The Corning Glass Center

The Corning Glass Center is located in the Southern Tier of New York State at the gateway to the famous Finger Lakes area, one of the most beautiful vacation-lands in the country.

Built in 1951, the Corning Glass Center presents the complete story of the history, art and science of glassmaking.

More than one-half million visitors a year come to the Corning Glass Center to see The Corning Museum of Glass, where thousands of glass objects depicting 3500 years of the history and art of glass are on permanent display; the Corning Technology Gallery, where colorful exhibitry shows how glass companies respond to technological changes; the Hall of Science and Industry, where the properties and uses of glass in contemporary living are demonstrated and exhibited; and the Steuben Glass factory, where the world's finest crystal is fashioned and engraved by hand.

On June 1, 1980, the Corning Museum of Glass moved into a new building adjacent to the Glass Center. The building has been described as "the most innovative new museum structure in America—a free-flowing ribbon of glass designed to house the world's largest collection of glass."

The museum library—the most comprehensive of its kind on the history and art of glass—is the central core of the building; the circular masterpiece corridor around it is a time tunnel from 1500 B.C. to the present day. Seven galleries opening off this corridor are arranged to show the evolution of the glass industry.

Leaving the museum, visitors may enter the Glass Center through an indoor walkway, which leads to another major section of the Glass Center tour, the Corning Technology Gallery. In this area, visitors may visually follow a product, material or technological development as it progresses from the idea stage, through research and development into a commercial reality. Visitors of all ages are attracted by the colorful and unusual exhibitory method used in this gallery.

The next highlight of the tour is the dramatic display of one of the largest pieces of glass ever made by man—the first casting of the 200-inch mirror disk for the Hale telescope on Palomar Mountain in California.

The Steuben Glass Shop is located off the lobby where the disk is displayed. In this shop, visitors may see replicas of world-famous presentation pieces as well...
as purchase or order other Steuben crystal.

The Hall of Science and Industry illustrates the versatility of glass in modern living. Push-button displays and other exhibits dramatically demonstrate the use of glass as an indispensable part of nearly every activity of man, from cooking to outer space. Hundreds of examples of glass illustrate the many and diverse roles that glass plays in our lives.

A glass-covered bridge leads to the Steuben Glass factory where visitors can watch the entire process of forming, polishing and engraving fine crystal. Steuben glass has achieved recognition by combining the skill of hand craftsmanship with superb material and distinguished design.

A variety of shops carry souvenirs, Corning products, and studio and designer glass from around the world.

The Glass Center is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week (closed only Thanksgiving, December 24 and 25 and January 1).

During July and August in the Glass Center's 800-seat, air-conditioned auditorium, the Corning Summer Theatre presents professional touring companies with stars of stage, screen and TV in Broadway hits.

In addition to being a visitor center, the Glass Center is also a community center for the Corning area. A diversified program of theatre, concerts, art exhibits, lectures, films and numerous civic activities is presented each year for local residents.

The Corning Museum of Glass

The Corning Museum of Glass, a non-profit, tax-exempt educational institution dedicated to the art and history of glassmaking, first opened on May 19, 1951, to mark the 100th birthday of Corning Glass Works. The present building, designed by architect Gunnar Birkerts, was opened on June 1, 1980.

One of the finest glass collections in the world—some 20,000 objects—is in the Museum. Acquired by gift, purchase, and archeological excavation, the collection continues to grow as desirable pieces become available. The library—the most comprehensive of its kind on the history and art of glass—is the central core of the building; the circular masterpiece corridor around it is a time tunnel from 1500 B.C. to the present day.

Seven galleries opening off this corridor are arranged to show the evolution of the glass industry. The outer wall contains a continuous periscope so that objects are seen against daylight with the factories, laboratories and offices of this glassmaking community, Corning, as background.

One of the high points of the glass collection is the outstanding Strauss collection, donated to the museum by Mr. Jerome Strauss of Pennsylvania. In the early 1930's, after dispersing a collection of more than 800 different varieties of pressed glass cup plates, Jerome Strauss began to study and collect glass drinking vessels—their form, style, decoration, and the techniques used to make them. During the decades which followed, he built—painstakingly and with mounting erudition—a superb and incomparable collection of glass drinking vessels numbering some 2400 in all. Far more than a sociological survey, the collection is evidence of the highest art of glass-making. Its riches span the centuries.

Also on display, starting May 1, 1982, will be a special exhibit of cameo glass. The technique of cameo glass decorating was one of the most costly, delicate and risky methods employed in ancient Rome during the late 1st century B.C. Some of the Roman masterpieces will be on display, as well as examples spanning the centuries to the 19th. This exhibit promises to be one of the most popular to be shown in 1982.

The new museum building has nearly four times the exhibition area that the museum occupied in the Glass Center.

Funding for the $7 million project was provided by Corning Glass Works.

