

HI HO SILVER SHINING

Elegant, eloquent and highly original riffs on the traditional silver beaker are inspiring designer-makers and gift givers alike, says Lucia van der Post

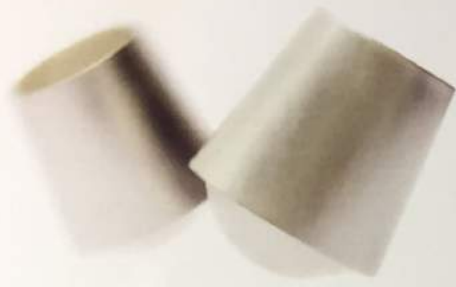
It's hard to put one's finger on the charm of silver beakers, though Theo Fennell has a jolly good try. "It's their adaptability, collectability and timelessness," he says. And, he points out, they also make a wonderful canvas on which the skills of engravers, enamellers, chasers and artists can be displayed. "The intricacy of the work complements the beaker's simple aesthetic." Through the years, Fennell has engraved or chased endless decorative variations upon his beakers, from sporting scenes to erotica, Greek mythology to the four seasons, portraits to people's houses or animals. Well-made beakers can also be beautiful without ornamentation, their elegance achieved with just the simplest of lines. "It is in this variety," he says, "that the appeal of the beaker lies."

Among Fennell's wonderfully rich and diverse portfolio is a fantastic collection of silver shot beakers (£2,950 each), the sides engraved with images of Scottish wildlife – a stag, grouse, capercaillie, salmon – and the shape based on the traditional cup used for serving whisky. "Fill them with a single malt or use them as stirrup cups in the craggy outdoors," he says. Polo is another popular theme (examples pictured below, £2,350 each), but Fennell will also makes beakers to special order (price on request).

Indeed, most established jewellers offer silver beakers of one kind or another. Check out in particular William & Son's charming sterling-silver beakers (£925, pictured overleaf) with decorative "bubbles" on the outside and gilding on the inside. I like too the Coiled Silver beaker (£2,400, pictured far right) at Mappin & Webb, which features hammered wire circles soldered together and is the creation of artist Nan Nan Liu. For other original riffs on such a traditional object, look to the work of individual designer-makers – such as Birmingham-based silversmith Theresa Nguyen, whose Square to Circle beakers (from £1,100, pictured overleaf), so-called because the square base subtly graduates into a circle at the top, are truly beautiful. "They rock on their base just as an 18th-century beaker would," she says. They come in various finishes, but I like best the finely hammered silver version. Rebecca Joselyn, meanwhile, specialises in taking ordinary everyday objects (a sardine tin, a ring pull) and making



Clockwise from centre: Abigail Brown silver Swirl beaker, £1,350. Grant McCaig silver beaker, £820. Elizabeth Peers silver Shetland beaker, from £1,250. Nan Nan Liu for Mappin & Webb silver and gilt Coiled Silver beaker, £2,400. Theo Fennell engraved silver shot beakers, £2,350 each



them in finest silver. Her beautiful, witty and original designs include silver beakers (£795, pictured far right) based on disposable plastic bottles, with gilt interiors for added glamour.

The Contemporary Applied Arts gallery on London's Southwark Street is many a design pundit's favourite source of inspiring work (this is where, for instance, I first came across Hiroshi Suzuki's extraordinary silverware). Here you'll find Adi Toch's Segmented cups (from £800, pictured top second from far right), cut, twisted and rejoined to striking effect. And at The New Craftsmen, that enterprising showcase for all things original and handmade in London's Mayfair, Grant McCaig has a new collection called Pleated Silver, in which fine silver is folded to create a beautiful carafe and matching silver beakers (£820 each, beaker pictured on previous page). A critic writing in *The Spectator* described them as having "the impact of a still-life by Morandi". And they do.

