

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 1920s and 30s, tableware and household objects were made at his workshop in copper, brass and nickel silver with exquisite crafts skill. Many of the different objects produced in this first period (such as the nickel silver **tea and coffee service** from 1921, the nickel-coated brass **flask holder** from 1926 and the **cheese tray** in fine nickel silver with milk glass from 1929) have become part of the collective memory of generations of Italians.

Design (in the modern sense of the word) first appeared at the end of the 1930s when Giovanni's eldest son, Carlo joined the company. Carlo had trained as an industrial designer in Novara and became the author of most of the objects that appeared in the catalogue between the mid 30s and 1945, the year when his last design project was presented: the '**Bombé**' **tea and coffee services**. This became one of the archetypes of the first era of Italian design.

In the 50s, Carlo became Chief Executive of the company. Together with his brother Ettore, he began to collaborate with freelance designers such as Carlo Mazzeri, Luigi Massoni and Anselmo Vitale; the authors behind numerous highly successful projects that are still in the catalogue (such as the '**870**' **cocktail shaker**, 1957).

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

In the 2000s Michele's son, Matteo, became the first fourth generation Alessi family member to enter the company. In 2008 his sister Chiara joined him. Giovanni jr, son to Carlo's third child, Alessio, has also carved out a successful career as a designer. Alberto has been appointed President of Alessi after his father, Carlo, passed away in July 2009.

In 1998 the Alessi Museum was set up within the Alessi company in Crusinallo. Its purpose is to reinforce Alessi's metaproject outlook and production policy as well as to provide a more direct and comprehensive channel for communicating with other museums around the world. Designed by Alessandro Mendini and curated by Francesca Appiani, the Alessi Museum is a founder member of the Museimpresa Association, established in 2001, which celebrates the museums, architecture and archives of key Italian companies.

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

Over the years, Alessi has produced objects created by more than two hundred designers. These historic designers include: Ettore Sottsass, Richard Sapper, Achille Castiglioni, Aldo Rossi, Michael Graves, Massimo Morozzi, Philippe Starck, Stefano Giovannoni, Guido Venturini, Enzo Mari, Jasper Morrison, Marc Newson, Ron Arad, the Campana Brothers, David Chipperfield, Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec, Mario Trimarchi, Marcel Wanders...and Alessandro Mendini, who has also been design consultant at the company since 1979.

Today Alessi employs around 500 people with the core business (the production of items by metal presswork) amounting to over 7,500 items a day - all produced **the Crusinallo factory**. Exports account for two thirds of the company's turnover, going to around sixty different countries worldwide.

The millennium has witnessed extensive new developments at Alessi. Collaborations have been formed with other companies in manufacturing contexts very different from Alessi's original dedication 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 licensed projects in this field include:

- A line of **wristwatches**, "**ALESSIWATCHES**" (with SEIKO, Japan)
- A line of **pens** "**ALESSIPENS**" (with Mitsubishi, Japan),
- Two complete settings for the **bathroom**, "**ILBAGNOALESSI One**" and "**ILBAGNOALESSI dOt**" (both with Laufen Switzerland and Oras Finland)
- **Ceramic tiles** "**ALESSITILES**" (with Steuler AG, Germany)
- A **car**; the "**PANDAALESSI**" (with FIAT, Italy)
- A **home textile collection** "**ALESSITEXTILE**" (with Bassetti, Italy)
- Two **toilet rim hangers**, "**FreshSurfer**" and "**Kayak**" (with Henkel, Germany)
- A complete setting for the kitchen, "**LACUCINAALESSI**" (in collaboration with Valcucine, Italy, and Oras, Finland)
- A cordless telephone "**ALESSIPHONE**" (with Telecom Italia and with Promelit, Italy, since 2011)
- A line of Fire lighters called "**ALESSIFIRE**" (with Lightech, Japan)
- Outdoor barbeque, "**BARBICÙ**" (with Fochista, Italy)
- The new "**ALESSITAB**" (with Promelit, Italy)

During the Salone del Mobile 2011 two new licensed projects have been presented:

- the folding "**ALESSICHAIR**" (with Lamm, Italy)
- LED lighting projects "**ALESSILUX**" (with Foreverlamp).

2006 saw a significant change at Alessi, with all products reclassified into three distinct brands: **Officina Alessi**, **Alessi** and **A di Alessi**.

Officina Alessi is an exclusive brand, which includes the company's most refined products, its one-off pieces and its limited series. These true benchmarks of international design are the fruits of the innovative research that has always been one of Alessi's distinguishing features.

The traditional **Alessi** trademark continues to include the best of industrial mass production in the household sector, combining the company's commitment as regards both production quality and design innovation.

Finally, with **A di Alessi** "The Dream Factory" sets out to pursue one of the founding aims of design, offering top quality products to as vast an audience as possible.

In 2010 with the **Oggetti e Progetti. Alessi: storia e futuro di una fabbrica del design italiano** exhibition, Alessi has lent an eye into the future of design. The exhibition opened at the Die Neue Sammlung in Munich and was curated by Alessandro Mendini in collaboration with the Alessi Museum.

Retitled **Alessi: Ethical and Radical**, the exhibition was then hosted at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PAM).