



A new bloom for Flora Danica jewellery

Flora Danica jewellery has taken its aesthetic cue and inspiration from Denmark's countryside for over half a century. In 2005, husband and wife Vagn and Anette Ibsen acquired the company with an ambition to appeal to a broader customer base and breathe new life into the brand. They share the inroads they've made and explain the new dawn they are shaping for one of Denmark's most romantic jewellery brands.

Words Paul Barfoot Photos Flora Danica Jewellery of Copenhagen

In 1953 Orla Eggert married his passion for decorative adornment with a love of the great Danish outdoors by creating a distinctive DNA for a new jewellery brand. Gathering flowers, leaves, herbs, twigs and grass he set about developing production techniques to preserve pieces of Danish vegetation by dipping them in sterling and bonding 24K gold over the sterling foundation to create sparkling representations of nature's gifts. The manufacturing formula remains a well-kept secret to this day, but they are still used to produce the realistic and intricate detailing that characterises every piece of Flora Danica jewellery.

During his lifetime, Eggert was committed to keeping his glittering business a family concern and continued to grow the Flora Danica portfolio in line with a healthy market demand within Denmark and such neighbouring countries as Germany, Norway and Sweden. In a very short space of time he began to maximise the potential for export, which quickly grew to over 40 countries worldwide, including Australia, America and Japan. The typical Flora Danica customer was a mature woman with a taste for refined style and delicate craftsmanship.

Upon his passing several years ago, Orla's family was determined to keep his legacy alive, and the final responsibility for this resided with his daughter, Helen. Despite sterling efforts, popularity declined and the company was forced to either cease trading or source a fitting suitor. Any potential buyer had to share the same vision of uncompromising beauty and quality that was the backbone of the Eggert empire, and Helen needed to trust that such values would remain inherent within the iconic

brand. The family had collectively decided that they would rather draw a line under Flora Danica than allow it to fall into the wrong hands.

"My wife and I have a textile background, and I knew the company well as I had been involved in developing a watch for them. Flora Danica's accountant approached us with an option to purchase the company, and knowing how important the company was to her and the Eggert family, we were delighted," explains Vagn Ibsen.

"We started by streamlining the Flora Danica portfolio. Only about 25% of designs were selling. We stripped away the other 75%, and so began our transformation," adds Anette Ibsen.

The couple knew that they wanted to modernise the brand, and had a definite idea of how to go about it. They quickly decided the best way to signal a new Flora Danica era to the world was to develop slick new white and gold packaging to support and accentuate the delicate sophistication of the jewellery, and they produced glossy marketing materials that introduced a new, younger, seductive Flora Danica woman that they wanted to target.

"When we took over the company, the majority of customers were in the 60 age bracket. In order for the brand to survive it was important for me to inject a greater fashion factor alongside the classic and timeless elements in order to cater for a new breed of Flora Danica customers" underlines Anette, who is steering the styling and trend focus of the company.



They recruited new talent to work alongside designers that have been with the company for many years in order to tweak existing designs and develop complimentary new designs such as Marguerit. The result is a new Flora Danica language that combines old-school Flora Danica with a trend-forward sensibility.

“Many of the old designs were produced exclusively gold plated. Many women today have a preference for silver, so we wanted to respond to this by providing the option to purchase items in both silver and gold, and also to combine the two for a bolder, more modern expression” explains Vagn.

There is now a greater focus on collections and the possibilities to combine elements within them to create different looks. It is based around a more modular approach than the single item Flora Danica of old. Furthermore, they have introduced new materials such as fine leather straps on necklaces and integrated sleek seamless neck chains to create a more contemporary accent to the brand. Updated fastenings on earrings has also improved the ergonomic performance of the jewellery by allowing it to effortlessly glide and react more naturally with the human form and motion. Such stylistic twists have very much transformed the character and personality of the brand.

“Many of the same stores are selling Flora Danica, but I have been supporting them to understand some of the changes we have made. This has involved encouraging them to embrace entire collections instead of individual items, and explaining the styling options within each collection and how it has an appeal to a broader customer profile than before,” Anette emphasises.

As an ambassador she has also tried to exemplify the flexibility of Flora Danica by giving very specific

consideration to her daily business attire. Making sure she plays with a range of styling possibilities herself helps retailers understand how Flora Danica can be worn to compliment a casual jeans and blouse look equally as well as a more formal outfit. Flora Danica is more fashion-forward and flexible than it has ever been, and grooming retailers to appreciate this has clearly filtered down to customers who are switching on too.

“We are getting an enthusiastic take-up from stores, and we are also seeing younger women discovering the beauty of Flora Danica for the first time. Some have discovered pieces of Flora Danica in their grandmother’s jewellery box and had it recoated so that they themselves can wear it. Every woman wants to be unique, and by combining the old and the new, Flora Danica allows them to add individuality to their personal style. Floral designs are still very popular. But no other manufacturer produces pieces quite like Flora Danica, from real flowers, and that also makes it very unique.” asserts Anette.

Since the takeover Anette and Vagn have yielded a near 300% customer increase within the Danish market alone, and Flora Danica is now available in excess of 225 outlets throughout Denmark, including Copenhagen’s Illum and Magasin flagship department stores.

“We wanted to firstly concentrate on our home market so that we had a solid foundation before we started to grow export. But we are now picking up speed in such territories as Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland, and we hope to replicate such successful penetration in Germany and France in the next phase. You can’t conquer the world in two weeks, and we have no intention to do so. But we know that there are other territories that will be particularly receptive to the new Flora Danica brand. One of these is Australia, and in many ways we have

Royal connections to thank for that,” reveals Vagn. The company received positive attention by designing pieces around the Australian national flower cast inside a crown for the marriage of the Danish Crown Prince Frederik to the Australian Princess Mary.

The couple have a clear export strategy for the future that is built around developing a strong distributor network. “We do not have the capacity to deal with individual worldwide retailers direct in the same way that we do in Denmark, and we know that it would not be the most economically effective way to manage the brand around the globe. It will take time to build up a network of international distributors, but we are happy to take small and considered steps in order to secure a healthy long-term future for the brand,” explains a business astute Vagn.

“The whole experience so far has been a steep learning curve for both of us. We knew very little about designing and trading jewellery, and I feel we have achieved so much in very little time. Of course there are still many opportunities ahead to continue our evolution of Flora Danica, but we know that it is the right challenge for us,” concludes Anette.

THE RICHES OF NATURE IN SILVER AND GOLD

Flora Danica jewellery is made from flowers, leaves, herbs, twigs and grass that have been meticulously selected and gathered in the Danish forests, gardens and fields and by the roadside. The pieces are produced in Sterling silver and plated with 24K gold to give a sparkling representation of nature’s finest details.

The studs are gilt four-leaf clovers.

