

# GLASSWARE FROM LAUSITZ

A HISTORIC GLASS-MAKING REGION IN THE CENTRE OF EUROPE



Map courtesy of NordNordWest cartography, Germany.

**BRIAN WALLING**

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The venerable Eastern and Oriental Hotel in Penang, dating from 1885, serves its sparkling wines in these beautiful crystal glasses of modern shape, rather than the old-fashioned straight-sided flutes that do not allow full development of the wine in the glass.



A maker's mark etched on the base shows the glasses' provenance to be the Stölzle company in Lausitz.



## Stölzle Lausitz

Stölzle Lausitz glassware comes from the small town of Weisswasser, which is in the far east of today's Germany, close to the border with Poland. After the 2nd World War (1939-1945) Weisswasser found itself in the Soviet-administered part of the old Germany, which in 1949 became the Soviet-influenced German Democratic Republic (the DDR in German, or East Germany to the Western allies). In 1990, with the reunification of West and East Germany, Weisswasser found itself back in the single Germany.

A quick look into the economic history of Stölzle Lausitz glassware is fascinating.

### Stölzle

This is a major European glass producer, specialised in very high quality glass bottles and containers. It serves the pharmaceutical, perfume and food industries as well as a number of other high-tech industries. It was founded in 1805 and is based near Graz in south-east Austria, which is some 500 km (300 miles) south of the Lausitz region in Germany. Stölzle's association with Lausitz glassmaking came only in the 1990s when the surviving elements of Lausitz glassmaking in the form of the United Lausitz Glassmaking Company were acquired by Stölzle and became a Stölzle subsidiary.

### Lausitz

This is not a town or city, but a historic region in the centre of Europe, south-east of Berlin and just inside the borders of Germany where it meets Poland and Czechia. In size, Lausitz is approximately 150 km x 150 km (roughly 100 x 100 miles), about the size of the UK's East Anglia or Northern Ireland. Over the centuries, "ownership" of the Lausitz region has lain with a variety of nearby states, countries and rulers, but Lausitz has survived as a distinct and separate cultural entity throughout. The essential factor in this is that Lausitz was originally an outpost of west Slavs, a small Slavonic cultural enclave with its own language (Sorbian), in the middle of what were otherwise Germanic and Polish populations

More recently Lausitz, for administrative reasons, has become identified into Upper and Lower Lausitz, with Upper being the southernmost and more hilly part and Lower being the northernmost and flatter part.

The name Lausitz has different spellings in Polish and in the local Sorbian language in Lower and Upper Lausitz. The English-speaking and academic worlds, curiously, seem to have preferred an Anglicised name, Lusatia – for which there appears to be no logic – to refer to it.

The Lausitz cultural and linguistic identity in this region is currently officially recognised within Germany, with, for example, place signs carrying both a German name and a local (Sorbian) language name.

The Lausitz town of Weisswasser, in the middle of the historic Lausitz region and on its eastern side, became the focus of glassmaking in Lausitz.

## Lausitz glassmaking

Glassmaking has existed since the Middle Ages in a number of areas in the hilly terrain of central Europe, due to good supplies of the basic materials, silica sand and clay, plus fuel (wood, coal) for heating the furnaces. Around Lausitz, glassmaking appears only to have taken off after the arrival of the railways in this area in the late 1860s, which facilitated transport of the necessary materials – as well as allowing shipment of the finished products. Initial efforts by local industrialists seem not to have been particularly successful in the 1870s, but in 1889 a glassmaking entrepreneur arrived from 150 km (100 miles) further east in the German area (from Glatz, which is now the Polish Klodzko), together with 26 glassmaking families, purchased the failing glassmaking company in Weisswasser and relaunched that town into glassmaking.

Initially the products were industrial items, such as glass tubes and globes for electric lamps (but around 1908 production was expanded into drinking glasses). A number of other glassmakers soon started up in Weisswasser and by soon after 1900 the majority of the town's workforce was employed in glassmaking. The various glassmakers progressively merged into the main United Lausitz Glassmaking Company and during the post-2nd World War period, when Weisswasser and most of the old Lausitz region lay in East Germany, the United Lausitz Glassmaking Company operated as an East German state company and became one of the largest European glassmakers – making Weisswasser one of the major European centres of glass production. The reunification of the two Germanys in 1990 created a number of severe commercial and marketing problems for the United Lausitz Glassmaking Company. It left state ownership and eventually in 1992 was acquired by the Austrian glassmaker, Stölzle.

