

Report from Daryl McClean, Green VI apprentice

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From the moment I first volunteered at the Green VI Glass Studio I have been passionate about glass blowing and eager to learn about it and progress in my skills. So I cannot thank Green VI enough for providing me with this most extraordinary opportunity to further my knowledge in many aspects of glassblowing. I am so appreciative of the knowledge I gained not only in glassblowing techniques, but also in the business and safety aspects of running a glassblowing studio. I also took the time to visit two of the top glass museums in the United States. This gave me exposure to the history of glass and enabled me to see collections of some of the best glass artwork in the world.

My first stop on my travels was to visit the Tacoma Museum of Glass, which has a collection of 20th and 21st century glass art from around the world including some work of Dale Chihuly and Lino Tagliapietra. During my time at Green VI I have heard so much about these two artists from other visiting glass artists.

It was amazing to me that the very next day after admiring their art in a museum, I would be attending the Pilchuck glass school founded by Dale Chihuly and actually witnessing first hand the artistry of Lino Tagliapietra. This was a dream come true for me.

The setting of Pilchuck campus is nothing short of magical. It is surrounded by a 15,000-acre tree farm. The narrow country road, that is the only entrance to the campus, is lined with thick, deep, lush, dark green forests. As soon as you turn onto that road, it feels like you are leaving the rest of the world behind and entering another more mystical world. In fact, because of its remote setting, this is a world on to itself that is solely dedicated to and focused on glass. Only students and instructors are allowed on the campus and the courses and learning sessions go from morning to night.

The buildings, all made of native Pacific Northwest materials, are rustic yet beautiful, and completely harmonious with the wilderness setting.

The one-week program at Pilchuck was called the 'Hands on Tomorrow' course. It had the unique feature of having two instructors that worked in recycled glass. In Susan Holland Reed's class new kiln cast objects were created by fusing together scrap pieces of glass into mosaic or collage like pieces and by adding wire, gold leaf, enamels and other materials. In

Nanda Soderberg's class, found glass objects were reconfigured using energy efficient methods. To prepare it for use, recycled glass was placed in the garage, rather than in an annealing oven. The garage is a far more energy efficient piece of equipment because the glass is ready for use within twenty minutes, and pieces can be added and removed at any time as needed. Nanda Soderberg works almost exclusively with recycled glass and he uses not only bottles but a variety of other glass objects such as old plates, bowls and even marbles. I was particularly impressed with what he was able to create using brown bottles.

Another energy conservation measure I observed in use at Pilchuck was the use of a small glory hole of about 15 to 20 gallons capacity for smaller pieces, reserving the larger 55 gallon glory hole for larger pieces.

In the class of Cesare Toffolo, I was able to see just how much could be created using flameworking alone. In the area of flameworking, he is a master on the same level as Lino Tagliapietra. Using just a lamp torch he created a goblet. But what was most impressive was the intricacy of the detail he placed on the goblet. With a steady hand he made fine delicate pieces like flower petals so small you could barely see them with the naked eye.

Another instructor, Durk Valkema taught European glassblowing methods and although his instruction was not in the use of recycled glass, of relevance to Green VI was his well recognized expertise as an engineer of energy efficient glass equipment. He included in his glass blowing instruction a great deal of discussion about glass blowing equipment.

Also very much in keeping with the objectives of Green VI was the lecture of guest lecturer Ron Van Der Veen, an architect who advocates for "deep green" initiatives.

The benefits of attending Pilchuck came not just from the instructors and lecturers, but from the exchange of ideas and interaction with other students. At Pilchuck I met students with varying levels of experience. Because my skill level was somewhat in the mid-range of the students in attendance, I was able to share my experience with less skilled students and learn from the more skilled students.

To further my training, I accepted an invitation to assist Charles Lowrie at the Harmony Glass Studio in California. I first met Charles when I went over on my own initiative to visit him in St. John at Maho Bay. While there I worked alongside Charles to create a piece called The Medicine Man. I saw it through from beginning to completion. I then worked with him while

he was a guest artist at Green VI.

I'm grateful that we have developed a good working relationship such that my assistance is of value to him. During my one week with him, I was very excited to have the responsibility under his guidance to pull multi-colored canes, and the opportunity to assist him on some very large pieces. Charles is a true artist and his work is complex and elaborate, so it is always a unique learning experience to work along side him.

Following the week working alongside Charles, I met with Jake Barron in Vermont. His mother graciously hosted me in her home and Jake gave me a highly informative tour of the local glass studios where he had apprenticed.

While still in Vermont I went to work for two weeks at the Mad River Glass Studio with David and Melanie Leppla, two highly accomplished glass artists. I had also developed a working relationship with David by visiting him and assisting him at Maho Bay. David Leppla has 25 years experience in glass blowing, has works on exhibit in various museums and has been the recipient of numerous awards including a Fulbright. He and his wife run their studio and business from their home in Vermont. In addition to having exposure to their considerable glassblowing skills, I was also exposed to the very successful way they were able to run their business from their home. Almost all of the pieces we worked on during my stay were to fulfill orders that were placed through their web site.

They were extremely hospitable, in both hosting me in their home and in taking me on a tour of glass blowing studios and art galleries in the area. We visited not just glass artists but artists of many different mediums. I particularly felt that metal working closely tied in with glasswork and with the use of recycled materials.

I managed to take a bit of time from my stay in Vermont to make a brief side trip to the Corning Glass Museum, which is in the neighboring state of New York. The Corning Glass Museum has one of the most extensive collections of glass art in the world from antiquity to modern day, and from every country in which glassmaking has been practiced. It is phenomenal, and one could spend days and days there trying to take it all in. There are also many glassblowing demonstrations. One demonstration, which I attended, was remarkable because they had a camera that was specially designed to withstand the high temperatures of the furnace and was therefore capable of filming what was happening inside. It was a truly unique experience to be able to view what was occurring to the glass inside the furnace.

After spending most of a day touring the museum, I visited the hot shop and met and then worked with numerous glass artists who were visiting there from around the country. I am learning that the glassblowing community is a small community and that many glass artists would welcome the opportunity to visit Green VI as a guest artist.

From visiting Pilchuck, meeting various glass artists, getting further experience and instruction, and reuniting with glass artists I have worked with in the past, I am realizing more and more how fortunate I have been at Green VI to work alongside glass artists with decades of experience. For my apprenticeship to progress I hope I have further opportunities to work alongside artists of that caliber, either when they visit Green VI or when I travel to visit them.