

The Beauty of Fenton Glass

With its wide array of coloured glass pieces, the Fenton Art Glass Company is the largest producer of handmade coloured glass in the USA. It was started in the mid-west in the early 1900s by two brothers who founded a small company that would decorate glass blanks purchased from large US glass manufacturers. At some point, because they were unable to obtain as much glass as they wanted, they decided to cut the middleman and manufacture their own pieces. And so it was that, in 1907, the first glass pieces produced by Fenton arrived on the market from their new plant in Williamstown, West Virginia.



The company's web site mentions that they were always at the forefront of glass production in the States and were influenced by the topmost artists of the period such as Tiffany and Steuben. In 1907 they also started producing what they termed "iridescent glass", which would become what we know today as carnival glass.

They also produced a lot of white "milk" glass in a myriad of patterns and shapes as well as stretch glass in various colours (a type of glass similar to what we know today as depression glass but with a more satiny look to it). They produced jadeite glass, Mongolian green glass, periwinkle blue glass, Mandarin glass in a deep red colour and in shapes reminiscent of Chinese antique porcelain and glass vessels, ruby glass, custard glass, ebony glass. But among their most popular items today are the opalescent glass pieces in a variety of pattern such as Spanish lace, coin dot, stripes, optic and hobnail in a variety of colours.

William Heacock, of Marietta, Ohio, one of the most knowledgeable people on American glass, has written about 20 books on this topic, including a few magnificent books on the history of the company. They are lavishly illustrated and contain price lists, which, as is the case for all price lists, should be read with a grain of salt.

The company is still active today, with the third generation at the helm.



The Fenton Art Glass Company also has a comprehensive web site at <http://www.fentonartglass.com>. You will find a company history including photos of the family members involved in the production today, information on collectors' clubs and conventions which are held regularly, a list of reference books and bulletins, and photos of current and past production lines, including a virtual tour of the factory. Anyone wishing to investigate American art glass should take the time to find their way around this and other similar sites.

There are also books on single topics (carnival glass, depression glass, milk glass, etc.), which depict the production of various glassmakers including Fenton. These are also quite useful because since most art glass pieces are unmarked, one should learn how to recognize the production from various companies, and also identify fakes and reproductions, which unfortunately have made their appearance on the market.

In closing, the Fenton Art Glass Company has such a large assortment of items, past and present, that it can provide a collector with a lifetime of collecting opportunities in any of their product lines.

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Are you interested in collecting Fenton Glass? Send us an e-mail and let us know. We'll try and keep an eye out for you. In the meantime, you can **search for Fenton Glass** in all of our current auction items.

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