

HEART OF GLASS

Deco-Glass, of Krosno, Poland is not only known for the exceptional quality of its glass but also for the size of some of its products, One of its vases made the Guinness Book of Records - it was 3.69 metres tall.

The Deco-Glass glass factory, a limited liability company, was established in 1993. It is located in the largest centre of the glass industry - the Krosno region. "The factory continues the famous old tradition of this region for individual craftsmanship. The skills of the local glass workers, as well as the experience and knowledge of the management, guarantee the excellent quality of our products. Another proof of this is the high reputation of the company in both Polish and foreign markets," says Mariusz Gierlach, director of Deco-Glass. Krosno is a historical, mediaeval town in the southern part of Poland which has, for centuries, been a centre for the manufacture of cloth, linen, canvas and baize, as well as for the Hungarian wine trade. In the middle of the 19th century it became the birthplace of the oil industry, but it is also now the largest centre for glass making in Poland.

The other glass production centres in the country are mostly located in the vicinity of glass sand deposits, but the Krosno glass factories developed on the basis of local natural gas resources which helped to meet the industry's high demand for energy.

The first glass factory in Krosno opened around the time of the commissioning of the municipal gas supply network in 1919. The development of glass production in Krosno today is connected with the longestablished regional tradition of glass making and decorating. Hand-made Krosno glassware is exported to many countries all over the world. It is used by the Queen of England and is especially popular in Canada and the USA.

In and around the town there are over 20 plants producing and decorating glass of different kinds - artistic glass, glassware, utility glass including a variety of glass





knick-knacks, table sets and lamp shades for oil lamps. The factories vary in size from small family-run establishments to big modern enterprises. Deco-Glass is one of the biggest glass factories in Krosno; indeed it is one of the biggest industries of any kind in the area.



Thirteen years of history

Deco-Glass Ltd has been producing glassware since 1993. It was founded by Mr Roman Jankowski-Mihulowicz, an engineer with many years of experience in the glass industry, and his German partner Mr Bernd Hoffbauer. The plant was built on a greenfield site in a few months - permission for building the works was given by the District Administration Office in Krosno in the July, and the first glassware was produced in October. The company started with 161 employees. 1994 saw the start of sales to foreign markets. In 1995-96 annual production of glassware reached 1200 tons.

During the following years the company employed over 300 people and produced both clear and coloured glass. The high quality of products won many customers and contributed to the dynamic development of the company.

From the beginning it was a very modern plant. By 1997, it had expanded the field of its activities by purchasing another tank furnace and using special glass treatments and new ways of decorating glass. The number of employees increased almost three times, and the production of glassware increased to 3600 tons per year.

The unparalleled variety of designs and patterns contributed to subsequent triumphs. By constantly improving its processing of the raw materials and the glass melting process, the company gained the most demanding customers in the world, and in 1998 it received the Fair-play business certificate.

In 2000 the factory was modernised and subsequently an even larger tank furnace was built - the biggest in the world that is used for manual glass production. Many of the areas dealing with glass treatment and its decoration were expanded too.

At present, the Deco-Glass glass factory employs 1100 people, producing 7000 tons of glass a year, which places this company in the leading position in Europe. At the moment, the main shareholders are Mr Roman Jankowski- Mihulowicz, general manager of Deco-Glass, and Mr Bernd Hoffbauer



Range of products

The company's market offering includes a wide range of artistic products as well as products for everyday use such as candlesticks, chalices, vases, sugar bowls, ash trays, trays, goblets and glass table sets. It also produces, glass elements for light fittings, lamp brackets, lampshades and halogen lamp bowls. Very few companies make glass for lamps as it is a very difficult technical process. For this type of glass Deco-Glass is estimated to be manufacturing over 30 per cent of the world market.

The glass produced is either clear or coloured in various layers (opal, cobalt, green, amethyst, black, yellow, azure, or opal slightly coated with another colour and multi-coloured glass). During the glass forming process, many decorations are used, such as flounce brims, antico, craquele, fillings and opal fibre (parchment). Glass can be merged with amber or silver.

During subsequent stages the products are further treated and decorated. They may be chemically or mechanically ground or painted by hand and they may have added cuts or be decorated with the silk screening technique.

It is worth mentioning that the factory, unlike most other glassmakers in Poland, creates products which are over 100cm high. The company's unique vase won the Guinness record for the highest glass vase - 3.69 metres (over 12 feet tall).

The company has two pattern room/design studios which allow the craftsmen to fulfil their dreams in designing patterns and decorations which meet the demands of the 21st century. There are as many as a dozen or so new patterns produced every week. This means that they have thousands of patterns to choose from. "We are prepared to make very short runs of products - even as short as 100-200 units. Thus, we are open to nonstandard orders. Such a strategy enables us to be flexible and to react very quickly to market needs. We can adapt our production to specific orders," says Mr Gierlach.

Among luxury products, the one which arouses most positive feelings is the Diamond Collection. This line of products was created in cooperation with the famous Austrian company Swarovski. In the Diamond Collection the highest quality crystal glass produced by this company is used.

On the market

Annual sales of Deco-Glass are estimated as PLN 40-45 million (€10-12 million) and profit in 2004 reached PLN 2 million (€500,000). About 90 per cent of all production is sold abroad. One half of exports go to Germany, 10-15 per cent to the USA, 6-9 per cent to Russia and the UK. Glass from Deco-Glass has been sold in almost every European country as well as Chile, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Japan - in fact, to 40 countries overall.

The Deco-Glass factory is thoroughly prepared for trading in the European Union countries. It meets high standards regarding protection of the natural environment, it uses modern computer systems, and it is also preparing itself for implementing the quality management system ISO 9001:2000.

Deco-Glass takes special care to protect the copyright of designed products, both its own and those of other partners. With this in mind, all the necessary measures are undertaken in the patent office. Strict procedures in this matter have also been introduced within the company itself.

Mr Gierlach goes on: "We have established distribution chains in Poland and abroad. There are two main channels of distribution in Poland: one is the biggest and the most prestigious shopping centres and the other one is a chain of factory shops, both are actively selling our products. In addition, we also sell our products via the internet. So far, internet sales represent only one per cent of our total turnover, but we think it



has great potential. Abroad, especially in Germany, we have a strong distribution channel through the chain owned by one of Deco-Glass shareholders."

The strength of Deco-Glass lies in the high quality of its glass - quality both in terms of its production and also its design. "We have focused on high quality hand made production. This is a gap in the market which we feel well able to fill thanks to our tradition and our experienced glass-workers. We are not interested in making cheap, poor quality ordinary glass. There are many producers around who make cheap glass for daily use - things that get broken and can be replaced at a shop on the corner of the street. We are keen to offer hand made art glass with a high level of craftsmanship. Each of our products is unique. One might say it has a soul," stresses Mr Gierlach."

A phrase in the company's advertising materials - "We create an environment of beauty" - explains in the best way the philosophy which laid the foundations of Deco-Glass and points out its core values of creativity, beauty and quality. But this is only a part of truth about the success that Deco-Glass has had during 13 years of activity. What is the secret of this success according to Mr Gierlach? "It's simple. We try harder" he says, with a smile.

