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Meet the Collector

ROWING UP in Belgium, Tiny Esveld was always attracted to beautiful things. She loved collecting antiques and she loved her job restoring old houses. Then, at 36, she hurt her back and needed to look for a new career. She had started collecting antique glass four years earlier; now she began dealing in it – and today her enduring passion for its vibrant, fragile beauty is palpable.

Of course it is difficult to be a collector while also being a dealer – the opportunities to buy are so great that you can end up buried under beautiful things. But while Tiny deals in the whole spectrum of Art Nouveau and Art Deco glass, she found a personal focus for her collection in a single maker who is not as famous as she thinks he should be.

“In the beginning you don’t know what is good or special and what isn’t. You buy too much – sometimes bad things because you don’t know how to discriminate. This



Earth, Wind and Fire

Tiny Esveld has a real passion for the elemental art form of glass – and for one glass-maker in particular



Above: Three coupes displaying the innovative variety of colour and decoration. Below and below right: Adventurous colour combinations from 1920-22. New shapes and colours poured from Charles Schneider’s inventive brain so, even though production was relatively short-lived, it produced incredible variety

you learn with the years that pass. But when you sit in front of your collection you see after a while what attracts you most. And for me it was the beautiful colours and shapes of Charles Schneider vases.”

If you know a little about glass, the first sight of a Charles Schneider vase would tell you it’s French – Daum or Gallé perhaps? And you’d certainly be on the right track. Of an Alsace-Lorraine family (a region that swapped between Germany and France due to war), both Charles, born near Paris, and his older brother Ernest worked at the Daum factory before the Great War in the great days of Art Nouveau. But then they struck out on their own as Société Anonyme des Verreries Schneider in 1913.

The coming of the Great War and conscription the following year threatened to end things before they had begun but in 1917 the brothers were demobbed to supervise the making of medical glass for the war effort. After the war ended, a lucrative line in commercial drinking glasses ran alongside Charles’ passion for art glass, for which he was

virtually the factory’s sole designer.

From his Daum training, Charles had learned all aspects of glass techniques. Now he set out to bring high class art glass to a much wider market via editions sold through the art sections of the great French department stores. And he pioneered an innovative style departure from the flowing Art Nouveau of Daum and Gallé.

Later dubbed Art Deco (after 1925’s turning-point Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, where much Schneider glass was on display), at the time the style was less a narrow orthodoxy than an eclectic embracing of the lessons of the past and enthusiasm for the future. Not least in Charles’s wonderful electric light chandeliers, including those featuring his favourite bright, distinctive orange called ‘Tango’, which speaks instantly of the Jazz Age.

Throughout the 1920s, department stores stocked Charles Schneider’s innovative designs under the trade names *Le Verre Français* or *Charder* for his acid-etched





glass vases, with the Schneider name reserved for his other glass designs. With schoolteacher sister Ernestine helping Ernest with the marketing, the factory even began to export to America and the workforce grew to 500 – until the Wall Street Crash laid the business low. For Charles Schneider it had been a brief decade of glory – but it left a wonderful legacy.

“The first Charles Schneider vase I bought, I remember very well because my mother called me crazy,” recalls Tiny. “It cost a fortune – a month’s salary in those days! It was a Le Verre Français vase with foxgloves and it had a beautiful shape. Both my parents were puzzled that glass could be so expensive, so they were surprised and pleased five years later when I told them I had sold it for twice the price.” Glass can be a good investment, then? “Well it can,” says Tiny, “But you should always buy with your heart.”

Alongside her business, over the years Tiny’s own personal collection of Charles Schneider glass also grew. “I could happily have collected every vase Schneider made, but one day I made a promise to myself that the collection wouldn’t take over my house! I decided it should not go outside the three cabinets I had provided for the collection and, by limiting myself and setting my sights high, the collection grew slowly but even more pleurably. Gradually, as you learn more, you find that when you eliminate the lesser things, what is left becomes more beautiful and harmonious.”

Tiny’s collection now specialises in the smaller Schneider series – rather than the more widely sold beautiful and often very large Le Verre Françaises. She loves the vibrant *Vases Bijoux*: “They are so small that they don’t take up much room and you can put a lot on one shelf – let oneself go!” At the other end of the scale the *Intercalaire* vases of coloured motifs trapped between layers of clear glass, “are so rare that if you possess one or two, you may count yourself very lucky. It is like you have a Rembrandt among your vases.”

