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Useful Beauty: Tiffany Favrile, Carnival Glass, and Consumerism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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USEFUL BEAUTY: TIFFANY FAVRILE, CARNIVAL GLASS, AND CONSUMERISM
AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by

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Abstract

Commercial markets within the United States were changing rapidly in the nineteenth century as improved transportation and efficient methods of mass production made goods available to a wider portion of the population than ever before. The glass market was one of many that changed drastically from the opening of the nineteenth century and on into the early twentieth century. Iridescent art glass, whether cheap pressed glass or expensive blown glass, provides a small window into how advertising and purchasing habits changed and why. The burgeoning middle class was looking for new ways to proclaim respectability and enhance their living space. Not everyone could afford to beautify their homes and proclaim their status with beautiful handmade Tiffany glass which was the impetus for cheaper versions art glass to be made and sold. The desire for affordable, beautiful objects has not disappeared from twenty-first century society. Designers and entrepreneurs still seek methods of bringing beautiful objects of good design to the widest portion of the population possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The glass industry was just one of many markets in the nineteenth century that became accessible to a lower middle class who could not have afforded decorative pieces in years past. John Bakewell, of the famed Bakewell glasshouses of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, received the first pressed glass patent in 1825 which paved the way for change in the glass market.¹ Further innovations over the next few years refined the process which allowed prices to drop as glassmakers no longer had to painstakingly cut or blow glass. A gather of molten glass could now be poured into a metal mold that already had a design cut into it allowing for a more efficient, and therefore cheap, process.² The glass market was deluged with affordable pressed wares that mimicked pricy hand-cut and blown glass. The burgeoning middle class of the nineteenth century eagerly filled their homes with what critics viewed as notorious Victorian clutter with clashing patterns, textures, and colors. Glassware, which was formerly only available to the elite, became common in home décor.

Pressed glassware was particularly accessible because of its cheap manufacture. It was intentionally produced in patterns that mimicked the most expensive cut glass pieces. The desire for affordable beauty created three separate markets. Glass produced by artist-craftsmen was sold to those looking for the finest pieces of luxury that they could afford. Decorative glass was also of interest to an emerging middle class able to purchase glass

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Pressed Glass."

² Glen and Stephen Thistlewood, *Carnival Glass: The Magic and the Mystery* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1998), 10.

imported from Austria and other European nations; domestic glasshouses also attempted more expensive, artfully produced glass. At the bottom tier were pressed wares produced in mass and sold by the dozen to department stores and five and dime stores across the United States. A microcosm of this larger market process is that of Tiffany Studios, mid-tier art glass, and pressed iridescent glass later known as “carnival glass.” The demand for objects of affordable beauty has continued into the twenty-first century. Designers continue working to bring affordable, appealing products into the middle class market. The development of Tiffany favrile and later imitative art glass and carnival glass exemplify larger, long-lasting trends in the decorative arts market. Examining the state of the glass industry in the United States in the nineteenth century will contextualize the development and proliferation of these decorative but useful wares.

The earliest American glasshouses generally mimicked European glass designs, but by the latter nineteenth century the glass industry of the United States began to have its own global influence. There were a meager nine glasshouses in the United States at the opening of the nineteenth century.³ By 1880 the glass industry blossomed to approximately 211 glasshouses.⁴ New modes of transportation enabled fuel and supplies to be brought to new locations so glasshouses could grow in areas other than the early principal places of glass manufacture in Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore. These factories were then able to use new roads, canals, and railroads to move their goods more efficiently to wider markets. Not only was there growth in the number of glasshouses and the variety of their locations, the type of glass being made in the United

³ George S. and Helen McKearin, *American Glass* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1989), 132.

⁴ Warren Scoville, “Growth of the American Glass Industry to 1880,” *Journal of Political Economy* 52, no. 4 (December 1944): 344, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1826963>.

States shifted to being more decorative in nature. The glass industry transformed from a focus on functional window glass in the eighteenth century to decorative lead glass (often referred to as “flint glass” at the time regardless of whether or not it contained flint) and pressed glass.⁵ As the type of glass being manufactured changed and the number of glasshouses grew, the industry also benefited from new modes of sharing information. Trade journals like the *Crockery and Glass Journal* played a vital role in disseminating information to those involved in the world of commercial glass. Wider audiences were reached by decorative arts publications aimed at refining educated, upper middle class tastes. The world’s expositions brought the best designs of the day to a popular, international audience.

