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The new front line

Superlabs where scientists lead the fight against terror

A girl named Rosanne

Johnny Cash's daughter finds her own voice

Moro's world

How two chefs feed their children

On with the show

The extraordinary married life of Liza Minnelli and David Gest

Crystal. There is absolutely no point to it. It is purely decorative, designed entirely for pleasure, and reminiscent of a bygone, decadent era. That was until Nadja Swarovski (yes, that Swarovski), made it an essential accessory. When she joined the family business in 1995, her initial target was to lift it out of animal ornament fame and into the reflected glamour of the catwalk; now, not even your sitting-room is safe. Enter the design guru Ilse Crawford (a past editor of *Elle Decoration*), hired to appoint designers to reinvent the chandelier. The results of the ongoing endeavour, the Crystal Palace Project, are launched at big industry shows such as the Milan Furniture Fair and Maison et Objet in Paris.

The two latest additions to the project are by the unlikely candidates Tom Dixon, currently consulting on the design and direction of Habitat, and the self-confessed minimalist designer, Michael Anastassiades.

Neither designer is especially known for his opulence, but for Crawford, they were obvious choices. 'The industry was desperately in need of an injection of relevance,' she says. 'I've chosen designers known for their innovation, who could challenge what the manufacturers think is possible, and I'm pleased to say they have all used new forms of technology.'

Not everyone immediately understood her logic. 'I would never have imagined using such a decorative material,' says Anastassiades, who was shocked to be asked. 'My work is usually conceptual; I choose the material to enhance the ideas.' For inspiration, he looked to the past. 'I learnt that you have to use crystal in abundance to make it decorative. And working with it, I came to appreciate its qualities - its decadence, the glitter, the fragility, the way it reflects light.' Incorporating concept and form in two chandeliers that mimic the cone shapes of whirling tornados, he found a way to stay true to his methods.

Unlike Anastassiades, Dixon was inspired by the project from the off. 'People assume you can only do one thing, but what's exciting is finding a recess where designers haven't been - nothing new has been done with chandeliers for a while,' he says. His design, Ball, a simple sphere with visible strings, feels like it's just waiting for Studio 54 to be reopened.

'I think there's little point in designing something unless it is a new solution to a need, but it was great to be decadent for once. At the showroom, looking for inspiration, I was surrounded by all these compelling and beautiful crystals, and I found myself gravitating towards the uncut crystal. It made me think of a comet, which is what my design is loosely based on.' And his idea of a dream project for the brand? 'I'd love to get my hands on those animal ornaments and do something really interesting,' he enthuses. 'Imagine that - the swan, the horse, and, of course,' his eyes lighting up at the very thought, 'the hedgehog.'



Having a crystal ball

Swarovski is calling on the services of some unlikely designers to reinvent the chandelier for the illuminated minimalist.

By Lisa Helmanis. Photographs by Chris Tubbs

Michael Anastassiades (above) and Tom Dixon (opposite), with their Swarovski chandeliers, shown at last year's Maison et Objet design fair. Chandeliers can be made to order and cost from £17,000. For details, call 020-7016 6780