

FAMILY IS FOR KEEPS

Wellendorff celebrates its jewellery-making traditions and latest collection at an enchanting evening of music and finery. Emilie Yabut-Razon reports from a castle in Germany

It's a night of magnificent revelry and dazzling jewels. A jazz duo performs as well-heeled guests, garbed in their elegant best, clink champagne glasses in the grand library of a castle in the German state of Hesse. A lavish banquet follows. The VIPs, who include couples from Hong Kong and Mainland China, are guests at the annual soiree held traditionally by the Wellendorff family to reveal its latest jewellery collection to its most valued clients. The venue this year, Schlosshotel Kronberg, adds a poignant connection for the family. Construction of the castle was completed in 1893, the year Ernst Alexander Wellendorff founded his jewellery company in Pforzheim, just a two-hour drive from Kronberg.

Previously known as Schloss Friedrichshof, the Kronberg landmark is one of the country's most impressive and well-preserved castles. It was owned by the dowager Empress Victoria, wife of Kaiser Friedrich III and the mother of the last emperor of Prussia. The empress was an avid art collector, and the castle is littered with paintings, ornate furnishings, carvings and antiques. The library, said to be the empress's favourite room, has a magnificent collection of leather-bound books and prints, and opens onto a terrace overlooking the castle's expansive gardens and golf course. The castle was converted into a luxury hotel in 1954 by its current owners, the House of Hesse, one of Europe's oldest royal dynasties.



When Ernst Alexander Wellendorff founded his jewellery company, his philosophy was to work with the best of everything, from materials to tools to goldsmiths, to create the finest pieces and attract the most discerning of jewellery connoisseurs. His creations became popular among the European aristocracy, including the tsars of Russia and the British royal family. The company thrived until World War II, when the Wellendorff factory was reduced to rubble. In 1947, Ernst Alexander's son, also named Alexander, revived the business with a few of the family's loyal goldsmiths, initially creating heavy 18K gold signet rings.

In 1960, Alexander's son, Hanspeter, and his wife, Eva, took over, introducing new designs and the hallmark of Wellendorff quality and craftsmanship—the gold-and-diamond W that is still found on all the brand's pieces today. Under Hanspeter, the company developed in 1977 a technique to create “silk” out of gold—woven rope necklaces that feel like silk to the touch. The range now includes multistrand necklaces and bracelets with shimmering



SHIMMERING TRESSES
A craftsman braids yellow gold strands to create Wellendorff's Golden Trellis necklace. Opposite page: A selection of purple enamel and diamond rings in white gold by Wellendorff



TWO GENERATIONS Christoph, Eva, Hanspeter, Claudia and Georg Wellendorff

effects, a line aptly named Brilliance of the Sun. “We’ve always endeavoured to improve the silk rope, so we created Brilliance of the Sun,” Hanspeter’s son Georg, who is head of product development for the brand, tells me on the evening of the Kronberg soiree. “Last year, we wanted to evolve further and made a chain that is even softer than that one, called Silken Delight.”

Georg explains that Wellendorff jewellery is the type one has to touch and feel to appreciate. In 1993, he and his brother Christoph expanded the Wellendorff range with a collection of colourful rings that feature a special type of enamelling that has a silky feel. Later they added a playful variation in which the enamelled part is able to spin around the shank. Along with the silk rope, these enamelled rings have become signatures of Wellendorff, and the ring concept has been adapted in colourful and comfortable

earrings, pendants and bracelets. Since 1997, Wellendorff has produced a numbered, limited edition ring to mark each year. The designs have attracted quite a following and a long waiting list, with the older rings now trading at multiples of their original price.

Quality is imperative to the brand, says Georg, explaining that producing in volume was never part of the plan. The family is happy with the steady growth of the company through the years, he says, especially in China, where it now has three standalone boutiques: two in Hong Kong and one in Beijing.

However, it’s apparent that the Wellendorff family is most proud of their success in forging and maintaining strong ties with their loyal clientele. The family’s personal touch is evident at the Schlosshotel gala.

Christoph weaves into his welcoming speech the names of all the guests and how they came to be clients of the brand. Says Georg, “To us, family extends to our goldsmiths, our employees and our jewellery connoisseurs.”

As a company focused on what others may consider a daunting vision of perfection, Wellendorff takes infinite care in the creation of a collection, often conducting years of



CROWD PLEASER Above: Wellendorff’s new amulet, My Lasting Delight Sapphire. Left: Christoph Wellendorff addresses guests in Schlosshotel Kronberg’s library

research before launching a new product. Its latest creation, officially launched at the Schlosshotel Kronberg, is an amulet necklace called My Lasting Delight—a large coloured precious gemstone (a ruby, sapphire or emerald) as the pendant of a silk rope necklace. The gleaming central stone is framed by two circles of diamonds, and the amulet can be opened and engraved with a special message.

Georg says that by name and design, My Lasting Delight represents the kind of pieces the Wellendorff family has endeavoured to produce since the company’s founding more than a century ago: pieces meant to last for the current generation and many more. ●

SHARING SECRETS

Below, from left: Brilliance of the Sun necklace; Moments of Delight pendant, which can be engraved with a secret message; Summer Dream rings; Tour de Coup Golden Trellis neck band, all by Wellendorff



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