## Stölzle Lausitz

Post 1992, the new Austrian owners modernised and revitalised the company in Weisswasser, renaming it and launching it under a new brand name: "Stölzle Lausitz". Since then Stölzle has kept the company as a separate and independent operation, specialised in high quality consumer and catering glassware, with a strong modern design element, and has not significantly integrated it with Stölzle's other more industrial glass operations. The Stölzle Lausitz drinking glasses are now all made in high quality lead-free crystal glass and share a common design feature, in that the base of the glass is "drawn" out of the glass at the bottom of the bowl of the glass and is not made separately and then attached to the bowl of the glass. A combination of crystal glass and one-piece manufacture is said to result in an exceptionally strong end-product.

## The glassworks today

The Stölzle Lausitz glassware company today, with its modern buildings, is easily found and still based at the original glassworks site in Weisswasser, adjoining the Weisswasser railway station.



image courtesy of Google Earth

The railway station building, across the tracks from the glassworks, looked interesting from the air and suggested one of the classic German designs from early railway history...

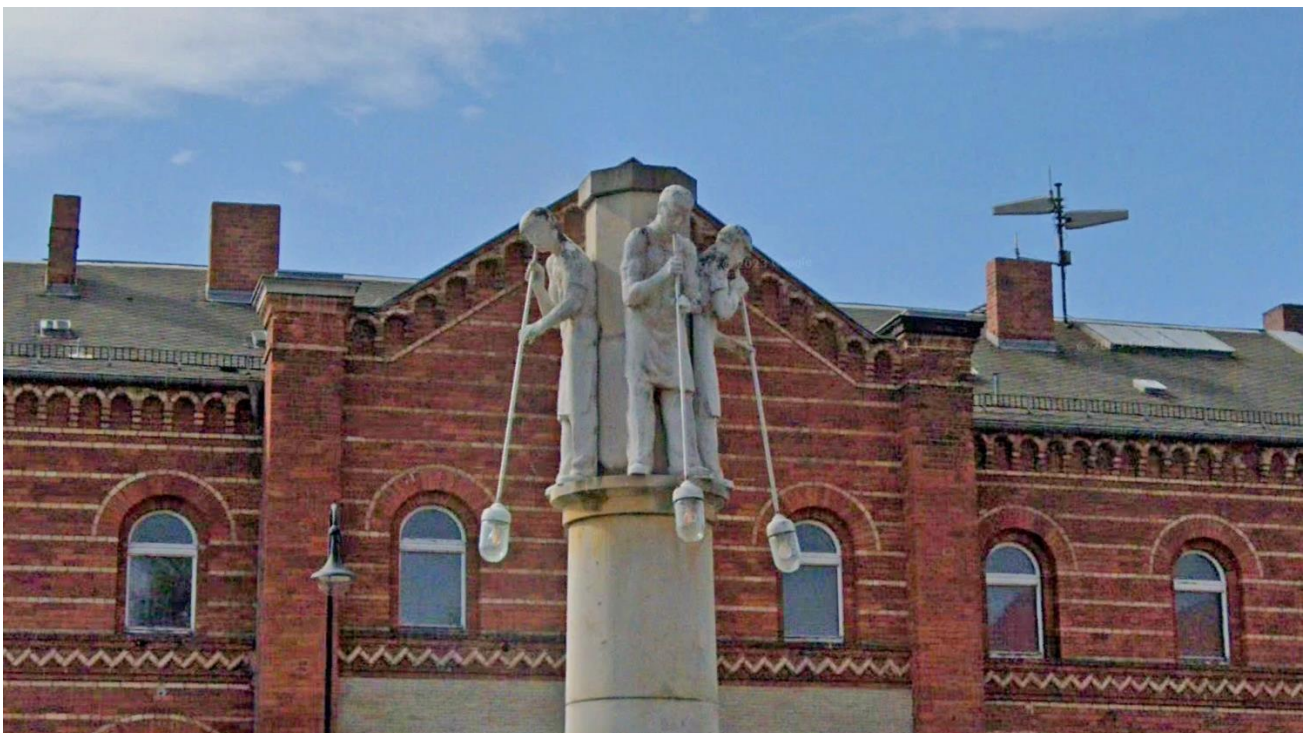


image courtesy of Google Earth

...so I looked at it from ground level in Google Street View.



The modern glassworks buildings can be seen in the background to the right of the station building and a surprising discovery was the fountain in front which beautifully depicts four glassblowers. An inscription at the base of the fountain indicates that this is (or serves as) a war memorial of the 1st World War 1914-1918.



images courtesy of Google Earth

Another file photo of the railway station highlights the historic linguistic issue. At its top the modern blue sign displays Weisswasser (Oberlausitz). The word in brackets means Upper Lausitz, one of the two recognised parts of the old Lausitz territory. Below is the name Bela Woda, which is in Sorbian language and means “white water”, the same meaning as the Weisswasser in the German name. Bela Woda also appears below Weisswasser on the older black-and-white sign on the brickwork of the station building.

