



MAK

Press Release

ROBERT LA ROCHE: Personal View

Press Preview	Tuesday, 3 May 2016, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 3 May 2016, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK DESIGN LAB MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	4 May – 25 September 2016
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Free admission on Tuesdays from 6–10 p.m.

The MAK will present the first retrospective on the Austrian designer Robert La Roche, whose distinct line of eyewear (*Lunettes Robert La Roche*) conquered the international fashion and film world. With a generous donation of 500 objects from La Roche's company archive, the exhibition illuminates his unique oeuvre and unconventional path from advertising specialist to internationally celebrated eyewear couturier. A few years after drawing his first design, his glasses began appearing onscreen, worn by stars such as Meryl Streep, Kevin Costner, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Other prominent fans included Yoko Ono and Andy Warhol.

The exhibition displays La Roche's craftsmanship and branding creativity with a selection of glasses, design drawings, photographs, and advertisements. La Roche produced eyewear frames whose textures and colors set new international standards. With equal attention to detail he directed his own marketing campaigns, some of which are now as legendary as the glasses themselves. From the 1 200 models he created between 1973 and 1999, La Roche is now widely considered as one of the key designers of 20th century eyewear. Many of his "classic" frames have an enduring popularity, and his vintage models are still highly coveted.

Born in Vienna in 1938, La Roche joined a renowned tradition of Austrian eyewear design whose forerunners included Udo Proksch (aka "Serge Kirchhofer"), Cari Zalloni (Cazal), and Dora Demmel (Silhouette). Emerging from the creative ferment of Vienna in the seventies and eighties, his success story is largely that of an entrepreneur. "The La Roche brand is one of the eyewear fashion world's first start-ups," as exhibition curator Thomas Geisler put it. "From design to production to marketing, Robert directed the entire enterprise with extraordinary energy and enthusiasm." By maintaining his own small and independent company, La Roche was able to respond



quickly with fresh designs whenever he sensed new trends developing in public taste. This often gave him a creative edge over his much larger competitors.

La Roche's birth as a glasses designer began in the early seventies while working as an executive for the Optyl company, founded by Austrian pioneering eyewear manufacturer Wilhelm Anger. From his work in marketing Viennaline, Christian Dior, Porsche Design, and CARRERA products, La Roche witnessed how creative design and branding could transfigure eyeglasses from a practical instrument for correcting vision into a stylish and highly personal accessory.

Embarking on his own career as a designer led him to the Cadore Valley in the Italian Dolomites, where he learned about acetate, a plastic derived from cotton cellulose. The material enabled him to handcraft frames of an entirely new standard, with special color nuances that became a La Roche trademark, as did their unprecedented fineness—qualities that distinguished his frames from products he'd encountered at Optyl's vacuum casting production.

What began as a one-man show in Vienna's 8th district quickly developed into a global brand available in leading outlets all over Europe and America. The inaugural "edition zero" of *WIENER* magazine in 1979, with its special coverage of the Austrian avant-garde, featured the fledging fashion designer Helmut Lang and a multi-paged interview with Robert La Roche. Following his second office in Munich, the designer established a New York branch in 1985 and placed striking, two-page advertisements in magazines such as *Details* and Andy Warhol's *Interview*.

To elevate his brand profile, La Roche enlisted help from top talents in the Austrian advertising industry: Christian Satek, Creative Director of the GGK Agency, and the photographer Gerhard Heller made invaluable contributions to the La Roche image. Andreas Berger, another former La Roche campaigner, organized the exhibition's graphics, the architecture was designed by the young Viennese Studio Okular. Austrian star models such as Cordula Reyer and Werner Schreyer became the brand's faces in award winning ad campaigns at home and abroad.

Beyond designing for his own label, which he sold in 1999, La Roche created designs for ESCADA, Beatrice Hympendahl, and Palmers, examples of which are shown in the exhibition. He was also a design consultant for Calvin Klein's early eyewear collections. La Roche is, along with Helmut Lang and Hans Hollein, one of three Austrian designers who produced artwork for the Swedish vodka producer ABSOLUT.

"Just for fun I calculated how many glasses I've sold in my career," said La Roche on the occasion of the exhibition. "As a very conservative estimate I'd say I've had the pleasure



of making four million customers not only see better, but also look better. Thinking about that gives me a lot of satisfaction, and it's how I like to sum up my life's work. Every one of those frames bears my name, as well as the word 'Vienne'—a little reference to the city of their origin, a metropolis of creativity, culture, and design.”

