



"... Glass making was in the blood and this carried the family through difficult times."

**Georg Riedel,**  
Owner, Riedel Glas

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## Georg and Maximilian Riedel

Riedel Glas

Riedel is famous for making arguably the most exquisite grape varietal specific wine glasses known to mankind. The glassmaker's USP is the unrivaled concept of functional stemware that matches different wines. But the Austrian company also makes glasses for Coca-Cola and has plans to branch out further. This much-celebrated glassmaker has been around since 1756, making it one of the oldest family businesses in the world. Now under the stewardship of 11th-generation family member Maximilian Riedel, the business looks set to flourish for many more years to come.

In 2013, at the relatively young age of 36, Maximilian Riedel took over the running of the family business. This made him the 11th generation of the Riedel family to rise to the top position at the glassmaker.

The company is named after its founder, Johann Christoph Riedel, a glass trader. He started the family business more than 250 years ago in the Bohemian town of Neuschloß, which is now in the Czech Republic, but was then part of Austria.

### Form follows function

Riedel is one of the 100 oldest family businesses in the world. But for Maximilian, what is even more impressive is the fact that the business has always been about one thing. "The remarkable part is that we have always been in the glass business," he says.

Based in the Austrian town of Kufstein since the mid-1950s, Riedel has become synonymous with beautifully crafted wine glasses. In fact, Riedel makes a different wine glass for nearly

every wine grape there is. What Riedel does so successfully is not only to manufacture beautiful wine glasses, but above all to create a whole experience around drinking wine from varietal specific glasses. Claus J. Riedel – Maximilian's grandfather – was the first designer to recognize that the bouquet and taste of wines are affected by the shape of the glass from which they are consumed. Working with experienced wine-growers and sommeliers, Claus Riedel laid the groundwork for functional as well as beautiful glasses by creating stemware that would match different wines and was made according to the Bauhaus design credo: form follows function. This concept was elaborated by the introduction of the Sommeliers series in 1973, which gained worldwide recognition.

### Machine production and global success

Maximilian's father Georg then introduced the machine production of stemware and created the new Vinum series in 1986. This series offers varietal specific wine glasses at an affordable price for the consumer. This has been the starting



The Vinum series was introduced in 1986 - it offers varietal specific wine glasses at an affordable price

point for the global success of Riedel Glas. Georg calls this USP of the company the "subliminal relationship between the glass and the drinking of wine."

He explains this in more business-like terms: "We don't see ourselves as purely a manufacturer. We are also a marketing company," says Georg. The marketing side is often developed through strategic relationships with other businesses.

Riedel has worked with the German household appliance maker and fellow family business Miele to influence their dishwasher design to better suit Riedel glasses. It has also teamed up with the chocolate maker Lindt by creating a comparative wine glass tasting and chocolate pairing experience for consumers. These tastings show that the best wine and chocolate pairing is enhanced by enjoying the wine from the proper varietal specific glass.

More radically, Riedel has recently teamed up with Coca-Cola to produce a glass specifically for the iconic drink. "It was our first step into making glasses for other beverages – apart from wine

and spirit glasses," says Maximilian. "Now the strategic move for the future is to develop glasses for other soft drinks and for tea and coffee."

Riedel produces about seven million glasses a year, with the majority produced in Germany in "the Bavarian forest close to Frankfurt," says Maximilian. But around 700,000 are mouth blown in the state of Tyrol, Austria, near the German border, at the company's Kufstein headquarters.

### The US is the company's biggest market

An important element of the glassmaker's appeal lies in where the glasses are manufactured. "Being made in Germany and Austria suggests quality," says Maximilian. "It's a key selling point." That global demand for quality in glassware has turned Riedel into a €230m company, with 1,200 employees.

The US is Riedel's biggest market, accounting for around US\$56.2m of total sales. Much of the success of the glassmaker in the world's biggest market is down to Maximilian. At the age



A glassmaker with a long family tradition: Claus J. Riedel (9th generation, left), Walter (8th), Josef (8th), Josef the Younger (7th, all in first row), Franz Xaver (5th), Anton Leopold (4th) and Johann Leopold Riedel (3th generation, all in second row)



Georg with his wife Eva (Head of Retail) and Maximilian with his sister Laetizia, who is Head of Legal Affairs



At Riedel, exquisite wine glasses were mouth blown in the 1950s ...



... and still are nowadays

“We were very lucky with succession. We didn’t need to hand it over to an outsider; we kept it in the family.”

Georg Riedel

of 25, he was appointed CEO of the business in the US, having previously worked for Riedel in France and Dubai. Maximilian drove a sixfold increase in US sales and, at the same time, he managed to fit in the design of the “O” series of glasses without stems, which has won multiple awards, including one from the Museum of Modern Art.

### Succession is the most important goal

There are few next-generation family members that could have started with such success, and it obviously made Georg’s task of handing over the reins easier. “We were very lucky with succession. We didn’t need to hand it over to an outsider; we kept it in the family.”

Stewardship has been a key element in the survival of the business for a long time. “The most important goal in running the family business is to hand over the business,” says Georg, who is in his mid-60s. And echoing the famous slogan from watchmaker Patek Philippe, Georg adds: “You don’t own it. You’re just watching it, guarding it, nurturing it, to hand it over to the next generation in as good a condition as possible.”

### Family members in the management

But stewardship at the business has not always been so easy. After World War Two, Walter Riedel, an eighth-generation family member, was deported in 1945 to Russia for his involvement as a scientist in the development of the radar screen. This happened by mischance as his name was written on one of those screens. He was in prison until 1955. But his son Claus was taken under the wing of Daniel Swarovski, founder of the Austrian family business famous for its crystal. When Walter eventually returned to Austria, Swarovski helped them take over a bankrupt glassworks in Kufstein, which re-established the business.

“It was a difficult time,” says Georg. “But glassmaking was in the blood and this carried the family through.” Georg’s wife Eva works in the business as Head of Retail, and Maximilian’s sister

Laetizia is Head of Legal Affairs. But for now, the business looks to have found a hugely energetic family member to lead it well into the 21st century.

Maximilian says that the future may not just be about creating drinking glasses. “We are making many technical advances in our factories. This may enable us to go into other industries where glass is used. And, although there are no firm plans yet, we might make glass for cars or for the construction industry. The possibilities are endless.”

With this attitude and such a strong commitment to the best principles of family business governance, there seems to be every chance that Riedel will go on for decades, if not centuries, as a family business. And the constant in all this? Glass.

### Georg Riedel / Maximilian Riedel

Former CEO and Owner / CEO

Company name: **Riedel Glas – Tiroler Glashütte GmbH**

Generation(s): **10th and 11th**

Founded: **1756 in Neuschloss, Bohemia**

Industries: **Glass production**

Employees (2013): **1,200**

Revenue (2013): **€230m**