

AUSTRIA

A sparkly world of wonder awaits

SUZANNE MORPHET is enchanted by the crystal attractions marking Swarovski's 100th anniversary

Heavy snow is falling as I enter Silent Light, an underground room at Kristallwelten in Austria.

Inside, it's cold. Snow piles in drifts on the ground and collects on the branches of a 6m-high Christmas tree as it turns slowly on a pedestal.

Coming closer, I realise that the tree's branches are not natural, but made of crystal. Thousands and thousands of sparkling crystals; some pointed, others more rounded. These crystals are not natural either, but man-made.

I walk around the tree on a shovelled path, shivering in the -10C temperature, yet utterly enchanted.

Silent Light is one of 18 rooms or "Chambers of Wonder" at Kristallwelten (Crystal Worlds), an attraction that was created to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Swarovski. It was here in the small town of Wattens in 1895 that Daniel Swarovski founded his crystal-cutting company. The innovative entrepreneur would go

on to become the indisputable king of crystal.

Kristallwelten spans 7.5ha, including a large garden and has attracted more than 16 million visitors since it opened in 1995.

The concept for Kristallwelten comes from the historical Chamber of Art and Wonders at Ambras Castle in Innsbruck, just a 20-minute drive away. There, in the 16th century, Archduke Ferdinand II displayed his encyclopedic collection of art, objects, instruments and exotica in an attempt to represent all the knowledge of the era.

According to Swarovski, Kristallwelten builds on this idea by having different artists use their imaginations, and Swarovski crystals, to each tell a story.

Before visiting, I was dismissive of Swarovski since its crystals are manufactured, relatively inexpensive and easy to find. The company sells them online and in about 2800 stores in 170 countries around the world. They are the polar opposite of rare gemstones found in nature, yet they're exceedingly popular. In 2016, Swarovski enjoyed revenues of about 2.6 billion euros (more than \$4b).

And now, at Kristallwelten, I can see why.

Synthetic crystals can be just as stunning as natural ones, especially in the hands of artists and designers like Tord Boontje and Alexander McQueen. The two men were originally commissioned to create Silent Light in 2003 by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London as a Christmas tree for the museum's main hall.

Now, it's one of the first chambers that visitors see after



A Christmas tree made from synthetic crystals. Pictures: Suzanne Morphet

entering Kristallwelten through what appears to be the head of a giant. Built into a hillside, covered in vegetation and with water spouting from his mouth, the Giant watches over the wonders inside.

After experiencing the serene beauty of Silent Light, I wonder what the other "wonders" will be. Crystal Dome is especially delightful. Modelled on the structure of a geodesic dome, it's embedded with thousands of crystals and 595 mirrors that reflect their light.

"Crystal comes to life with light," explains Carla Rumler, cultural director of Swarovski Tourism Services.

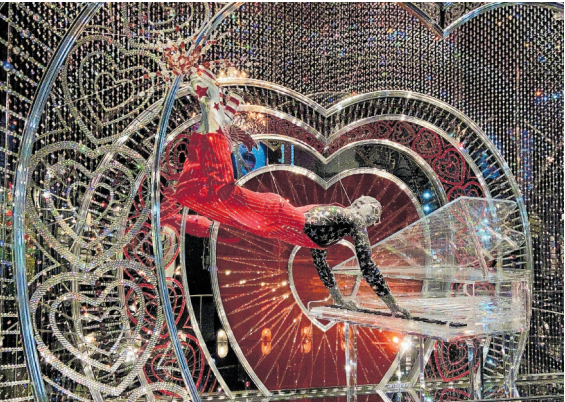
Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama also uses mirrors to amplify light, which becomes a synonym for pain in Chandelier of Grief. The hexagonal chamber is lit by a single crystal chandelier and as it rotates, the mirrors reflect more

and more chandeliers, as infinite and hypnotising as stars in a night sky. And speaking of stars, El Sol — Spanish for "the Sun" — is a sparkling red sphere that hangs from the ceiling and lights up its chamber with a warm glow. Exactly one billion times smaller than the sun itself, Mexican artist Fernando Romero designed it to have a similar dynamic surface as the sun. He achieved it using 2880 precisely cut crystals that refract the light from LEDs at its core.

Then there's The Art of Performance. Not surprisingly, Swarovski has enjoyed a long relationship with Hollywood's top entertainers and creators, and this chamber is full of familiar figures. There's Elton John, hovering above a piano, his bejewelled fingers flying along the keys. We see Cher's original Golden Wings from her outrageous shows at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas in 2008. There's a replica of the "Happy Birthday Mr President" dress that Marilyn Monroe wore to John F. Kennedy's birthday party in 1962.

And of course, Michael Jackson's shimmering white glove. The scope of what artists can do with crystals seems infinite. "We are so surprised always, it's never ending," Carla says.

What's also surprising is that Swarovski has managed to keep its manufacturing process a secret. Is it lead that makes the crystals so sparkly? Does potash make the glass more malleable? Without giving anything away, Carla says simply, "It's the cutting".



Elton John appears to hover above his piano in The Art of Performance.

Suzanne Morphet was a guest of the Austrian National Tourist Office. They have not seen or approved this story.

travel in WA

To advertise please contact
Emily Tipton on 9482 2398
emily.tipton@wanews.com.au

ALBANY

EMU BEACH CHALETs
s/cont. pet friendly 9844 8889
emubeachchalets.com.au

EMU POINT MOTEL - Studios
s/cont. near beach 9844 1001
info@emupointmotel.com.au
www.emupointmotel.com.au

CAR HIRE

★ WORLDWIDE CAR HIRE ★
Unbeatable Rates
Call Crown 1800 139 747

DUNSBOROUGH

TOWN ONLY 700m, Beach
150m. Large executive quality
house well equipped 4 x 2
sleeps 9, all linen included.
Phone 0418 901 686
Hermitage@westnet.com.au

THE WEST CLASSIFIEDS
Call 13 22 80.
Give yourself the best chance
to sell it. Be it Motoring, Real
Estate, For Sale or whatever.
We can help you advertise it.

It's easy
Don't delay
Ring now

NEED TO SELL YOUR CARAVAN, CAMPER VAN OR MOTORHOME?

WE ARE YOUR CONSIGNMENT SPECIALISTS

- › You will have a set price upfront
- › Your RV will have the best exposure & security in Perth
- › We take all the worry & stress out of private selling
- › We pride ourselves on professionalism & honesty
- › Our aim is to impress you so much that you REFER others
- › FREE pickup Metro area

Call: 9361 0011

CROWN CARAVANS & CAMPERS

DL 17079
1110 Albany Hwy, St James opp Diesel Motors (Mercedes)
crowncaravans.com.au

BOOK A BEACHSIDE BREAK AT Moore River Guilderton

Be Quick - Book Now X'mas / School Holidays Filling Fast

Phone: 9577 1321 • Mobile: 0429 969 889
Web: mooreriveraccommodation-BranchysHolidayHomes
Email: branchys@bigpond.com

KALBARRI PALM RESORT

Summer Sale

- 3 nights in twin or queen bed suite
- FREE fresh food hamper to enjoy
- Chocolates and a bottle wine

Total cost just \$299

Offer for 2 persons, 1 child or infant free, conditions apply subject to availability

BOOK NOW Ph 1800 819 029
Web www.palmresort.com.au Email stay@palmresort.com.au

travel in WA

To advertise, please contact
Emily on 9482 2398 or
emily.tipton@wanews.com.au