

The Timeless Presence of Benjamin Moore's Glass

by Shawn Waggoner

Inspired by Scandinavian ceramics of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, Benjamin Moore's objects in glass possess a timelessness achieved by the artist's focus on color, shape, and proportion. By altering the way light interacts with the work through opacity, translucency, and transparency, Moore creates different impressions for each series of his work.

Moore learned surface decoration techniques such as reticello, latticino, and murrine from the Venetians at the Venini Factory in Murano in the 1970s. He also served as Dale Chihuly's primary gaffer from 1974 to 1982. But the fundamental concern and focus of his own work was and is to achieve simplicity, balance, and clarity of form.

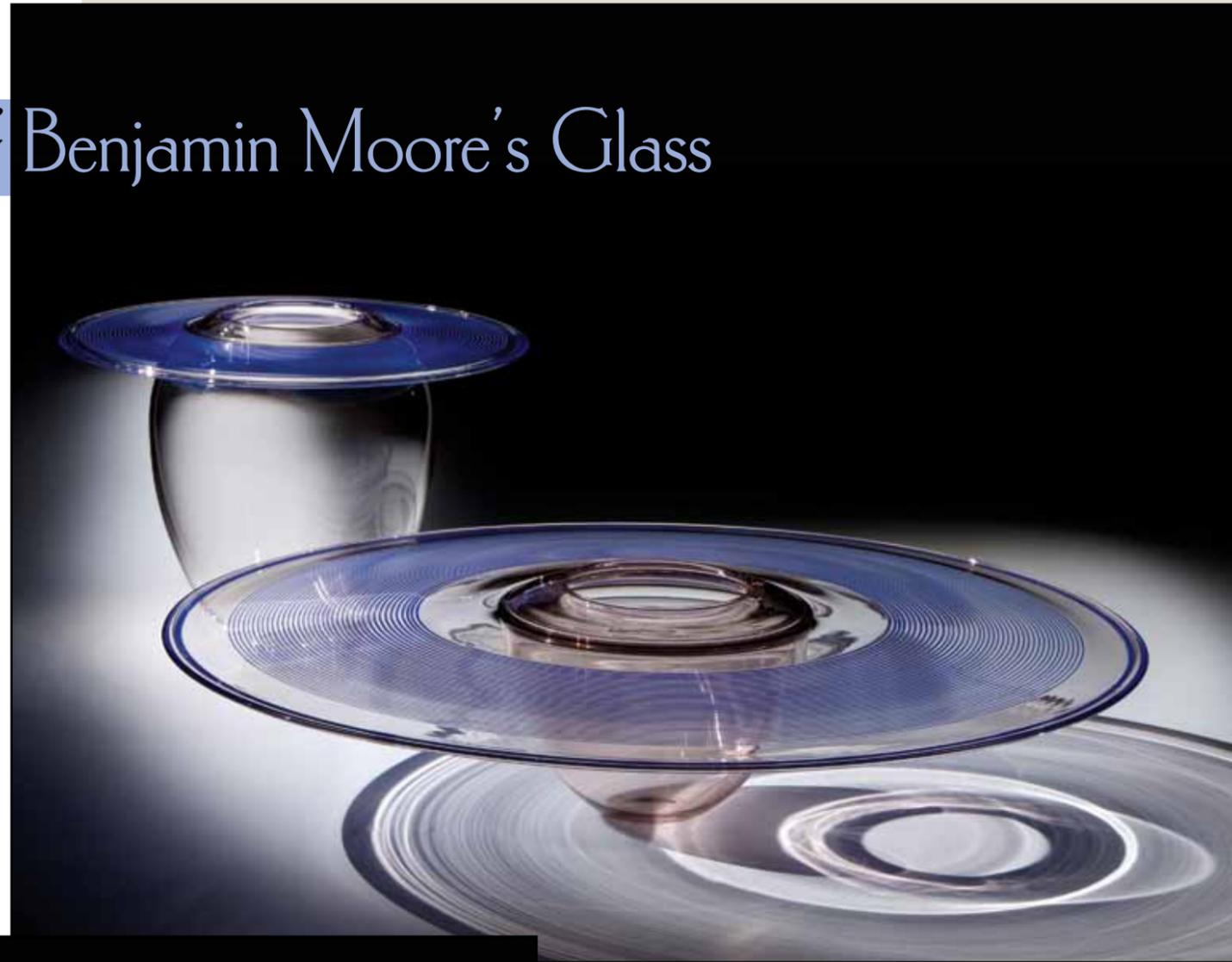
Moore's Signature Series

Throughout his career, Moore focused primarily on three signature series, blown off hand while working on center. "If you think of trying to blow something off hand on the round, historically almost everything had already been done. To come up with something fresh and totally new with those parameters was almost impossible."

