

New individuals in 2008

Vigna's birds are creating a new tradition

Iittala's renowned glass bird collection, Iittala Birds, has its roots in experimental designs created by **Oiva Toikka** at the beginning of the 1970s, and his birds have become a design phenomenon over the 35 years since then. Iittala launched a new collection of glass birds in 2007, by the Italian glass designer **Giorgio Vigna**. His birds rapidly made waves on the international design scene, and the new birds have been described as both very modern and very individual.



Vigna has now extended his collection with the addition of a new bird in clear glass, to complement and contrast his three earlier "species": Circoli, Colori, and Contrasti.

A collection full of sculptural qualities

Vigna's birds were featured at the Vessels Gallery in London in May 2007, prompting the international design magazine Wallpaper to write in its May edition: "Iittala's new hand-blown glass birds are an exquisite feather in its cap."

An exhibition of Vigna's jewellery was held at the Design Museum in Helsinki at the same time as the London show. Vigna's inquisitive nature and the range of methods he employs were reflected in the wide range of materials in the pieces: metal, glass, paper mache, gold, silver, and precious stones.

Vigna's birds are also like jewels – glass jewels – and are hand-blown from multiple layers of molten glass. After the glassblower has worked his magic, the glass is placed in an annealing furnace where it can slowly cool. A particularly thick piece can take as long as 20 hours to cool. When the birds have cooled, their tails and beaks are cut and polished until the surface is completely smooth. This is one of the most important stages in the creation of Vigna's birds, just as it is in working precious stones.

As Vigna always respects the unique aspects of the materials he works with, the design of his birds starts from the droplet-like shape so characteristic of molten glass.

"When the craftsman gathers the first molten glass on to his blowpipe, he quickly blows a little air into it, creating a droplet-like bubble, before working it back and forth in a wooden block and blowing into it again," explains Vigna.

"Stage by stage, the molten glass becomes a droplet pregnant with creativity."

THREE DIFFERENT SPECIES OF BIRDS

Each of Vigna's three species of birds has its own personality.

Circoli

Vigna's Circoli draws the eye in, with its rich red or black surfaces. Its angular tail and beak and eye-catching spirals are the result of the glassblower's skill in blowing white and coloured glass alternately to fuse them together. The crystal-like glass inside the bird resembles a well of ice-cold water, and results in a bird that is both coolly elegant and full of life at the same time.

Colori

Vigna's Colori birds are all about colour. Their hollow interiors reflect all the colours of the spectrum. The head and tail of the Colori birds are almost identical, except for their difference in scale, and one can easily imagine these sleek, torpedo-like forms speeding across the surface of the water.

Contrasti

The two colours used in the Contrasti birds highlight the interplay between light and dark. The birds take their power from the coloured glass at the heart of their clear body. The contrast this sets up creates new reflections in every direction.

Vigna's visit to Nuutajärvi was decisive

Giorgio Vigna got to know the techniques used in cutting and polishing glass while working at the Venini glassworks in Murano. He visited Nuutajärvi for the first time in 1998 to hold a workshop on glass jewellery. He met Iittala people during the same trip and a couple of years later the contacts made then led to him creating the Vigna Collection of Iittala Birds.

Made by craftsmen

All of Iittala's birds are handmade by craftsmen at the Iittala Group's Nuutajärvi or Iittala glassworks.

When designing his birds, Vigna follows long-established artisan traditions, which are still in use both at Murano and Nuutajärvi. He first sketches his designs on paper and then draws them in chalk on the floor. Nuutajärvi's craftsmen do not need any special linguistic skills to interpret these chalk images. Both designer and craftsman speak the same language – the language of glass.

Master glassblower **Timo Niekka** has been creating birds for 30 years, and loves the challenges of the job: "You have to keep the temperature of the glass at around 700 °C throughout the process, and that's why the glass has to be reheated repeatedly, to prevent it cooling too much, when you can't work it any more. "Getting your timing just right is critical when you're making birds," says Niekka.

Vigna's birds take some time to produce, and a number of finishing steps are needed before they take on their final personality. When they have been blown, they are cooled, and the beak and tail are cut and polished. Master polishers **Teppo Lehtinen** and **Seppo Luoto** take centre stage during this important phase. "Every stage, ours included, takes time and skill – and a little bit of an eye for the job as well."

When ELLE Decoration asked Vigna what species his birds resembled, he replied none. He describes them as 'archetypal':

"They're not drawn from life, but from my imagination. I like the way they look so quiet and serene."

Product information, new Birds by Vigna

Contrasti, 180 x 90 mm, lime

Contrasti, 180 x 90 mm, clear

Colori, 165 x 105 mm, numbered 1- 2006, clear

Colori, 205 x 130 mm, numbered 1- 2006, clear

Colori, 165 x 105 mm, light lilac/blueberry blue

Colori 205 x 130 mm, lime/brown

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