



**DREGENO**

Seiffener  
Originale

# Finest Woodcraft

since 1919





Spielzeugdorf Seiffen · 2022

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# Finest Woodcraft

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DREGENO SEIFFEN eG operates mainly in the town of Seiffen and its surrounding district. It is a co-operative venture of craftsmen and women who are gainfully employed in upholding the best traditions of Erzgebirge folk art.

The long tradition of the cooperative has its roots in the 1919 formation of the “Trade Association of Erzgebirge Woodworkers and Toymakers”. This society eventually became the present-day DREGENO SEIFFEN eG in 1946. Meaning that in 2019, we will be looking back on what is now 100 years of active history.

Our 120 members have such a wealth of artistic ideas and such

a broad range of individual skills that you are always bound to find a comprehensive and varied selection of products in all categories.

The cooperative nature of the organisation, with whole families pooling their creative energies over generations, has helped to preserve not only the very special skills required but also the values of the Erzgebirge folk art tradition and the emotional bond felt by its members.

These wooden gems not only tell us how previous generations interpreted their world but even seem to have the power to transport us back to those less complicated, less frenetic times.



# THE Christmas Pyramid

Although by all appearances the Erzgebirge Christmas pyramid resembles other static Christmas decorations, such as the Lausitz Pyramidenleuchter (a pyramid-shaped candleholder), the Thuringia Reifenbäumchen (a stylized tree-shape, consisting of wooden hoops in various diameters) or the Bavarian Klau-senbaum (a pyramid constructed with wooden rods placed in apples, the apple at the tip of the pyramid bearing a candle), the construction of the moving parts of this revolving pyramid from the Erzgebirge is very different from all the other types mentioned. It

is certain that the imagination of the woodworking craftsmen was inspired by the movements of the horse whims in the mines.

In festive glow, the upward-moving warmth from the lower circle of candles turns the different levels of groups of lathed or carved figures. Each Christmas pyramid was initially unique and had been made in the toy-makers' family to decorate their own home during the Advent period. The Erzgebirge pyramids were not made on a commercial basis until later, in the first decade of the twentieth century.



# Angels AND Miners

Angels and miners are the best-known figures symbolising an Erzgebirge Christmas. Standing side by side with the miner, the angel with her flickering flame symbolises the miners' deep emotional relationship to light and the blessing that he seeks for his work underground. In the Erzgebirge tradition, these two figures are inseparable, so it comes as a surprise to discover that they were not originally conceived as a pair.

The first inspiration for the wooden replicas of miners

came from the tin figures that were used as candleholders on the church altar. The angel, so typical of the Seiffen Christmas scene, also traces its long folk history back to a church setting.

The locals will tell you of a charming custom relating to these figures. For each child in a miners' family, a figure would be placed in the tiny cottage window – an angel for a girl and a miner for a boy. Wouldn't it be nice to see this tradition revived?





# THE Nutcracker King

What would the world of Erzgebirge figures be without its Nutcracker King!

Besides apples, gingerbread and other goodies, golden-painted nuts are a part of the traditional Christmas decorations. But if you actually wanted to eat the tasty kernel, you first had to crack your nut! And so a nutcracker was created, having not only a practical but also a decorative function, as it would also be designed to represent a certain character.

As early as 1735 in Sonneberg they were referred to as wooden “nut-biters”. They were strong-looking characters with large heads and a lever on their backs with which the nut was pressed against their upper jaws and cracked open.

It is said that the first Seiffen nutcrackers, which are today known all over the world, were made around 1870 in Wilhelm Fächtners little workshop and since then, nothing in their basic design has been changed.



# THE Incense Smoker

Whenever a pleasant aroma wafts gently through the room at Christmas time, then this is probably due to one particular modest and unassuming figure – the Erzgebirge incense smoker.

Incense candles may well have been part of the Erzgebirge Christmas tradition as long ago as the early 19th century. Along with its aromatic properties, the incense candle had a deep religious significance in bygone times and was also used as a cure for breathing complaints.