The world’s fairs of the nineteenth century empowered the American glass industry to exhibit their wares on a global stage. The first world’s fair was in London in 1851, and while only two firms from the United States exhibited glass, Brooklyn Flint Glass Works won a prize for their lead crystal glass. The glass captivated British glassmakers who found the purity of the glass to be impressive.⁶ Despite this early success, American glass firms were largely underrepresented at world’s fairs until the 1876 exposition in Philadelphia. Dozens of American glassmakers participated by displaying their best wares, but it was Gillinder & Sons with the most spectacular exhibit. The firm constructed a working glasshouse that became one of the most popular exhibits at the Centennial Fair.⁷

⁵ Ibid., 343.

⁶ Jane Shadel Spillman, *Glass from World’s Fairs: 1851-1904* (Corning, New York: Corning Museum of Glass, 1886), 9-10.

⁷ Ibid., 29-30.

The Libbey Glass Company of Toledo, Ohio, repeated a similar stunt by erecting a working glasshouse at the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893 where visitors could watch glass being blown, and they could even try glassblowing themselves.⁸ Libbey's display of items made with glass thread was also immensely popular. These items caught the attention of an American actress and Spanish princess who requested their own custom dresses made of glass thread which caused a sensation at the time. Visitors to Libbey's pavilion could purchase various glass souvenirs ranging from ink wells to salt and pepper shakers. Libbey's gamble in spending generously to create such an elaborate exhibition paid off with a solid national reputation.⁹ Throughout the latter nineteenth century glass firms of the United States benefited financially from the ability to display wares on an international scale, and they absorbed new ideas as well as disseminating their own innovations and style. Glasshouses eagerly took on the challenge of developing innovative exhibits that would capture the imagination of visitors and bring customers through their doors.

The nineteenth century mass production of goods enabled lower classes to achieve a standard of living previously unattainable, but not everyone embraced the system that enabled a new middle-class lifestyle. The dominance of the machine and division of labor were alienating to many who longed for a return to the days when artisans could design and execute their own work. The division of labor as well as the use of machines instead of traditional methods were driving concerns of the Arts and Crafts Movement which pushed for a return to a simpler way of living. The movement

⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁹ Jack Sullivan, "When Mr. Libbey Went to the Fair," *Bottles and Extras* (March-April 2010), 44-47.

originated in England in the 1860 but made its way across the Atlantic by the last years of the nineteenth century.

John Ruskin's writings significantly formed the intellectual framework of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Ruskin was born in London in 1819 and of Scotch background. He was an influential art and social critic of the Victorian era. Ruskin valued the blending of intellectual and practical skills needed to create art. He wrote that he wished, "all of us were good handicraftsmen in some kind, and the dishonour of manual labour done away with altogether... The painter should grind his own colours; the architect work in the mason's yard with his men...."¹⁰ He believed manufacturers ought to allow workmen to use their whole mind and creative powers in the production process. In "The Nature of Gothic," a chapter in his influential work *The Stones of Venice*, he explained this idea in detail. Because glass beads were made by men who had no role in the design process and merely had a small, repetitive, machine-like role, anyone purchasing such beads was involved in the "slave-trade."¹¹ Any maker involved in the production of goods ought to be included in the whole process. Not only did he value the agency of every worker, he was also concerned about the beauty and usefulness of what was produced. "Your stuffs need not be such as would catch the eye of a duchess; but they should be such as may at once serve the need, and refine the taste, of a cottager."¹² Ruskin's passion to have workmen involved in each part of the creative process and his passion to surround the

¹⁰ John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds., E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903), 9:201.

¹¹ John Ruskin, *The nature of Gothic : A Chapter of The stones of Venice* (London: George Allen, 1892), 25, <https://archive.org/details/natureofgothicch00rusk/page/24>.

¹² John Ruskin, "Art and Society," in *Selections and Essays*, ed. Frederick William Roe (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2013), 142.

lower classes with the practical and the beautiful inspired William Morris, probably the best known figure of the Arts and Crafts Movement, to bring Ruskin's ideas to fruition.

