

Anyone stepping into the MASSIFCENTRAL manufactory on the island of Eiswerder will immediately sense that this place is more than just a production site. Water, open space, industrial architecture and quiet define the rhythm of work. "We deliberately chose this location for our manufactory," says Christian Seltmann. "Eiswerder stands for focus, for craftsmanship in depth and for a certain distance from the fast-paced market. That inspires both our collections and our mindset."

The name MASSIFCENTRAL refers to the French passports of the Seltmann brothers. The French Massif Central symbolises originality, substance and authenticity. "For us, *massif* doesn't mean mass – it means weight, depth and durability," says Seltmann. "We work exclusively with solid glass, because it doesn't just transmit light – it shapes it."



Christian Seltmann (left) and his brother Philipp Seltmann, Head of Production at MASSIFCENTRAL  
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#### What makes MASSIFCENTRAL's products so special?

At MASSIFCENTRAL, there are three levels of customisation: our existing collections, semi-custom solutions and fully bespoke designs – even as a single piece. This freedom is an expression of true craftsmanship; it's where soul enters the product. Our special commissions in particular carry the DNA of MASSIFCENTRAL – whether highly individualised glass elements, custom ceiling structures in a wide range of forms or precisely coordinated lighting effects. Our luminaires are not decorative accessories. They are complete in themselves – and begin to define the space. This is how atmosphere is created. Spaces are elevated into a new dimension.

#### Where does the sensuous yet modern design language come from?

From dialogue – with our planning partners, with the space, with the material. And from within our team. Many ideas emerge directly in the manufactory, in our glassworks, through hands-on experimentation. Glass is currently hugely prevalent in interior design. Internally, we speak of a design offensive. At MASSIFCENTRAL, innovation arises from a deep knowledge of the material and an exceptionally high level of vertical integration. We receive the raw material and oversee every single step through to the finished piece – until the glass truly

*"For us, light is not an effect – it is an architectural quality."*

#### A conversation with Christian Seltmann, Managing Partner at MASSIFCENTRAL

shines. Our closeness to the process fuels curiosity, encourages bold experimentation and enables a level of design that would otherwise be unthinkable.

#### What do your clients and project partners say?

I often hear: "With MASSIFCENTRAL, we were able to realise something that previously seemed impossible." A defining project was in Basel – a canopy of 120 pendant lights, completely free-hanging, without a single screw. Even the production required the utmost precision. I spent three days on site with

three colleagues, and together we installed this 15-square-metre, half-tonne structure – complete with integrated projector lift and sprinkler system – with millimetre accuracy into an aluminum cooling ceiling – tolerance: just half a millimetre! Moments like this reveal how much passion, expertise and precision go into every one of our projects. That's where our added value lies: craftsmanship, customisability and a genuine passion for what we do.

#### What role does craftsmanship play in your innovation strategy?

A central one. Every luminaire passes through the hands of our master craftspeople. It takes years of training to master the techniques required to shape and refine glass and to control light with precision. Surface technique is particularly important: in the production process we continually discover new textures, nuances and possibilities. Each experimental variation reveals a new quality we hadn't previously imagined. This touch of manual work is unique – a tangible hallmark of quality you can see and feel.

#### How does innovation manifest itself technically?

In the quality of the light – in colour temperature, glare control and reliability. Our LED modules are not manufactured from

purchased off-the-shelf components; they are custom-built based on our own board designs. This construction method provides significantly higher stability and a longer lifespan. Many lighting companies use standard modules from external suppliers. We develop and manufacture our LED modules ourselves. For us, sustainability means repairable, reliable and intelligently constructed. This is how we create lighting objects that are technically precise and blend effortlessly into sophisticated surroundings.

#### MASSIFCENTRAL stands for atmosphere.

##### What does this mean for your work?

Atmosphere is the true aim of our work. Light from MASSIFCENTRAL is not meant to dominate – it's meant to support. It creates calm, depth or presence, depending on what the space requires. Just this morning, a project partner called to say: "The room suddenly feels right." That's exactly what we're aiming for. We shape light in a way that makes spaces emotionally legible and enhances architecture, instead of overshadowing it.

##### How do you see the future?

*Mindful luxury* is becoming increasingly important – with awareness and respect for both materials and people. We want to continue designing light as architecture, in collaboration with our partners. The artist James Turrell put it perfectly: "Light is not so much something that reveals, as it is itself the revelation." This is the philosophy we live by at MASSIFCENTRAL – every day on the Eiswerder Island.



Christian Seltmann in the glassworks

Interview by Elke Doppelbauer, ConceptManufaktur München