The Interior Fold Series (1975) incorporates the technique of folding the transparent glass onto itself. The ancient Romans used this technique as a utilitarian detail in the vessel form, giving the piece added thickness. "I use this folding technique as a design or aesthetic element. In this series, I combine this folding technique with a horizontal plane of glass, which is spun out from the fold. The spiral wrap on the horizontal plane emphasizes the circular form."

Moore's *Palla Series* (1983) was developed and based on the simple spherical form "palla," the Italian word for ball. In this series, the sphere functions as the foot of the form as well as the focal point. "I use contrasting opaque colors to draw attention to the contrasting geometric elements. These forms are created generally in pairs, accentuating the horizontal and vertical lines. However, the bowl does stand strongly on its own."

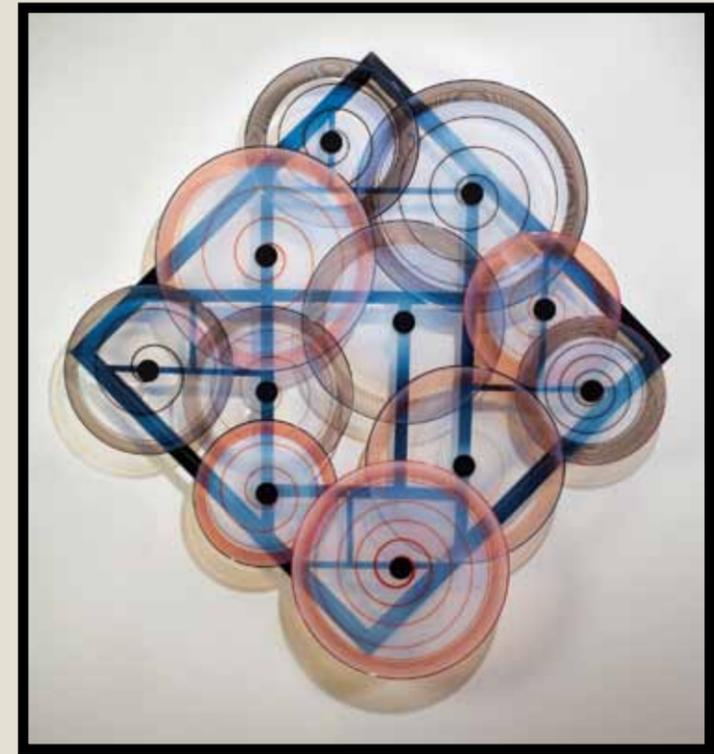
In the *Exterior Fold Series* (1978), Moore uses a similar technique to that used in the *Interior Fold Series*, the difference being that the exterior fold creates a hollow ring on the outside of the piece. That fold is used as the breaking point between the concave curve and the convex curve in the blown form. The pieces are generally displayed in groupings, and the translucent colors vary from subtle to bold.



Benjamin Moore, Interior Fold Set manganese tint with blue spiral wrap, 1996.



Benjamin Moore, Exterior Fold Trio in opaline, 1995. From the Renwick collection at the Smithsonian Museum of Art.



Benjamin Moore, Modified Modern wall piece, collaboration with Louis Mueller, 2005.

Collaborative Work

In 1974, Moore earned his BFA in ceramics from California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC), where Louis Mueller taught jewelry. The artists became friends at Pilchuck in the mid 1980s and realized they had a mutual respect historically for the modernists and artists such as Pieter Mondrian, Gerrit Rietveld, and Josef Hoffmann. "With Louis' design sensibility, talent in working with metal, and my focus on blown glass, lighting seemed a natural art form for us to collaborate on."

In 1987, Moore and Mueller began creating floor lamps and sconces, then moved to wall compositions strongly influenced by the De Stijl movement and the Wiener Werkstätte and their artists. The work addresses geometric form along with primary and minimal color, with the metalwork as an integral design element, not just a support for the glass. Recently, they created chandelier-like objects (hanging ceiling sculptures) that do not necessarily have a light source coming from within. Over the years, more site-specific lighting commissions have been created for both public and private settings.

Moore and Dante Marioni have also collaborated on a few lighting projects, one for a restaurant in Australia that included 22 chandeliers utilizing Marioni's color sensibility and Moore's forms. This past summer, they also collaborated on the creation of a Hornet lamp, featuring Moore's folding technique and Marioni's reticello surface decoration, which referenced a seafaring sensibility.

At age 17, Marioni was the punty boy at The Glass Eye, where Moore was making a high-end production line. When the Glass Eye moved to a new space, Moore bought the building on King Street and founded his company Benjamin Moore, Inc. Here Moore's team of glassblowers, including Marioni and others, blow glass for some of the finest artists and designers in the world.

Both collaborations have resulted in international commissions for clients from corporate and private sectors as well as public settings that include libraries, restaurants, hotels, and residential homes. Moore's talent as an individual artist combined with the skills of his collaborators garnered them great respect within the glass arts and architectural communities.

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See the March/April 2014 issue of Glass Art for more information on Benjamin Moore and his studio, Benjamin Moore, Inc.

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