William Morris practically implemented Ruskin's philosophy through his own work and his decorative arts company Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Company (later Morris & Company). He believed that artful utilitarian objects were important because they would bring pleasure to both the producer and the consumer.¹³ Morris, like Ruskin, held socialist ideals and wanted beautiful things to be within reach of the average consumer- not just the elites. Ultimately, the time and labor that went into creating the beautifully crafted works caused prices to be out of reach for most people. This was an issue Louis Comfort Tiffany encountered in making handcrafted works of glass art, and it created a vacuum that allowed companies making iridized pressed glass to fill with cheaply priced, mass-produced glass.

It is within this context of a growing glass industry, a new middle class filling their homes with objects of status and beauty, and the Arts and Crafts reaction against practices they believed to be immoral and the manufacture of goods they considered gaudy, that Louis Comfort Tiffany entered the world of the decorative arts. Without Tiffany, it is likely that there would have been little impetus for the creation of iridescent pressed glass, and such a creation would have lacked such a receptive market. Without the Arts and Crafts Movement, Tiffany's advertising and appeal (although not necessarily his business model) would have looked very different. Tiffany's work was deeply influenced by this movement, and it became important, perhaps in more of an ironic way, to his business practices.

¹³ William Morris, "The Arts and Crafts of Today," <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1889/today.htm>.

Chapter 2: Louis Comfort Tiffany: The Artist and Businessman

Louis Comfort Tiffany's story is not a "rags to riches" narrative. His father was Charles Lewis Tiffany, the founder of the famous Tiffany & Co. Charles Lewis Tiffany, along with his partner John Young, established a small fancy goods store in 1837 in New York City. The company prospered and began selling clocks, glassware, and porcelain. By the 1850s, he was selling luxury items of the finest materials to the elite of the day. First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln received Tiffany pearl jewelry as a gift from her husband in 1862.¹⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, Tiffany was no longer just another merchant on Broadway competing for the business of the upper-middle class; his name was known and respected internationally for selling fine jewelry and other luxury items. His designs were being offered to and sought out by the wealthiest and most influential people.

Thus it was that Louis Comfort Tiffany was born into a world of luxury and privilege in 1848. In his 1914 biography, written in collaboration with *New York Times* art critic Charles De Kay, this aspect of his life is downplayed. The opening line states that Tiffany "was born with a golden spoon in his mouth, but the spoon was immediately tucked away and he was seldom permitted to remember its existence."¹⁵ Perhaps his childhood was humbler than some would expect, but it is inevitable that the son of the founder of Tiffany & Co. was exposed to some of the finest craftsmanship and objects of

¹⁴ Sheila Dow and Jaime E. Noce, eds., "Tiffany, Charles Lewis," in *Business Leader Profiles for Students* (Detroit, MI: Gale, 2002), 2:455,

<http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3427100368/GVRL?u=richland&sid=GVRL&xid=f4b4301d>.

¹⁵ Charles De Kay, *Tiffany*. (New York: Parkstone Press International, 2010?), 8.

beauty available at the time. In fact, as late as 1878, Tiffany is listed in the Dun Credit Ledger as “a young marr’d [married] man of fair ability & no means whatever[,] being assisted by his father & not making a living from his profession.”¹⁶ His background was far from average and his resources and connections were numerous.

Tiffany did not slide directly into the family business; he spent years studying to become a painter under artists such as George Inness and Samuel Colman. His wealthy background enabled him to travel widely and encounter new ideas, art, and architecture. He traveled throughout Europe beginning in the winter of 1865 to the spring of 1866 and again in 1868-1869. He would have inevitably come into contact with the Arts and Crafts Movement during his travels to Europe. In 1870, Tiffany traveled to North Africa which inspired his use of color and design in his later work.¹⁷ After these years of travel and artistic development, his focus on the decorative arts intensified while he continued to paint.

In 1878 he established a glasshouse with Andrea Boldini who was trained in the famous glasshouses of Murano. According to a timeline of glass history published by his company, Tiffany also installed his first church figure window that year.¹⁸ His first glass patents were filed in 1880 and were variations on techniques developed by his competitor John La Farge.¹⁹ During the end of the 1870s to 1880 Tiffany was involved in business

¹⁶ Dun Credit Ledger, 1878, vol. 388, New York, p. 1896, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, quoted in Roberta A. Mayer and Carolyn K. Lane, "Disassociating the 'Associated Artists': The Early Business Ventures of Louis C. Tiffany, Candace T. Wheeler, and Lockwood de Forest," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 8, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 2001): 6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40662779>.