Twelve Masterpieces

Twelve landmark works have been selected to represent the remarkable achievements in the history and development of glass from early Egypt to the contemporary studio movement.

These masterworks are shown in individual columns in the Grand Gallery, giving the viewer a concise tour and quintessential representations of the museum's collection. They are:

- The newly acquired head of Amenhotep II, the earliest known glass sculpture of a Pharaoh. (Amenhotep II ruled Egypt from 1436 to 1411 B.C., nearly 75 years before King Tutankhamun ascended to the throne.

- A 5th century B.C. Persian glass bowl, or phiale, cast and cut from a virtually colorless glass—one of the finest examples preserved from this era.

- The Daphne Ewer, a Roman glass pitcher decorated with a scene depicting the myth of the nymph Daphne. The scene shows the lovesick god Apollo pursuing Daphne through the woods.

- The Ibis Cup, an Islamic carved glass bowl dating from the 9th century. Figures of four ibex, alternating with four birds, are carved in high relief on the wall of the cup, and a stylized tree, guarded by two falcons, decorates the bottom. The cup is a masterpiece of design, as well as glass cutting.

- The Rothschild bowl, an opaque white glass bowl, enameled and gilded, with a portrait of a young man (Venice, ca. 1500-1510). Formerly in the collection of
the Baron Guy de Rothschild and a spectacular example of the luxurious glass for which Venice became world famous.

A goblet engraved by Johann Wolfgang Schmidt, Nuremberg, 1690. The bowl bears an engraved portrait of Maximilian II Emanuel, Elector of Bavaria, with minutely-detailed battle scenes on the reverse.

The Warriors Vase, a cameo-carved vase standing almost 20 inches tall, of red and "snowflake" glass, is from China and dates from the 18th century. The elaborate scene depicted in relief on the sides is of mounted warriors racing past a shrine.

The Kulm Goblet, an elaborately cut, enameled, and engraved vessel which commemorates the dedication of a monument to a great battle in the Napoleonic Wars. Probably made in Northern Bohemia in the late 1830's, the goblet is a masterpiece of elaborate enameling. It is decorated with the coats of arms of Russia, Austria, and Prussia, and a wreath of flowers on its base.

The Houghton Salamander Paperweight, made in France during the late 1870's. It is impressive for the realistic salamander, made entirely of glass, enclosed within a sphere of crystal glass.

The Northwood Portland Vase, carved by John Northwood. This vase is the first carved glass copy of the Portland Vase, one of the most famous pieces of ancient Roman glass.

The Moorish Lamp, about 1895-1910, by Louis Comfort Tiffany, America's foremost glassmaker of the turn of the century, and Clement Massier, an important French artist-potter. It is an outstanding example of the Art Nouveau style in glass and one of the rare examples of Tiffany's collaboration with leading European artists.

The "Technique is Cheap" Head of Harvey Littleton, one of a series of eight made by Erwin Eisch of West Germany in 1976. Today, glass is a medium for the fine arts and it is being used in ways radically different from anything done before in its 3500-year history. The statement, "Technique is Cheap," is evocative of the new diversity in glassmaking. It is an example of Eisch's overriding concern with content rather than with technical process. Harvey Littleton was one of the founders of the Studio Movement in 1962, which made glass as a medium available to individual artists.

The Steuben Factory

At the Steuben Glass factory in the Corning Glass Center craftsmen carry on the ancient art of glassmaking that has remained virtually unchanged for 2000 years. Galleries extend along the entire length of the factory allowing visitors to follow every step in the production process.

The Steuben Glass factory is one of the few places in the age of machines where the art of fine hand-crafted glass remains. Watching these age-old hand processes helps the visitor understand the masterpieces in the Corning Museum of Glass and the triumphs of technique they represent.

The molten glass is shaped by small teams of workers. They form a "shop" and work around their own reheating oven, or "Glory Hole." It is the final job of the "gaffer," or master blower, to create the finished object just as the artist originally envisioned it.

After careful inspection, the piece is removed to the annealing oven, or "lehr," where the glass slowly cools as it moves through the unit, a process that prevents internal strains. It is then taken to the finishing lines for grinding and final polishing, which restores the natural luster to the glass.

Many Steuben pieces are specially designed to contain intricate copper-wheel engravings. Within sight of those who wish to observe, the engraver works directly from an artist's design, interpreting light and shading in terms of the width and depth of his cutting.

Steuben Glass is frequently used for gifts of State and is represented in museums and private collections throughout the world. Many of the finest contemporary artists have found the brilliant crystal a fitting medium for the execution of their designs. In the Steuben Glass Shop in the Glass Center visitors may see duplicates of some of these famous pieces, along with a complete selection of current designs.

Frequently, in the Steuben Glass Shop, special exhibitions of the crystal are presented.

We are indebted to Clare M. Bavis of the Corning Museum of Glass for this series of articles about the Corning Glass Center and the museum.