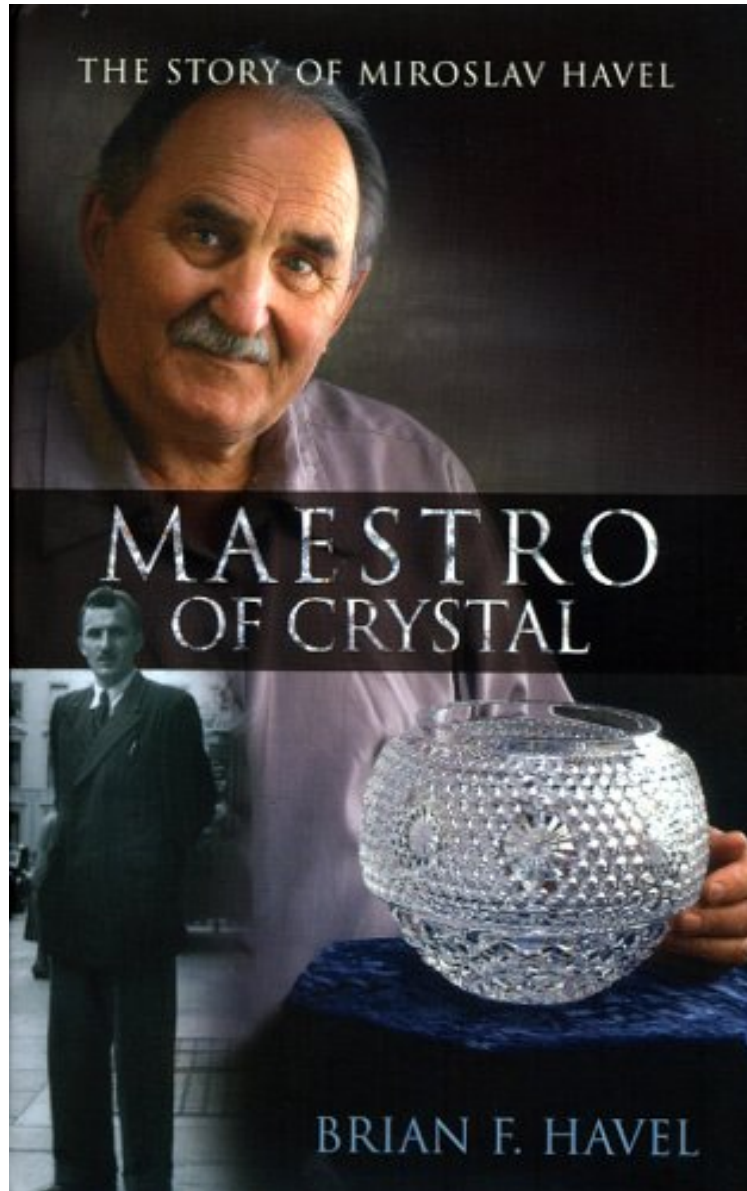


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## Maestro of Crystal: The Story of Miroslav Havel

*Brian Havel*

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**Brian Havel : Maestro of Crystal: The Story of Miroslav Havel** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Maestro of Crystal: The Story of Miroslav Havel:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great bookBy LindawLovely book about Miroslav Havel and Waterford Crystal. It contains a lot of interesting information about the creator of so many beautiful Waterford