¹⁷ Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, "Louis Comfort Tiffany at the Metropolitan Museum," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (Summer 1998), 6.

¹⁸ "Tiffany Favre Glass Made Under the Supervision of Mr. Louis C. Tiffany," (New York: Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company, 1899), 33, <http://library.metmuseum.org/record=b1150546>.

¹⁹ *Secrets of Tiffany Glassmaking*, The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, Winter Park, Florida. <http://www.morsemuseum.org/on-exhibit/secrets-of-tiffany-glassmaking>.

ventures with various artists and artisans providing interior decoration by commission. These ventures eventually coalesced into Louis C. Tiffany & Co., Associated Artists (1881-1883) which provided interior decoration to impressive figures from Mark Twain to Chester Arthur at the White House. In 1885 Tiffany formed the Tiffany Glass Company which became the Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company in 1892 and finally, Tiffany Studios in 1902 when Tiffany became the head of Tiffany & Co.

The lore that Tiffany's tireless experimentation and inherent artistic genius were the driving forces of his company's success is repeated numerous times in newspaper articles and magazines of his day. According to Tiffany's own timeline, favrile was first available to the public in 1893. Favrile glass pieces were iridescent blown-glass works of art which often had a more practical function as vases, bowls, and cups. The distinctive colors and organic forms of favrile were inspired by the beauty of the natural world. An article in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in October 1895 gushes over the bright colors, metallic surfaces, and unique, free-flowing forms of Tiffany glass. The article opens dramatically declaring that, "We have a new art. It is American. It is produced right here on Long Island. It is art in glass and Louis C. Tiffany is the inventor...."²⁰ That favrile, and many other works offered by his company, were Tiffany's invention is reported in such a way that leaves the reader to believe he worked tirelessly and individually to bring beauty to the world around him. His praises are constantly sung for his work, when in fact, glasswork is an inherently collaborative effort. Some employees felt bitter that their work was ignored which led to tension with Tiffany, but others respected him as an artist and employer.

²⁰ "Gallery and Studio. Louis C. Tiffany Is the Founder of a New Art," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 20, 1895.

Chapter 3: Advertising Tiffany Favrile

Advertisements about Tiffany's favrile glass are key to understanding how he was perceived by the public and who his primary audience was. The publications in which Tiffany advertised his favrile were primarily aimed at an educated, upper class audience. He generally advertised in publications like *House Beautiful*, *Scribner's*, *Country Life in America*, and *Brush and Pencil*. Theodore Peterson, who researched the development of magazines in the twentieth century, explained that magazines like *Scribner's*, "addressed an audience well above average in income and intellectual curiosity."²¹ They were not really intended for anyone below a privileged middle class. Publications like *House Beautiful* and *Brush and Pencil* took Morris' golden rule seriously, which was to, "Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful."²² These publications were founded to promote aesthetics in the modern home that rebelled against the iniquities of the Victorians with their heavy, ornately carved furniture, gaudy ornamentation, and mass-produced knick-knacks galore. It was in magazines dedicated to tasteful artistry in the home and layman's intellectual pursuits that Tiffany saw fit to advertise his wares (Figure 3.1 and 3.2).

²¹ Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 2. <https://library.brown.edu/cds/mjp/pdf/mojp000046.pdf>.

²² William Morris, "Hopes and Fears for Art," <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1882/hopes/chapters/chapter3.htm>.

TIFFANY STUDIO

The charm of originality and true artistic merit attaches to every production of the TIFFANY STUDIO.

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GLASS SHADES; ETCHED METAL
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SHREVE, CRUMP & LOW CO., BOSTON, MASS. Eastern Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.
W. SCOTT & SONS, MONTREAL, QUE. Province of Quebec, Canada.
RYRIE BROS., TORONTO, ONT. Province of Ontario.
T. & E. DICKINSON & CO., BUFFALO, N. Y. Buffalo and Niagara Falls.
C. A. SELZER, CLEVELAND, O. Ohio north of Columbus and east of Toledo.
J. J. FREEMAN & CO., TOLEDO, O. Toledo and immediate territory.
WRIGHT, KAY & CO., DETROIT, MICH. Michigan.
MARSHALL FIELD & CO., CHICAGO, ILL. Illinois, Indiana and Iowa.
T. A. CHAPMAN & CO., MILWAUKEE, WIS. Wisconsin.