The Goldsmith Company's excellent website is another rich source of exquisite craftsmanship. Here, Belfast-based silversmith Samantha Moore has some charmingly simple small, round beakers (£1,350, pictured top third from far left), designed to tap into the rich Irish tradition of combining storytelling with a proper drink; Elizabeth Peers, inspired by the way fabric folds over the body, took the standard beaker shape and give it a "twirl" design (from £1,250, pictured on previous page); and Abigail Brown seems to be thinking along similar lines in her Swirl beaker (£1,350, pictured on previous page), with its curving lines whooshing round the sides. Even more ambitious are Juliette Bigley's characterful and eloquent silver Whirling beakers (£2,400 for the pair, pictured top far left), which, with their rounded bottoms, sit at an angle without toppling over and move like spinning tops – ever a conversation starter at the dinner table.

Last but not least is William Welstead, long one of my favourite sources of silver. Elegantly spare, the British

Above from far left: **Juliette Bigley silver Whirling beakers, £2,400 for the pair.** **Samantha Moore silver beaker, £1,350.** **Adi Toch silver Segmented cup, from £800.** **Rebecca Joselyn silver and gilt Bottle beakers, £795 each**



jeweller's beakers (from £150, pictured bottom) come in Britannia silver (which has a slightly higher purity than sterling) hand-hammered in Kathmandu, his silversmiths having fortunately survived the earthquake, though their village was badly affected. The squatter, more rounded hammered-silver Wobbly cups (from £160) are equally beguiling.

It seems that today's designer-makers are as excited by the silver beaker's aesthetic possibilities as their historical predecessors ever were. "Demand for handmade, uniquely designed pieces like these is growing," says Fennell, whose push-the-boat-out

From above centre: **Theresa Nguyen silver and gold Square to Circle beaker, from £1,100.** **William & Son silver and gilt Bubble beaker, £925.** **William Welstead hammered-silver beakers, from £150**

sterling-silver shooting beakers (£50,000 for a set of 10, boxed in a saddle-leather "gun case") are each engraved with a different country scene that takes around three days to complete. "And on the back of this there are many more talented young people wanting to become silversmiths and engravers." Which is a boon at Christmas, as well as for

godparents or grandparents looking for interesting christening or birthday presents – and giving one a year soon adds up to a complete set. The problem is which the many lovely variations to choose. ♦

CUPS OF GLEE

Abigail Brown, 07752-011 212; www.abigailbrown.co.uk and see Contemporary Applied Arts and The Goldsmiths' Company. **Adi Toch**, 07972-872 769; www.aditoch.com and see Contemporary Applied Arts. **Contemporary Applied Arts**, 89 Southwark St, London SE1 (020-7620 0086; www.caa.org.uk). **Egg**, 36 Kinnerton St, London SW1 (020-7235 9315; www.eggtrading.com). **Elizabeth Peers**, 07854-841 753; www.elizabethauriolpeers.com and see The Goldsmiths' Company. **The Goldsmiths' Company**, 020-7606 7000; www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk. **Goldsmiths' Fair**, 020-7606 7010; www.goldsmithsfair.co.uk and see The Goldsmiths' Company. **Grant McCaig**, www.grantmccaig.co.uk and see The New Craftsmen. **Juliette Bigley**, 07779-005 751; www.juliettebigley.com and see The Goldsmiths' Company. **Mappin & Webb**, 132 Regent St, London W1 (020-7287 0033; www.mappinandwebb.com) and branches. **Nan Nan Liu**, 07515-127 009; www.nannanliu.com and see Mappin & Webb. **The New Craftsmen**, 34 North Row, London W1 (020-7620 3190; www.thenewcraftsmen.com). **Rebecca Joselyn**, 07788-784 715; www.designinsilver.co.uk. **Samantha Moore**, 07840-033 999; www.samanthamooresilversmith.com and see The Goldsmiths' Company. **Theo Fennell**, 169 Fulham Rd, London SW3 (020-7799 5002; www.theofennell.com) and stockist. **Theresa Nguyen**, 52 Frederick St, Birmingham B1 3HS (07903-192 142; www.theresanguyen.co.uk). **William & Son**, 34-36 Bruton St, London W1 (020-7493 8385; www.williamandson.com). **William Welstead**, 01451-860 175; www.williamwelstead.com and see Egg.

