

## Alessi

The Alessi company was founded by Giovanni Alessi in 1921 at Omegna, a village on Lake Orta in the foothills of the Alps near Novara. Giovanni was a skilled lathe turner, the last of a long line of craftsmen from the nearby Valle Strona valley.

During the nineteen-twenties and thirties, in his workshop copper, brass and nickel silver tableware and household objects were made with exquisite craft skill. Many of the different objects produced in this first period (like the nickel silver **tea and coffee service** from 1921, the nickel-coated brass **flask holder** from 1926 or the **cheese tray** in fine nickel silver and milk glass from 1929) have become part of the collective memory for generations of Italians.

Design (in the modern sense of the word) first appeared at the end of the nineteen-thirties with Giovanni's eldest son, Carlo. Carlo had trained as an industrial designer in Novara. He was the author of most of the objects that appeared in the catalogue between the mid-thirties and 1945, the year when his last design project was presented: the '**Bombé**' **tea and coffee services**. This was one of the archetypes of the first era of Italian design.

In the fifties, he became Chief Executive of the company and together with his brother Ettore he began to call in free-lance designers, such as Carlo Mazzeri, Luigi Massoni and Anselmo Vitale, the authors of some highly successful projects that are still in the catalogue (like the **cocktail shaker No. 870** of 1957).

In 1970, Carlo placed his eldest son, Alberto, in the company and gradually handed over to him responsibility for design management. Other, younger members of the family were also brought into the company: the other two sons, Michele and Alessio and the nephew, Stefano. Thanks to their new creativity and freshness, Alessi has been able to develop a policy of design excellence which has made it one of the leading and internationally renowned *Italian Design Factories*.

In the 2000s Michele's son, Matteo, has been the first member of the Alessi fourth generation to enter the company.

One of Alessi's special features today is the ability to reconcile its typically industrial needs (in terms of operations and products) with its tendency (at intellectual and spiritual level) to consider itself more as a 'research laboratory in the field of the applied arts' than an industry in the conventional sense. This is what inspires Alessi's tireless research and experimentation, which has led it over the last few years to use new materials and new technologies: wood, porcelain and ceramics, plastic, glass and crystal, electricity and electronics.

Over the years, Alessi has produced objects that have been created by over two hundred designers. Some of the historic designers of the company include: Ettore Sottsass, Richard Sapper, Achille Castiglioni, Aldo Rossi, Michael

Graves, Massimo Morozzi, Philippe Starck, Stefano Giovannoni and Guido Venturini, Enzo Mari, Jasper Morrison, Mark Newson, Ron Arad... and Alessandro Mendini, who has also been design consultant since 1979.

The last important project was presented - in preview at *Next, 8. Mostra Internazionale di Architettura 2002* at the Venice Biennale - at the Milan Triennale in April 2003: the "**Tea & Coffee Towers**" operation, twentytwo tea and coffee sets, designed by as many international architects.

Alessi employs today about 500 people. The core business (i.e. the production of items by metal presswork) amounts to about 7,500 items a day. Exports to about sixty different countries account for two thirds of the turnover.

The 2000s are witness to new Alessi developments: the collaboration with other companies in manufacturing contexts very different from the original one dedicated to small objects for the home and kitchen. Alessi's aim is to give life to new objects characterised by that mix of eccentricity and style, playfulness and culture, irony and elegance which has become synonymous with the Alessi name. The projects in this field include a line of **wristwatches**, "**Alessi Watches**" (with the Japanese SEIKO), a line of **pens** "**Alessi Pens**" (with the Japanese Mitsubishi), two complete settings for the **bathroom**, "**ILBAGNOALESSI One**" (with Laufen Switzerland, Oras Finland and Inda Italy) and "**ILBAGNOALESSI dot**" (with Laufen and Oras), **ceramic tiles** "**Alessi Tiles**" (with the German Steuler AG), a **car** the "**Panda Alessi**" (with the Italian FIAT), a **home textile collection** (with the Italian company Bassetti), two **toilet rim hangers**, "**FreshSurfer**" and "**Kayak**" with German Henkel as well as a complete setting for the kitchen, "**LACUCINAALESSI**" (in collaboration with the Italian companies Foster and Valcucine and the Finnish company Oras).

The year 2006 has seen a significant change: all Alessi products have been reclassified into the three brands **Officina Alessi**, **Alessi** and **A di Alessi**.

**Officina Alessi** is an exclusive brand, which will include the company's most refined products, its one-off pieces and its limited series, real benchmarks of international design and fruit of the innovative research that has always been one of Alessi's distinguishing features.

The traditional **Alessi** trademark will continue to include the best of industrial mass production in the household sector, combining the company's commitment both as regards production quality and design innovation. Finally, with **A di Alessi** "The Dream Factory" sets out to pursue one of the founding aims of design, i.e. offering top quality products to as vast an audience as possible.