J. B. HUDSON & SON, MINNEAPOLIS, MINN. Minnesota.
J. KENNARD & SONS CARPET CO., ST. LOUIS, MO. Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska and Western Kentucky.
THE LORING ANDREWS CO., CINCINNATI, O. Eastern Kentucky, Ohio south of Columbus.
W. W. WATTLIN & SON, PITTSBURGH, PA. Penn. west of Harrisburg, West Va., Youngstown, Salem, Wellsville, E. Liverpool and Canton, Ohio.
SHAW & BROWN, WASHINGTON, D. C. D. C. and Virginia.
HURLBUTT & HURLBUTT, BALTIMORE, MD. Maryland.
J. E. CALDWELL & CO., PHILADELPHIA, Penn. east of Harrisburg, Delaware, New Jersey south of Rahway.
SHREVE & CO., SAN FRANCISCO, California.
ALBERT HANSEN, SEATTLE, Washington.

Figure 3.1: Tiffany took out a full page ad in *Scribner's* from 1906. The exclusivity and artistry of the works of Tiffany Studios is emphasized.



THE TIFFANY STUDIOS EMBRACE THE HIGHEST EXAMPLES FOR THE FURNISHING AND DECORATION OF RESIDENCES, CHURCHES AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS. THEIR DISPLAY OF FURNITURE—BOTH CLASSIC ORIGINALS AND REPRODUCTIONS—OF FABRICS, ORIENTAL RUGS, LAMPS, ELECTROLIERS, OBJECTS IN FAVORITE GLASS, ARTICLES IN BRONZE, WINDOWS AND INDOOR & OUT OF DOOR MEMORIALS OF EVERY DESCRIPTION, FORM AN EXHIBIT WHICH THE PUBLIC IS INVITED TO INSPECT WITHOUT REFERENCE TO PURCHASE. MADISON AVENUE, AT FORTY-FIFTH STREET, NEW YORK.

Figure 3.2: In this December 1908 advertisement in *Country Life in America*, Tiffany used a Latin “V” instead of the more recent “U” evoking a connection between his work and the great and enduring works of the past.

Tiffany's advertisements can also be found in more egalitarian publications often through an approved seller. He advertised in a variety of trade journals related to the glass industry such as *Glass and Pottery World*, *The Pottery and Glass Salesman*, and the *Crockery and Glass Journal* alongside glass that represented a range of quality. His favrile can be found advertised in newspapers that were nationally significant publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Still, favrile primarily received coverage in publications on the decorative arts which would have attracted an audience with leisure time and a comfortable income.

One of the quintessential magazines bringing the ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement to a broad audience was *The House Beautiful* (later, simply *House Beautiful*). The first volume of the magazine was published in December 1896 under Eugene Klapp, who first conceived of the publication, and Henry B. Harvey who shared Klapp's ideas about practical home design and décor.²³ Home design magazines were not simply reflecting the taste of the day. They were actively seeking to shape consumer tastes. A controversial series of articles was run by the magazine in 1904-1905 which were critical of the taste of the rich and even published photographs of poorly decorated homes and the names of people with poor taste. Herbert Stone, the magazine's editor from 1898-1913, responded caustically to his critics that, "*The House Beautiful* acts merely as a signpost; it points the way to go; if the rich show no more taste than the poor, it merely proves that *The House Beautiful*'s mission is larger than some people suppose."²⁴ Stone

²³ Fredric F. Endres, "House Beautiful," in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*, eds., Kathleen L. Endres, Therese L. Lueck (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 158-159.

²⁴ Quoted by Virginia Robie in "How We Did it in the Old Days" and cited in Endres and Lueck, 160.

believed his publication had a “mission.” He wanted the publication to be changing modern tastes according to the principles of pleasing simplicity advocated by Morris.