patterns still enjoyed today. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Prof. Dr. Larry Sitsky fascinating and moving 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant Biography of Miroslav Havel, the Czech Emigre Whose Artistry (and Industry) Revived Waterford Crystal By Daniel E. Ursini What perfectly sums up Miroslav Havel, the legendary Waterford Crystal artist and industrial designer, is the image of this sharply mustachioed man walking into a nondescript storage room in a noisy factory and coming out with a dazzling hand-crafted wedding-cake chandelier. It was his first and it looked quite promising. The future at Waterford was made anew at that moment. Previously, nobody in management had given chandeliers a thought as a company line. They had seen their future mainly in producing drinking glasses. Yet before Havel retired in the late 1980s, Waterford Crystal chandeliers had become signature elements of such august public spaces as Westminster Abbey and the Kennedy Center. Time and again Havel's vision, talent and will won the day. How he did it is the subject of, "Maestro of Crystal: The Story of Miroslav Havel," a book written by his son, Brian. It is a model of restraint and good judgment in a sub-genre -- the biography of a notable written by an offspring - that could benefit from such an example. "Mommy Dearest," says it all. Brian Havel makes the novel decision of approaching his subject with humble detachment, elegant manners, and a sure ear for the telling anecdote. He also defines a narrow focus at the outset, and sticks to it. This book is about what shaped Havel as a creative mind; and how he proceeded to use that mind in producing some of the most commercially and artistically successful crystal of the last century. The book is roughly divided in halves - childhood and coming of age in Czechoslovakia as it was between the wars; adulthood and fulfillment in Ireland. Havel's father was a blustery entrepreneur; his mother was kind and sensitive. Miroslav Havel was a thoughtful, obliging son with no clear sense of his future until, on a lark, he discovered an unanticipated gift for working in glass. He quickly distinguished himself, betraying a consistency of accomplishment which would become a hallmark of his career. As the author puts it, an "enlightened apprentice system," obtained throughout Continental Europe during that era. Yet Havel's expected trajectory through it was disrupted by politics - that is, the politics of oppression. The Nazis moved into Czechoslovakia before World War Two; and were followed afterwards by the Russian communists. Both brought a poverty of possibility into the lives of most Czechs and Slovaks. Typifying this reality was Havel's own predicament in 1947. He had been invited to spend a summer in Ireland, working for an old employer heading a glass factory in Waterford. Though most of this book sustains a light, well-composed energy the section dealing with Havel's journey from his home across Europe to Ireland and Waterford takes the narrative to another place--the sad comedy of lost people trying to locate a personally significant destination in a foreign land. In terms culturally resonant, he finds himself in situations remindful of both Beckett and Kafka. In the way that he finds the Waterford factory, Havel locates for the reader the fundamental resilience of the human spirit. Every bit of that strength was needed - sooner than Havel could have figured. His passport disappeared, rendering him a stateless person. The Iron Curtain slammed down behind him for good -- extinguishing for years any direct family contact; destroying both career possibilities and a key romantic possibility. He was stuck in Ireland, like it or not. Once on the job, he found himself, like the rest of post-war Europe, starting from zero. But he had the benefits of abundant talent and a strong perspective. While a student in Czechoslovakia, Miroslav Havel disdained traditional Czech crystal because it was compulsively busy. As the only fully skilled employee at Waterford, he developed a style of glassmaking based on his own ideas in combination with old Waterford/Penrose patterns -- further finessed to accommodate Havel's gifted but inexperienced Irish apprentices. Quickly, Havel's style resulted in such works of sweet beauty as the Lismore suite. The visionary designer was also the perfect worker, capable of doing every job from drawing up a new pattern to packing the finished glassware into boxes. Throughout his decades of work at Waterford, he displayed a staggering work ethic, maintaining a blur of activity on the factory floor. It all paid off. In the 1970s and 1980s, the author relates, "Waterford Glass was regularly cited as Ireland's most successful industrial company." This success was of great value, both material and inspirational, in the growth of the Irish economy. It reminded the Celtic tiger to wear elegant stripes and to keep a cat's eye fixed on the correct marketplace niche. One of the major strengths of the book is the author's clear and broad perspective of the many elements which made Waterford a success around the world - especially in the United States, where for years it accounted for nearly a third of the crystal market. The author points out that Miroslav Havel was not the only visionary at Waterford. There were people like Cornelius (Con) Dooley who thought that, "a twentieth-century re-interpretation of the classical Penrose designs, laden with the mystique of Irish history, would appeal to the huge and increasingly wealthy American marketplace." Language is at the core of Irish culture, of course. Dooley wrote ad copy that evoked a poetic, dreamy Ireland, presenting crystal suites with names like Hibernia and Curraghmore. The ads worked like a charm right from the start; and they worked their magic for years to come. As the author points out, the Lismore suite has been one of the most popular wedding gifts of the last half-century. There are implications to this fact vital in understanding the cultural value of heirlooms and in appreciating the dignified gravity of artists like Miroslav Havel. The art on display in the world's museums may enact the human spirit at its most transcendent; but within each home, heirloom articles have a vital inspirational role of their own: they offer an example of the elegance and beauty which can imbue life's cherished moments. As the decades roll by, family members can learn and relearn such truths when the crystal is brought out for weddings and for other occasions marking such passages of life. The artisans responsible for the design and

manufacture of such objects do civilization a dramatic, if largely unrecognized service. Restoring that attention is one of the overarching accomplishments of this book.

The biography of Waterford Crystal designer Miroslav Havel who helped restore the Irish crystal industry.