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NOTHING FACETIOUS ABOUT IT

### Design Spotlight: Waterford Crystal London Collection Glassware

PRICE: \$100-\$499

By NICK CARUSO on 11.29.13

Its origins dating back well over two centuries, the current iteration of the Waterford Crystal company has been making exquisite, traditional crystal products for a good portion of history — stemware, serving dishes, sports trophies and, perhaps most famously, the individual crystals that make up the New Year's Eve ball that slowly lowers in Times Square each winter. But now Waterford has decided to reimagine their product; indeed, they've decided to revolutionize the way a man might feel about crystal, and as part of that effort heralded designer Jo Sampson fashioned the new decidedly male-centric London Collection. Apropos, then, that we hopped over to foggy London town to meet with Sampson, chat with Waterford CEO Pierre de Villemejeane and check out the new collection.

We weren't sure what to expect — Waterford isn't exactly a brand every guy has on his wish list. After all, your grandma had the crystal; grandpa had a Purple Heart and one pair of boots his entire life. Waterford crystal is sincerely very nice — hand cut, clear as air, like so many diamonds — but much of it is seemingly from a bygone era, and...well...flowery. We were intrigued and, truthfully, skeptical.

Before witnessing the collection firsthand we sat down for coffee with Sampson, who spoke of her design process and described the final product. Instead of somewhat stuffy, old-fashioned stuff, she explained, this series is an evolution of crystal: contemporary, handsome, functional products with clean, masculine lines, neither grandiose nor solely ornamental. Rather, the cut and patterns — when light refracts off each of the rigid, gridded facets of these suavely sculpted pieces you can't help but widen your eyes and grin — are entirely new. It's meant to be used. It's crystal for the modern man, because, as Sampson put it, "Why not? Why can't the men of this world have amazing objects around them?" When coffee was over and our voice recorder off, we felt our paradigm had shifted somewhat. Instead of expecting something dubious, we were eager to see something sublime. And rightfully so.

While we wouldn't suggest you dress in formal wear to have a belt of scotch with your brother, we do advocate that every drink be an event. Why have a mediocre cocktail experience when you could enjoy something perfectly? The London Collection hardware is that kind of perfection, plain and simple. The rocks glasses and tumblers, either pair yours for less than a couple hundred bucks, are heavy, substantial and direct in their design and purpose. They are the go-to glasses a modern Don Draper would keep in his office, not the fluted flutes in mom's china cabinet. Sampson put it beautifully: "When you start actually drinking and using the crystal, and you feel the weight and the sound that it makes when it goes onto marble — the quality — it makes you feel good; it makes you change how you sit, how you drink. It elevates the experience."

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Individual barware and desk accessories aside, Sampson's coup de grâce — and Waterford's, so far as we gents are concerned — is the extraordinary Desktop Bar. The exquisite cabinets, any of which would look smashing atop a mahogany power desk, are just over a foot high and nearly as wide, with swinging double doors that open to reveal a complete London Collection bar set: two rocks glasses, two highballs, a round decanter, a square decanter and a set of leather coasters; on top is a removable serving tray, should your business partner insist on being brought his drink. We saw four variations of the Desktop Bar, each integrating a different material throughout: blue embossed leather, solid gold, rich woodgrain, white marble. Naturally, each is largely made of crystal, all in the same handsome, chiseled cut as the rest of the London Collection, though the Desktop Bar adds a neat trick — illumination. The crystal cubes are so alluring that even (especially?) in a dark room, each is, as Sampson put quite plainly, "a thing of beauty". It's art into which you can pour bourbon. (Of course these start north of seventeen grand, so it had better be very good bourbon.)

We asked de Villemejeane what part Waterford's newest barware plays in the modern man's lifestyle. This venture represents the brand's eye for "classic cuts, contemporary creativity" he opined. He went on to speak on the "nobility" of crystal and suggested that anyone purchasing any piece from Waterford is interested in heritage, in opulence and in quality. They are interested in "living a crystal life". And that's how Waterford will convince men. Living a crystal life no longer has to mean displaying the sparkly, ornate stemware in a hutch like your aunt does; now it can mean displaying bold, functional, masculine style right out in the open. It's not overblown; it's desirable. It's not old and stuffy; it's heritage, reinvented. With Jo Sampson's keen eye and effortless talent, Waterford has found a way to stay true to its roots but polish its heritage until it glistens — just please don't leave it in the hutch.

#### Jo Sampson, Designer



When describing her approach to design, Sampson, an interior architect who has designed some of the fanciest hotel, nightclub and restaurant interiors around, approaches a project thinking, "how can you transcend that space from day to night?" But unlike designing an entire environment, Sampson said, creating products like these Waterford pieces — individual items that sit inside such a space — requires "going from the macro to the micro" to create "a world within a world". She described the two-year process of designing the London Collection (and two other contemporary collections that have recently debuted) as a jigsaw puzzle that she assembled piece by miniature piece — customer demographics, the narrative behind each object, etc. — until suddenly, there it is, "I design what I would like to buy", Sampson said, which is a coincidence, because she also happens to design what we'd like to own.

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by American Apparel



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