Weisswasser is similar to and understandably equates to White Water in English. Bela in Sorbian is close to the Polish/Slavonic/Russian byelo, byela, or white; Woda equates to the Polish/Slavonic/Russian for water.





## Lausitz images – Weisswasser town

Some other present-day images from Weisswasser.



Weisswasser town library, housed in a former municipal school building.



Weisswasser town hall.

Lausitz images – Weisswasser town (continued)



Doorway in the Weisswasser town hall.

## Lausitz images – other towns



Bautzen (capital of Upper Lausitz), old town.



Cottbus (capital of Lower Lausitz), town centre.



Lübben (former capital of Lower Lausitz), Breitstrasse.



Luckau (another former capital of Lower Lausitz), Market Square.



Zary, capital of the part of old Lausitz region that now lies across the border in Poland.



A street in Görlitz, just inside Germany today, but well inside the old historic Lausitz region.

Görlitz town in the far corner of Germany, next to the borders with Poland and Czechia and Germany's easternmost town, is developing a reputation for itself as an artistic and cultural centre in the region. In this it is helped by its wealth of beautifully restored old buildings and two world-famous pipe organs.

Görlitz's St Peter & St Paul church, which dates from around 1500, houses a highly renowned old organ, documented by JS Bach among others and rebuilt a number of times over the centuries, but with a number of original features preserved including its organ case of c 1700. It's called the Sonnenorgel (= sun organ) due to 17 sun-like designs in its case where small pipes are arranged radially. The pipes of one trumpet stop are also distributed in and sound from the mouths of a number of angels in various parts of the case.



The Sonnenorgel in Görlitz's St Peter & St Paul church

To hear the Sonnenorgel, go to

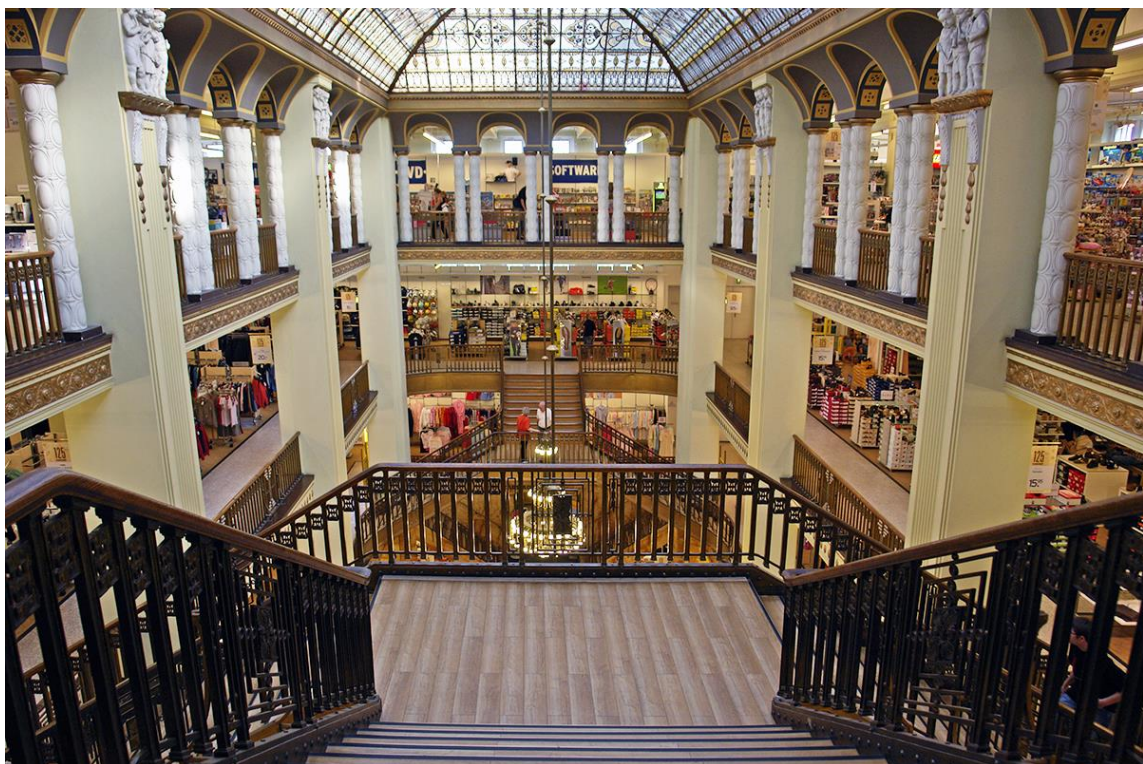
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=115uW7E7Rdw> (press Control key and then the highlighted link)

with your computer sound switched on, and then watch and hear a brief video (3 minutes) of the organ being played.