Numerous original vintage La Roche models – from the sophisticated to the eccentric— are available for sale in the MAK Design Shop.

The exhibition *ROBERT LA ROCHE: Personal View* is graciously supported by Eyewear Solutions GmbH, Essilor Austria, and Generali Insurance AG.

Press photos are available for download at MAK.at/press.

Supplemental Program

Guided tours

Dialogue Tours

Sun, 15.5.2016, 4–5 p.m.

Global Eyewear

Dialogue tour with Robert La Roche

Robert La Roche's eyewear conquered the world from Vienna. What explains this success? How has the work of designers changed over the past 40 years?

Sun, 12.6.2016, 4–5 p.m.

Glasses as Eye-Catchers

A dialogue tour with Andreas Berger, creative director and partner at kratkys.net, previously an advertising designer for Robert La Roche at GGK

A journey through three decades of legendary ad campaigns: How do advertisements for a product such as glasses work? How much is craftsmanship still a part of ad design today?

Please register in advance: T +43 1 711 36-297, beate.lex@MAK.at

MAK SENIORS

Wed, 18.5.2016, 3 p.m.

Tour of the exhibition followed by further discussion in the restaurant Salonplafond im MAK, total price: € 15

Please register in advance: T +43 1 711 36-298, education@MAK.at

Special Tours available on request: T +43 1 711 36-298, education@MAK.at

MAK Design Kids

Sat, 21.5.2016 and 17.9.2016, 2–4 p.m.

Transparent: Design Glasses Like a Professional

Workshop for 8- to 12-year-olds (unaccompanied)

How are glasses made? Along with Robert La Roche, who has designed over 1 000 pairs of glasses over the course of his life, we will learn about the entire design process by



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taking on the role of designers and making our own prototypes.
Number of participants is limited. Please register in advance (by the Thursday before your preferred date): T +43 1 711 36-297, designkids@MAK.at
Cost: € 7,50

Program for School Classes (6- to 12-Year-Olds)

Insights

Tour and experiential workshop (duration: 2 hours)

Whether circular, oval, or pink, many of us wear glasses. In this exhibition we'll focus on glasses and gain insights into the craft of eyewear design. Afterward, LICHT FÜR DIE WELT will tell us about the day-to-day lives of blind people: We'll learn how to get around with a cane while blindfolded and try reading brail.

Information and registration: T +43 1 711 36-297, beate.lex@MAK.at

Tours and events are held in German, unless stated otherwise. Meeting place for all guided tours and events: MAK Columned Main Hall
Additional information is available at MAK.at.

Exhibition Talks

Tue, 31.5.2016, 6–7 p.m., MAK FORUM

Where Glasses Are Not Just Lifestyle Products, but Lifesavers

Designer Robert La Roche in conversation with actor, moderator, and author Chris Lohner, ambassador for Licht für die Welt, on the need for seeing aids in developing countries.

Tue, 7.6.2016, 6–7 p.m., MAK FORUM

How Are Glasses Marketed?

Founder Robert La Roche in conversation with graphic designer Christian Satek and photographer Gerhard Heller, both of whom played a key role in the design of the ad campaign.

Tue, 14.6.2016, 6–7 p.m., MAK FORUM

How Are Glasses Designed?

Robert La Roche, the doyen of eyewear design, in conversation with two newcomers from Austria: Christoph Egger (gloryfy) and Christian Wolf (Rolf Spectacles) will offer a

glimpse behind the scenes of their design work and marketing strategies.

Eyewear Consultation

Sun, 25.9.2016, 2–6 p.m., MAK Columned Main Hall

See Better, Look Better

At the closing of the exhibition, designer Robert La Roche as well as opticians Petra Geiling and Philipp Bischl will advise museum visitors. Selected examples of his original vintage glasses will be available then and for the entire duration of the exhibition at the MAK Design Shop.

Press Data Sheet

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Curator	Thomas Geisler, Curator, MAK Design Collection
MAK Admission	€ 9.90 / Reduced € 7.50 / Family Ticket € 13 Free admission for children and teens under 19

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Vienna, 15 April 2016