She also collects glass fruit as well as fruit bowls and the

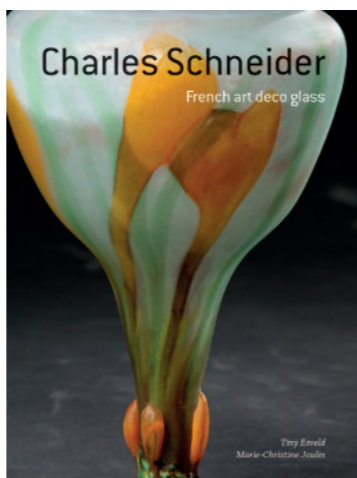
Charles Schneider brought to book

Many items from Tiny’s collection feature in the upcoming *Charles Schneider: French art deco glass*, which she wrote with Marie-Christine Joulin, who shares her intensity of passion, though mainly for the Le Verre Français line. Schneider’s colours, Marie-Christine says vividly, are, “so flamboyant that they seem to have not yet grown cold” from the furnace.

“In 2004 Marie-Christine and her husband Gerold published the definitive collectors’ book on all the patterns made by Le Verre Français,” explains Tiny. “They were already working on it when Gerold first invited me see their own collection at their home in Germany – I was very impressed!

“Of course new discoveries have been made since 2004 so we decided to join forces on this new book that displays patterns not known before. And it still doesn’t end – we are certain that new vases will pop up and surprise us all!”

One discovery they made in the Schneider archives was that a distinctive pattern at the top or near the bottom of the vase often referred to as honeycomb or bubbles, actually references a pattern of stone in vogue at the turn of



the 20th century and used in many facades – including the 1908 train station in Epinay-sur-Seine where Schneider lived. “His designs incorporated things from the daily life he saw around him,” says Tiny, “as was confirmed by his granddaughter Marie-Therese Schneider when we met her last summer in Paris. She said Charles Schneider was always drawing and inventing new shapes and patterns even in old age and this is how he should be remembered: as the great inventor of French art deco glass.”

Contact Tiny via www.tinyesveld.com for price and publication details.

Far left: Glass fruits and vegetables were lamp-worked with utmost skill. The lamp-work dragonflies on green powdered glass *Vases Bijoux* were made between 1919 and 1923. The exquisite quality of the lamp work can be seen in these lightly powdered orange glass *Vases Bijoux*. Left: One of Tiny’s three cabinets – though normally the doors stay firmly shut!





A GOLDEN GLOW

While Tiny has to keep all her fragile vases securely tucked away in glass cabinets, some of her Charles Schneider glass is out in use just as it was designed to be. From the moment they struck out on their own, Charles and his brother were pioneers in the new technology of electric lighting for the home, and these light fittings bring the unique Schneider genius into Tiny's living space and make Charles a constant presence in her daily life: "What a delight it is to admire the lamps, so dazzling with colour in the darkness of my living room."



stemmed dishes named *Coupes Bijoux*, whose violet bases set off the vibrancy of the colours above. "I look for exceptional colours and try to find every different shape made."

True to her vow, the collection is displayed in the three glass cabinets that she set aside for them. "This keeps the dust away more or less," she explains, with cleaning with a moist cloth a once a year job only. "Because I'm always afraid I will break something. This is a job for when you are very relaxed and not in a hurry!"

Some of her Charles Schneider glass is put to use though – she also collects and uses the glorious lighting fixtures the factory made, "What a delight it is to admire the lamps, so dazzling with colour in the darkness of my living room," she says.

Tiny finds that her favourites inside the cabinets change with time. "Usually the last piece you bought is your fa-

vourite, because you have just bought it and you are still full of that enthusiasm. Then you come to your senses and see it more in perspective." Her absolute favourite, though, is the crocus vase from 1924-5 that she features on the front cover of her new book. "It has everything – it is poetic, gentle in its colours, very difficult to make with the marquetry technique. And the crocus flower promises new life after the long cold winter, which I like as well."

And is there anything that her collection is missing; a Holy Grail she's still looking for? "Yes, there are some pieces on my want list – but I can't possibly tell you what they are, because then the price will double!"

Galerie Tiny Esveld, Frilinglei 9, 2930 Brasschaat, Belgium (www.tinyesveld.com)



Tiny's favourite piece in her collection