As well as its medieval architectural heritage, Lausitz also boasts impressive buildings from other style periods, including examples of Jugendstil, which is the Germanic expression of Art Nouveau, but with an early whiff of the Art Deco style that was to follow. Good examples of this are again to be found in Görlitz.



Exterior of the old Karstadt department store in Görlitz, completed in 1913, now defunct but under review for relaunch as a new-style store.



Central atrium of the 1913 Karstadt department store in Görlitz, used in the movie *Grand Budapest Hotel* as the hotel's interior.

Also in Görlitz is found the famous Sauer concert-hall organ in the town's 1910 Stadthalle (town hall). This was the very last organ built by the German organ builders Sauer of Frankfurt-on-Oder, just 100 miles (160 km) north of Goerlitz, renowned for their powerful romantic-style organs. It is the only surviving concert-hall organ of Sauer. The organ was fully restored in 1991 and the Stadthalle in which it is housed is now undergoing a full restoration, due for completion in 2026, to support the town and region's aspirations as a cultural centre. The organ case is a beautiful example of Germanic Jugendstil (the Germanic form of Art Nouveau) and one of the few surviving examples of Jugendstil in organ architecture.

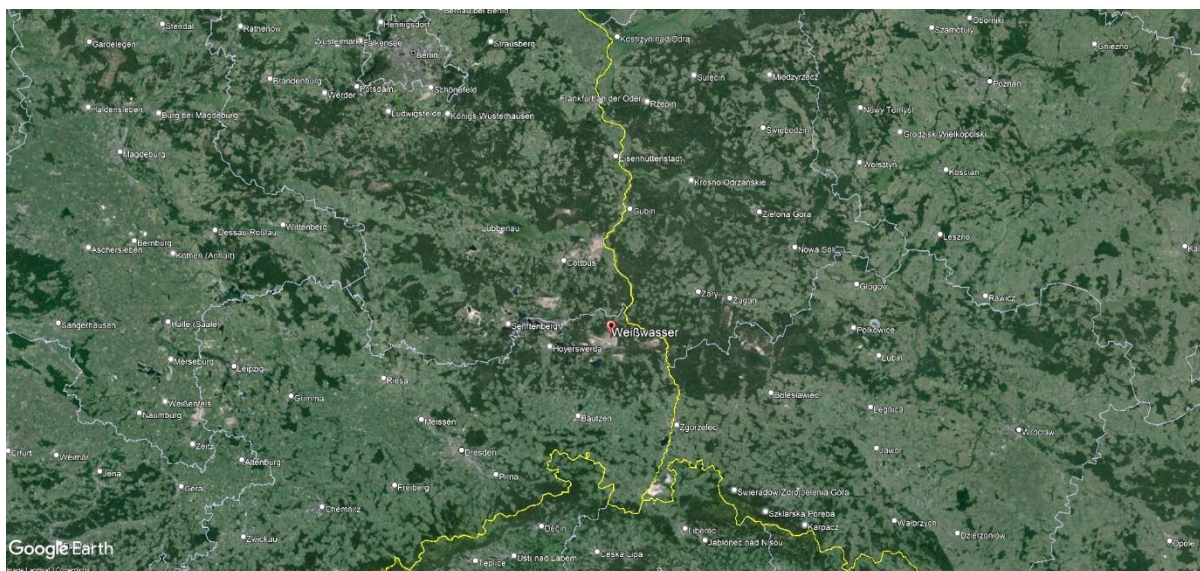


The 1910 Sauer organ, with its Jugendstil case, in Görlitz's Stadthalle

To hear the Stadthalle organ, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTJ2k8CtmiU> (press Control key and then the highlighted link) with your computer sound switched on, and then watch and hear a brief video (3 minutes) of the organ being played.





The SE corner of Germany, 2020 image (image courtesy of Google Earth).

The above map shows the location of Germany's Weisswasser today, just inside Germany's border with Poland, which lies to the right of the yellow north-south border line.

The important Polish city of Poznan lies about 150 km (100 miles) north-east of Weisswasser near the top of the map. Berlin in Germany lies a similar distance north-west of Weisswasser, also close to the top of the map; Dresden in Germany lies about 80 km (50 miles) south-west of Weisswasser.

Below Germany and Poland on the map lies part of Czechia and the roughly east-west yellow line indicates Czechia's border with the other two countries.

Weisswasser lies approximately in the centre of the historic Lausitz region, which extends very roughly 80 km (50 miles) in each direction around it: down to the today's border with Czechia; almost to Dresden in the south-west and to Berlin in the north-west; northwards up to Frankfurt-on-the-Oder; eastwards to Zuga in today's Poland.