

# Swedish Glass Traditions

Today the finest crystal in the world is Swedish. But it was two Italian glass-blowers, Rochio Brijos and Andrea Ninqvedo, who produced the first glass in Sweden. This was in the mid-16th century when Gustav Vasa wanted to get a glass industry going in Sweden. In the next two centuries several small factories were founded but most of the labour still had to be imported from Germany.

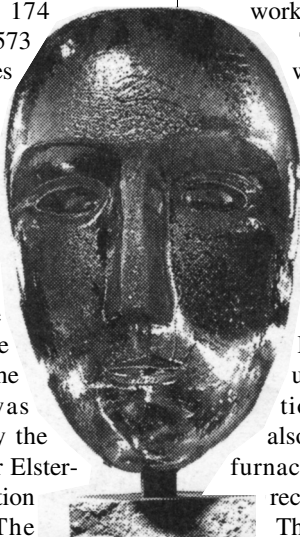
The first consumers of glass in Sweden were the wealthy church and monastery builders of the middle ages who invited skillful glass-blowers from the Continent to come to Sweden and manufacture window panes. After the church lost its powerful position with the Reformation, this luxury consumption was taken over by the palaces, manor houses and the big houses in the city owned by the aristocracy and it was the nobility and the royalty that took the initiative to set up glass factories in Sweden. Much glass was needed by the upper classes for celebrations as it was a custom to break a glass after you had "skåled" a specially important person. In 1563 King Erik invited the people of Stockholm to a Christmas celebration and at this very joyful party 174 glasses were broken. In 1573 Johan III broke 375 glasses at a single occasion.

The Kungsholm glass furnace was founded in Stockholm in 1676. Goblets in Venetian and German style were the specialty here.

Kungsholm was also the first factory to produce engraved and cut glass. The first engraved piece was produced in the 1690s by the German master Kristoffer Elsterman. Much of the inspiration came from Nurnberg. The



(Above) Kosta Boda glassware by Göran Wärrff, (below) a glass sculpture by Bertil Vallien and (right) pitcher by Gunnel Sahlin



most common motive was a shining sun or a star with a monogram surrounded by a palm or a laurel wreath.

The furnace in Kungsholm was joined by a glass factory in Henrikstorp in Skåne. It started production in 1691 and had 14 glass-workers from northern Germany. In the 1740s they were joined by two mirror workers - David Christoffer Mültner and Hans Schiffman.

For a while Kungsholm and were the country's only glass factories but they were eventually joined by several blast furnaces in various parts of Sweden. Most of them produced window glass, household glass and pharmacy utensils. Additionally beer and aquavit glasses, teapots, cups and saucers, butter boxes and many other items were produced in white, "finer" glass. As the tradition developed art glass was manufactured.

The "glass kingdom" of the province of Småland emerged in the mid 18th century. It was here the forests were found and wood was needed in large quantities to fire up the furnaces. The glass factories were successful both artistically and economically but there was a lot of instability. Kosta, famous today, was founded in 1742 and began its production with only German glass-workers.

The glass-blowing profession was often passed down from father to son and famous glass-blower families like the Schmidt, Heintze, Scheutz, Gleisner and Greiner emerged. By the end of the 18th century Sweden had its own clan of glass-blowers, often the sons of immigrants. At Kosta, for example it is not unusual to find seventh generation glass-blowers. Kosta was also often regarded as the mother furnace from which other factories recruited their glass-blowers.

There was a great deal of mobility

among the glass-blowers. They were often attracted from their glass factories by the competition with additional privileges. One such privilege was a trip to Stockholm to receive communion as most of the glass-blowers were Catholic.

The glass factory became the center for the village. It was here in the warmth of the furnaces that people gathered to tell stories, pass on news and maybe enjoy a meal often consisting of salted herring. The potatoes were baked in the ashes. This is

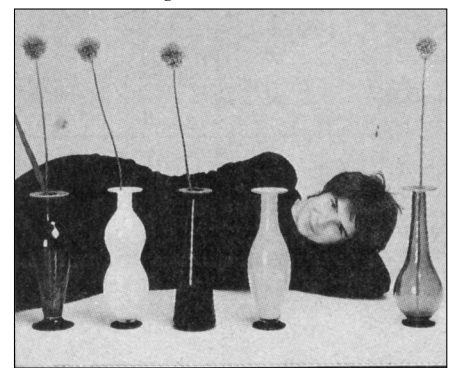
the "Hyttstill" a tradition that tourists can enjoy to this day at certain glass factories.

The 1970s was a bad time for the glass industry and in just 15 years 27 glass factories disappeared. At the same time micro-furnaces became economical and many small studios with one or maybe two artists were started.

Two of these artists are Bertil A. Vallien and Ulrika Hydman-Vallien from Åfors. They are both associated with Orrefors but work independently.

Since 1 June 2005, Orrefors Kosta Boda AB with its four glass factories situated in Glasriket, Småland, is part of the Swedish New Wave company after a few years as part of Danish-dominated Royal Scandinavia. Åfors and SEA are also part of the glass group that employs more than 950 people.

Artist Erika Lagerbielke with her Solo vases



(Above) A stamp celebrating the Åfors glass works.

(Left) The Johansfors and (below) the Orrefors logo.

