



THE ART IS IN THE GLASS

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Paul Arnhold, whose work is shown above, adds his own twist to classic silhouettes.

We can trace glass blowing back to Syrian craftspeople in the first century B.C.—or perhaps earlier, given the discovery of glass remnants in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem.

But today, hand-blown glass is on trend and treated as art. Some glass artisans create one-of-a-kind works, and interior designers often commission them to craft pieces for their clients.

“We tend to use hand-blown glass as accessories, votive candles, glassware, pitchers, vases,” says interior designer Michael Violante, principal and partner of V&R Interiors in Santa Fe, N.M. He and his partner, Paul Rochford, have selected hand-blown lighting fixtures for clients that were “absolutely gorgeous” and unlike any other. “If you want a focal point, hand-blown glass lighting can accomplish a lot in terms of upping your decor,” Violante says.

Rochford says hand-blown glass creates visual interest in a room. “So many elements in decor are geometric, and hand-blown glass is free-form,” he explains. “So every piece, no matter how small or what it is used for, becomes a piece of art.”

Glass blower Paul Arnhold, who’s based in Brooklyn, N.Y., takes his inspiration from classic silhouettes but adds his own twist. “I want each piece to be something I’ve never seen before,” he says. “My best-selling glass is bold and statement-making—playful shapes with interesting color combinations.” Often his work is utilitarian. “You can take a wavy bowl off the coffee table, fill it with crushed ice, and use it to serve caviar,” Arnhold explains. “Or you can

fill a vessel with freshly cut flowers.”

Unlike mass-produced items, hand-blown glass is irresistibly imperfect.

“The mark of the hand is what we are always drawn to,” says architect-turned-lighting-designer Alison Berger of Alison Berger Glassworks in Los Angeles. She explains that individuals are naturally attracted to the fluidity, irregularity, and flaws of hand-blown glass. “It’s a subconscious draw,” she says. “When you realize that something is made by hand, the piece just feels different.”

Berger designs and fabricates high-end lighting fixtures and accessories sold to designers and architects. She employs age-old glass-blowing techniques when creating her art-like pieces—such as the Word Pendant, etched with the writings of Leonardo da Vinci. Each fixture is meant to be layered in a room and take on a sculptural quality rather than act as the primary source of light. “The work we do is electric candlelight,” she says.

Beyond pendants, sconces, and chandeliers, Berger offers decorative objects and furniture. Clients use these collectible hand-blown pieces in nearly every room, including libraries, stairwells, and even kids’ rooms.

To tell whether an item is hand-blown, look for tiny bubbles and imperfections. Even the most precious piece might not be entirely symmetrical—and that’s essential to its allure. “In a world of uniformity, there’s something really beautiful in knowing that something was handcrafted,” Berger says. “It’s unique because of that. That elevates the piece. That elevates the story.”