

SWAROVSKI VARIATION IN PRODUCTION (VIP) PIECES

And finally, on variations, we are dedicating a whole factsheet to Hedgehogs and Mice as both have quite large families ... hope you are sitting comfortably ... we begin with our spiky friends - the Hedgehogs!

HEDGEHOGS ON PARADE

A complicated extended family. We are concentrating here on the Silver Crystal Hedgehogs and explaining the differences that can be found. Many of you will be familiar with the cute Replica Hedgehog which has been produced in clear, AB, golden shadow, dark green crystal and as a set of 3 pale yellow, blue and pink hedgehogs, but are you also aware of the previous issues of Hedgehogs? All the retired hedgehogs shown here were designed by Max Schreck.

The first hedgehogs were fairly round in shape and had silver whiskers. The family comprised 4 original sizes of hedgehog, 2 of which were available globally and the other 2 only being available in the USA market giving them a choice of 4. Within this group, there were a few design changes involving the shape of the spines, and there can be eye placement differences which can make them look slightly different too. Within this particular group, only the replica hedgehog which was produced later has faceted quills/spines. But that's not the end of the story.



L-R: Round hedgehogs with silver whiskers: King (USA), Large, Medium, Small/Tiny (USA) and Replica hedgehogs

On retirement, these were replaced by the also now retired oval shaped whisker-less hedgehogs in 3 sizes. These all have pointed quills/spines.



L-R: Oval hedgehogs with no whiskers, large, medium and small/mini

In the photo below we feature 7 retired hedgehogs as if they are lined up on the starting grid for the Hedgehog Grand Prix. This is a great photo which shows the different shapes and sizes available in the original hedgehog family groups.

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Left column top to bottom: King, large, medium, tiny hedgehogs (whiskers)
Right column top to bottom: Large, medium, small hedgehogs (no whiskers)

First we have the King Hedgehog who has a body stone of 60mm in diameter, next is the Large Hedgehog, which has a 50mm diameter body stone. Then we have the medium (40mm diameter) and finally the tiny hedgehog (30mm diameter). The king and tiny hedgehogs were only ever available for sale in Canada and the USA. This led to a situation where confusingly, the medium (40mm) was often referred to as “small” in Europe, while the “tiny” (30mm) hedgehog was called “small” in USA!



Two King Hedgehogs which look very different

If that wasn't enough hedgehogs for you, another variety of the whiskered medium hedgehog can be found with faceted black eyes instead of the smooth eyes that are normally found on hedgehogs. This one has pointed spines.

The whiskered variety of hedgehogs were the first to be released, and shortly after their retirement, a new whisker-less, more sculptured, and some might even say, more “aerodynamic” hedgehog trio was introduced. These are shown on the right hand side of the main photograph. From top to bottom these are the large, medium and small oval hedgehogs. All the whisker-less hedgehogs can have close set or wide apart eyes and for the large hedgehog, some have a spine set in between the eyes, some don't! The large hedgehog has approximately 57 quill stones and is 70mm long, the medium has approximately 48 quill stones and is 54mm long and the small hedgehog has approximately 44 quill stones and is 38mm long.

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And there's more the first hedgehog ever released was very different! It is extremely rare and is an early version of the medium sized hedgehog with whiskers. However, the big difference is that its quills are faceted and almost egg shaped, rather than straight and pointed like the other hedgehogs. This one came in special blue packaging with a drawing of a hedgehog on the side of the box. It is this design that the "replica hedgehog" which was introduced much later was based on, and you can see the similarities below:



L-R: The original hedgehog (note the faceted spines) / the special box for the hedgehog / replica hedgehog / replica hedgehog original box (later changed for standard packaging).

If you now look back at the replica hedgehog – he has some traits from the earlier pieces in his design. Faceted quills and eyes just like that earlier variation piece, although they are different sizes and cannot be mistaken for each other. All the other hedgehogs in the family have pointed quills and round eyes (except the very rare one). Originally the replica hedgehog had a special box, also pictured, and if you look closely you will see a picture of the hedgehog on it, that doesn't look too dissimilar to that drawing on the original old blue box for that very special hedgehog. So, as far as hedgehogs are concerned, the design seemed to go full circle before the hedgehogs were all retired.

MOUSE MATTERS

Another complicated family with USA exclusives and variations! Just as Disney say it all started with a mouse, Swarovski can claim the same as that's where Silver Crystal started. If you don't know the story of the original mouse – here's an abridged version.

By 1976 Swarovski's business expanded from that of a cutting, manufacturing, and jewellery production facility to a business committed to silver crystal as an end product for figurines and collectibles. All apparently due to four crystal chandelier parts being glued together just for fun, creating the first member of Swarovski's full cut crystal animal menagerie: the mouse.

This mouse was designed by the late, great Max Schreck and the Swarovski Silver Crystal range that we know and love was born! Jet (black) stones were added for the eyes and nose, metal whiskers painstakingly cut to size and added, and finally the leather tail was carefully cut by hand. It is believed that 1,000 of these mice were made (which still had holes in the ear stones due to their original purpose, ie being chandelier parts). They were sold to Swarovski employees and were a huge hit. The mouse that went into full production was slightly different, having the more familiar metal spring tail, the ears were smaller and they didn't have the holes in them as they were specially produced stones rather than chandelier parts!

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L-R: Original mouse (leather tail), box for the mouse, close up to show the hole in the ears, the medium mouse that went into full production (metal tail and no holes in ears)

Now back to the family tree ... 4 mice which were on bases went into production in the early days of Silver Crystal – and as per the hedgehogs, 2 of them were exclusive to the USA and 2 were available globally. These are the King Mouse USA (60mm diameter body stone and 50mm long ears), Large Mouse USA (50mm body and 40mm long ears), Medium Mouse (40mm body with 30mm ears), Small Mouse (30mm body and 25mm ears). There was also a mini mouse although this didn't have a base. The small mouse has an octagonal base and the others have a diamond shaped base. Apart from differences in eye placements which can make them look very different, there were variations to the stiffness of the tails, going from very floppy to stiff. There are even some differences to the ways the ears are faceted. Later, as per hedgehogs, a replica mouse was produced which had the leather tail of the original but was significantly smaller.



L-R: King Mouse (USA), Large Mouse (USA), Medium Mouse, Small Mouse, Replica Mouse

Confusingly, the medium mouse was often referred to as the large mouse in Europe as there were only 2 sizes available! Here's an example of different tails and eye and ear placements which can make the mice look very different – this one is the medium mouse:



A variety of wide and close set eyes and ears, plus different levels of tail stiffness.

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Here we have the small mouse, again with different ears, eyes and tails

Other variations noted are the numbers of facet cuts on the ear stones, and as you can see above, the placement of the body stone can show the mice looking forward or slightly downwards! These differences seem to occur in all the different sizes of the mice.

Initially the replica mouse came in the same special packaging as the replica hedgehog and replica cat, but this was later changed to the traditional blue packaging. For a time, the 3 replica pieces could be purchased together in one larger box with same design as below and came with a display mirror which had painted images of the 3 replica pieces.



L-R: Replica mouse with special packaging, starter set with special mirror, starter set special packaging

While this is not intended to be a definitive guide to all the variations ever produced, we hope it gives you plenty of ideas of what to look out for when purchasing the “vintage” Silver Crystal pieces. These days, variations don’t really occur as components tend to be bespoke and assembly is more tightly controlled. Additionally, these days, if a piece undergoes a re-design, it is normally retired, and then the new design is re-issued under an entirely different code number and it is treated as a brand new piece.