However, we have no historical evidence of exactly when they first thought of inserting a 3 cm incense cone into a hollowed-out figure. Ferdinand Frohs and Friedrich Haustein are credited with having produced the first Seiffen incense smokers to be turned on lathes around the year 1850.

In contrast to the Nutcracker King, who gently pokes fun at the powers that be, these figures were designed to represent popular characters from village life such as the chimney sweep, night watchman and postman.



# THE Candle Arch

Should you journey through the towns and villages of the Erzgebirge at Christmas time, you would see the festive glow of numerous arch-shaped candelabras in the windows of the houses. For more than 250 years, they have been associated with the Erzgebirge Christmas and have become an inseparable part of the festive decorations. Johann Teller, a mining blacksmith from Johanngeorgenstadt, is said to have made the first candle-holder of this type in wrought iron around the year 1726.

According to the story handed down, the arched shape

has its origins in the mining industry. On Christmas Eve at the pit, the miners would hang their lighted lamps in a semi-circle around the entrance of the mouth of the tunnel leading to the mine, marking the last shift before Christmas, the so-called “Midnight Mass shift”.

The “Schwibbogen”, which literally means “arched buttress”, probably took its name from the terminology of architecture. In the Gothic period, the “Schwebobogen”, a buttress, was a freestanding, supporting arch between two walls.



# THE Nativity Scene

Nativity scenes are found all throughout the Christian world. Building such scenes became an important Christmas tradition in 18th century Germany, particularly in the mountain regions.

While wood-carved nativity scenes have a long history in the western Erzgebirge, woodturned figures tend to prevail in the eastern Erzgebirge. Increasingly, local and even mining-related elements are being incorporated into nativity scene designs.

There has thus always been a close connection between these nativity scenes and the Erzgebir-

ge Christmas Mountains. These elaborate terraced and landscaped structures are adorned with towns and villages, some even with mechanical moving figures, and often reverently relocate the birth of Christ to native farmhouses or miners' dry rooms.

Papier-mâché or mixed-composition figures, trees, fences and homes served to populate the nativity scenes and mountains, as so many Erzgebirge pattern books from the mid-19th century have documented. And often is the case that the little cardboard and splinter boxes were filled with lovingly-created treasures from Seiffen.





# THE Music Box

The vivid telling of fairy stories and legends to the accompaniment of pleasant melodies from the musical box has lost nothing of its fascination. Especially at Christmas time, something of the magic of childhood memories, long believed to be forgotten, re-awakens upon seeing the moving scenes.

At first, the musical box was nothing more than a simple toy, a box which, by means of turning a handle, could be made to revolve and play a tinkling tune. The melody accompanying the little

turning figures of people and animals then still sounded rather dull and lifeless. It was not until around 1930 that the first true musical boxes were created.

Besides miniature angels, figures from the world of fairy tales and sagas, or scenes from village life, Christ's nativity became the main Christmas theme for the creative and artistic toymakers. Since then, a whole repertoire of melodies has been pouring forth from these little works of art, driven from the inside by a filigree, music-making mechanism.



# THE Carol Singers

Today, on each of the four Sundays of Advent, the boys' choirs in Seiffen and other Erzgebirge communities still go from house to house, carrying lanterns and illuminated stars wishing the inhabitants with their carols and festive songs a blessed Christmas.

"Curro" (currere) has its origins in Latin and means "to walk". The "walking" choir consisted of boys between the ages of 10 and 14, and it was not until 1945 that girls were admitted to its ranks. The style of the singers' clothing is from around 1535 at the time when the area around Seiffen went over to Protestantism.

Unlike the altar boys who assist Catholic priests, the clothing consists of a simple black cassock and a round-brimmed hat.

Around 1935, Max Schanz from Seiffen created the "original choir scene" consisting of five choirboys each holding a book between both hands, one choirboy holding a star, three narrow, gable-roofed houses, one of them having a ridged turret tower representing a church and two trees made of wood shavings. It is possible that the boys' choir of the Kreuzkirche (the Church of the Holy Cross) in Dresden provided the original model for this charming scene.



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