

# Heart, soul, passion

Who is the man now behind Lalique? An exclusive interview with Silvio Denz

Anyone who is a connoisseur of art deco and art nouveau, whoever loves quality French lifestyle, knows the unique craft of Lalique. Its beauty and elegance inspired elaborate creations including perfume bottles as early as 1890, and it is said that Karl Lagerfeld only drinks his Coca Cola Light from Lalique glasses.

Like many before him, Silvio Denz could not resist the charm of this enchanting art. But before he was to acquire the company in 2008, Silvio first had to go through a few different stages in his life. Still, it was always in the stars that the Lalique/Denz destiny would be shared.

Within the family of this successful businessman - one of the 300 wealthiest citizens of Switzerland - perfume has always been a passion. Silvio's father was in the duty-free business and his uncle owned a perfumery chain. When Silvio returned to Europe from his US studies in 1980, the senior Denz suggested he join the company temporarily.

And the passion quickly spread. From the years 1980 to 2000, inspired, among other things, by his work with Alain Delon - whose fragrance

line he designed, he built the largest perfumery chain in Switzerland, with over 100 stores and 750 employees.

Then he landed the deal of a lifetime: he sold his company to France's Marionnaud and was free to do as he liked. So what was it ... relax, be lazy? God no! Silvio Denz founded Art & Fragrance S.A. and has since taken perfume to new heights, as well as wine, art and architecture. "All of these stimulate the senses and arouse emotions, these passions I inherited from my father," he says.

### Wine on the side

There are seven wineries totalling 150 hectares owned by Silvio, a man for whom his staff would go through fire for: Château Faugères and Château Péby Faugères, both since 2012 Grand Cru Classé of Saint Emilion, Château Rocheyron, Grand Cru of Saint Emilion, Château Cap de Faugères in the Côtes de Castillon, Château de Chambrun in Lalande de Pomerol as well as one in Catalonia and Tuscany.

Since 2002, he and his business partner have been buying 19th Century properties in London to refurbish and sell to wealthy Russians and Asians. It's a profitable pleasure. "Over the past 10

years we have sold 24 properties. Each time there is a personal satisfaction when the house is finished," says Denz.

Of course, he would love to move into most of them, but: "In life you have to be able to say goodbye. For 10 years I have lived like a vagabond, sleeping every other night somewhere else. Today, I'm in

"My brother says I'm a driven man," he smiles. "On the contrary, I don't chase after anything or anyone! Life often decides fate; things come automatically to you. Whenever I tried to force something, it never led to a happy ending."

But that was not the case with Lalique. When the company was up for sale in 2007, Silvio immediately realised its potential: "The extraordinary story of René Lalique and the outstanding global reputation and extraordinary history are perfect for successful marketing. You can lure the consumer emotionally, but what I need to have is quality so the customer comes back."

### Back in profit

His passion for René Lalique is reflected in the fact that he owns the largest collection of René's antique perfume bottles.

Silvio Denz just wanted to buy the perfume from Lalique, but the former owner insisted that the entire manufacturing company and its 620 employees be taken over. Silvio agreed, taking control of the Alsace-based company and after extensive restructuring brought it back to profit.

In 2011, 17 new boutiques were opened - and there are



Silvio Denz has had a long love affair with Lalique

these attributes, nothing can be created. Today, my greatest luxury is to have no fixed appointments more than 10 days ahead. My calendar should not dictate my life. I enjoy the freedom, for example, of spontaneously going diving in the Maldives with my son - this is quality of life!"

Is there a desire, a dream that a man like Silvio Denz has not yet satisfied? "I have the life that I enjoy and am perfectly happy. When the soul is at peace, so is the body. What's important is to live in the now." PH/CT



Lalique Desert Flower Carafe

Paris at Lalique, tomorrow in Bordeaux on my estate. The next day I am in my house in Richmond on the Thames."

now 65 worldwide, including in Monte Carlo and Cannes. Sales increased by 25 per cent and amounted to 66 million euros. In 2012, sales are expected to have risen by a further 10 per cent. Denz has invested 13.5 million euros into streamlining work processes and the modernisation of this classic brand. Each year, up to 400,000 pieces of glass - chandeliers, sculptures, vases, jewellery - are created. Some of these pieces require hundreds of hours of work.

Reading Silvio's résumé, one would assume that this art connoisseur and lover of fine things had mastered every challenge in his life and made each project a success. But: "Everyone experiences ups and downs, just as there is day and night, ebb and flow," says the businessman. "Heart, soul, passion: without

## RENÉ LALIQUE (1860 - 1945)

René Lalique was one of the most daring artists and interior designers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. An exceptional jeweller and Grand Master of glass design, he was the great creator behind the Lalique influence on Art Nouveau and Art Deco. He opened his first business in 1890 in Paris. His obsession: "To create something never seen before." As an avant-garde artist, René exhibited his Lalique jewellery then lent his expertise to perfume and the tradition of Art Nouveau, which wanted to bring art and industry together. Lalique manufacturing existed for 90 years in Alsace, where the first Lalique Museum was created in 2011.

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