

A piece by Lino Tagliapietra, on display at the Museum of Glass

THE CITY
OF **TACOMA, WA,**
IS ALL FIRED UP
ABOUT THE ART
OF GLASS.

A TOUCH OF

GLASS

HOW MUCH art glass can you see during one visit to Tacoma, WA, the self-proclaimed "City of Glass"? If you count the pieces in the Museum of Glass, Murano Hotel, Bridge of Glass, Tacoma Museum of Art and

various local businesses, well, let's just put it this way: You will be blown away.

In the last five years, Tacoma has undergone a transformation, with a museum triangle, a glossy—er, glassy—new

hotel, and a future as bright and shiny as the Dale Chihuly chandelier that graces the University of Washington-Tacoma's library. (A Tacoma native, Chihuly—pronounced *Chuh-hoo-lee*—set the world of

glass-blowing on fire with his work; he also cofounded Washington's Pilchuck Glass School in 1971.)

"Glass has moved away from being purely decorative or functional, like a vase, to being sculptural and



GLASS GREATS:

(from left) Venetian Wall on Chihuly Bridge of Glass; *Incidence* by Buster Simpson at the Museum of Glass

making a statement,” says Julie Pisto of the **Museum of Glass** (www.museumofglass.org). “Glass is where photography was 20 years ago. It’s an art medium.”

If you’ve ever seen Chihuly’s bold work, you know just how wow-worthy art glass can be. And Tacoma’s the place to see it. Get out on foot for a glass tour of the city.

Base yourself at the shiny new **Hotel Murano** (www.hotelmuranotacoma.com; 888-862-3255), named after the famed glass-blowing region in Italy. This former Sheraton is a glass-themed wonder. You’ll enter on a path of crumbled glass crystals, where a series of glass Viking longboats by Danish artist Vibeke Skov rises above the first floor. The stunning mirrored chandelier looks like chrome, but, that’s right, it’s glass. The reception desk? Cool and striped—and made of glass; ditto the front panels on the property and the 104-foot sculpture outdoors. Shadow boxes in the entry hall exhibit glass artwork, and each of the hotel’s floors features a profile of an artist, with one of his or her masterpieces showcased in the hallway. In the sleek guest rooms, there are blown glass lamps and glass pedestal sinks, but, wisely, designers drew the line at glass beds and chairs. Still, “We’ll probably go through a lot of Windex,” an employee confides.

The first stop is the **Tacoma Art Museum** (www.tacomaartmuseum.org), where the permanent Chihuly collection includes some of his early works. Across from the museum, check out the rotunda of **Union Station** (www.unionstationrotunda.com), home to a few magnificent Chihuly pieces, including the massive “End of the Day” chandelier. Next stop: the **Chihuly Bridge of Glass**.

Tumbles of iceberg-blue polymer mark this 500-foot pedestrian overpass. Look up and see 2,364 pieces from Chihuly’s “Seaform” and “Persian” series in the Seaform Pavilion. Next, you’ll encounter the Venetian Wall, where 109 of Chihuly’s creations are displayed behind glass, including fanciful vases of flowers (think Dr. Seuss meets Dalí), sea life and forms with sprouted horns. The bridge links the **Washington State History Museum** (www.wshs.org), Union Station and downtown to the Museum of Glass, so it’s not just for looks.

The Museum of Glass is a celebration of the



DIY GLASS ART

The **Tacoma Glassblowing Studio** (www.tacomaglassblowing.com; 253-383-3499) offers a two-day beginner class (\$225), which runs four hours a day. You’ll create paperweights, ornaments and small vases. The **Glassblowing Experience** is a 30-minute one-on-one session (\$65) during which you’ll create a single piece.

artists who have made the Pacific Northwest such a key part of Studio Glass movement. It features other internationally known artists, too. For example, “Lino Tagliapietra in Retrospect: A Modern Renaissance in Italian Glass” will be on display through August 24, showcasing the man acknowledged by Chihuly as the greatest living glass artist in the world.

Step inside the giant stainless steel, cone-shaped amphitheater to the museum’s Hot Shop, where visitors can watch artists blow and shape molten glass into art. “This is the world’s largest hot shop,” Pisto says. “There’s no place like it in the world.”

A narrator explains what’s happening as artists work in two furnaces, which are around 2,400 degrees, making the glass goopy, stringy and stretchy. Visiting artists from all over the world come to Tacoma for the Hot Shop. “Artists can make larger pieces here, so they love it,” Pisto says.

After all this, you’ll be itching to take some home. The museum shop offers glass items ranging in price from a \$1 ladybug to a \$1,000 bird by artist Oiva Toikka. At nearby **Traver Gallery** (www.travergallery.com), there’s more art glass than you can shake a stick at (although stick-shaking would hardly be welcomed here), including pieces by Chihuly himself. You can always go for a fused glass pendant or set of coasters, which are less costly and easier to take home. If you need a break from all this glass-worship, hit the vintage store **urbanXchange** (www.urbanxchangeonline.com) on Pacific Avenue for a T-shirt with a picture of Chihuly to show off your cultured side.

The final Chihuly-gazing spot on the tour, and a favorite watering hole, is **The Swiss Pub** (www.swisspub.com; 253-572-2821) on Jefferson Avenue, where eight of his pieces are displayed above the bar, alongside neon signs and a stuffed pheasant. Thus, the Tacoma tour ends with a glass—albeit one filled with beer. 🍷

Museum of Glass: Wyn Bleilaska, Courtesy of the Museum of Glass; Venetian Wall: Scott M. Leeh