpaneva designed ice glass: objects blown into a wooden mould, a technique that resulted in an uneven surface of the glass. Of this period, Wirkkala’s Ultima Thule (1968) is still in production.

Iittala’s glass products reflect a high quality yet relaxed lifestyle where objects adjust to changing needs. International designers, such as the Swiss-Argentine Alfredo Häberli, bring us a first-hand feel for international market demands. His impressive yet effortless Essence (2001) and Essence Plus (2013) wine glasses are for modern tastes on every continent. Matti Klenell (Lempi, 2012) and Aleksi Kuokka (Sarjaton glass, 2012) are good examples of contemporary aesthetics in a modern lifestyle.

Timeless design for all rooms at home

Today’s Iittala collection encompasses much more than just glass. Iittala launched a collection of essential products for preparing a meal, setting the table and decorating the home in 2003. Kaj Franck’s design classic Taema tableware was added under Iittala brand. Since then, Iittala has created items for dining and home ambience in a variety of materials. A good example of the new material thinking is Sarjaton, a modern interpretation of Finnish traditions, which is a collection of independent items of glass, ceramics,
textile and wood. In 2013, Iittala moved more strongly towards all rooms of the home by bringing storage solutions and lighting to its collection, such as Vakka plywood boxes by Aalto+Aalto and Leimu lamp by Magnus Pettersen.

The core idea behind Iittala’s ranges is to offer aesthetically and functionally durable products that bring enjoyment and pleasure to everyday life, whether it is about dining, creating a mood or storing small items at home. All Iittala objects are thought through in form, function and quality. All aim to achieve long-lasting everyday use and inspiration. Iittala objects are designed to be combined, with existing environments or with each other.

Right for lasting products
We believe people have the right to expect the design they buy to last a lifetime. We also see that the world is becoming more and more aware of the value of long-lasting design. We believe quality never goes out of fashion. The effort put into quality design has paid off: the Iittala collection includes not only new design but also items that have been around for more than 80 years. The design work today is lead by Harri Koskinen, who has been Iittala’s design director since 2012.

Visionary thinking by designers goes hand in hand with the knowledge and experience needed in the production of quality items. This traditional but vivid cooperation continues to drive the Iittala product development today. And all the famous Aalto vases are still mouth blown at the original Iittala factory.

The home of Scandinavian design
The Iittala store concept has been developed in order to show consumers the possibilities in our product portfolio: to let each consumer make their own choices, with their own combinations of Iittala products in order to achieve a slice of the Scandinavian lifestyle.

The first Iittala shop was opened in 2002 in Helsinki. Our Helsinki flagship store opened 2003 in a location that Professor Kaj Franck had already designed in the 1950s to be the showroom for Wärtsilä. Since then, Iittala has focussed on developing the international Iittala retail experience.

During the past few years, Iittala has opened several retail doors, most of them very centrally located, including the Iittala concession at Matsuwa department store at Tokyo’s Ginza shopping street, Le Bon Marche in Paris and Skandium’s Brompton Road store in London. The latest opening is a 180m² store in Shenzen, China in autumn 2013 and Osaka store spring 2013. Currently, there are globally approximately 200 Iittala shops, outlets and shop-in-shops. In 2012, Iittala launched an international web store with distribution currently to Finland, Germany, Denmark, France, Netherlands and Great Britain. In 2014, Iittala is planning on opening several new doors in Europe and Asia.

As part of Fiskars group since 2007, Iittala is one of the key international brands of the company and has grown 14% between 2009 and 2012. The international expansion of Iittala is part of Fiskars’ strategy to become the world leader of consumer goods in Scandinavian design.