Tiffany’s favrile is regularly mentioned and praised for its taste and artistry in *House Beautiful*. One author concerned with recommending quality “bric-a-brac” stated that Tiffany, “far outstripped his competitors, surpassing them in the intrinsic artistic values of his glass, in the variety of forms he employs, in the numberless colors he uses....”²⁵ In other words, each piece of favrile is a unique work of art that is not comparable to mass produced glass. Tiffany was a shrewd businessman and this selling point was not lost on him. Tiffany’s advertisements emphasize his “Originality of conception and execution....”²⁶ He did not advertise frequently in *House Beautiful*, but there was no need- the praises of favrile were being sung within the publication’s pages regularly at the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, it was the exposure of his wares at the international expositions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that brought much attention and critical acclaim to his work when reviewed in taste-making arts publications.

Tiffany Studios had a similarly positive relationship with *Brush and Pencil* which was first published in 1897. An 1899 review in *The Washington Post* lauded the publication as “an art monthly of exceptional excellence.” It was recommended not only to students but “the layman who may have a little time at hand occasionally for current art literature.”²⁷ *Brush and Pencil* was aimed at an audience that had the extra time read about the arts, the educational background to desire and appreciate the information

²⁵ Caryl Coleman, “Bric-a-Brac or What You Will,” *House Beautiful* 5, No. 2 (January 1899): 83.

²⁶ Tiffany Advertisement, *House Beautiful* 13, No. 6 (May 1903): xxxix.

²⁷ “In the World of Art,” *Washington Post*, July 2, 1899.

offered, and the money to purchase such a publication. In the early years of the publication, Tiffany's favrile received much praise for its effective blend of beauty and utility. In his article "The Art of Things," Gardner C. Teall argued that just as nature tends toward the beautiful, so should the work of the craftsman. Even the most mundane objects should be beautiful. Tiffany's work in favrile serves as his prime example. Teall explains that, "like Morris he has spent quite as much energy in *applying* his art and doing that unselfishly, devoting whole days at a time...working out some idea, which...he always gladly gives to the world from a love for the promotion of the beautiful."²⁸ Two years later in 1901, Tiffany's favrile was still inspiring admiration from art critics. James L. Harvey wrote an article on Tiffany's favrile shortly after the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. He praises Tiffany as an innovative scientist and tasteful artist. In regards to describing Tiffany's work Harvey asserts that, "One could no more do this effectively than one could describe the harmonies of a masterpiece of music."²⁹ The author is echoing the Arts and Crafts Movement's high view of craftsmanship in comparing glasswork to fine art. Such effusive praise obscures the technical, scientific, and creative genius poured into Tiffany Studios by those he employed, and it highlights that Tiffany was, in fact, an excellent businessman.

Tiffany worked hard to establish his image as an American Morris implementing the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Elizabeth Guffey pointed out the disconnect between Tiffany's advertising and his business strategies in her 2007 essay "Illuminating Texts: Louis Comfort Tiffany's Lamps and the Rhetoric of Production, Authenticity, and

²⁸ Gardner C. Teall, "The Art of Things" *Brush and Pencil* 4, No. 6 (Sep., 1899): 310-311.

²⁹ James L. Harvey, "Source of Beauty in Favrile Glass," *Brush and Pencil* 9, No. 3 (Dec., 1901):176, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25505698>.

Consumption.” Tiffany was struggling with his relationship to his workers throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was reproducing objects that were sold as “unique” works of art. His studio fell short of an Arts and Crafts paradise with autonomous artist-craftsmen designing and implementing each unique work. Most critics would not have been focused on these issues because, as Guffey points out, most critics had never visited his factory.³⁰ In the advertisements and literature put out by Tiffany Studios, Tiffany is emphasized as the master craftsman and designer behind it all. An 1899 publication explaining favrile says that, “The effort on the part of Mr. Louis C. Tiffany to utilize his discoveries and experiments, to the delight of the connoisseur, and the delectation of his brother artists, has been fully recognized at home and abroad.”³¹ Tiffany’s name and achievements as an artist of glass are constantly accentuated in his advertisements and by critics alike.

The creations of Tiffany Studios were certainly far out of reach for the average person, and the types of publications within which Tiffany was advertising his favrile indicate that he must have been at least subconsciously aware of this. As of 1905, a mere 30% of the working population was making \$12 or more a week.³² The 1908 Blue Book by Tiffany and Co. lists the cost of a favrile nut bowl as \$8 to \$10. This put favrile out of the reach of a large segment of the American population.³³ An article reviewing popular art décor in the home from the *Washington Times* complains that, “The Tiffany clusters

³⁰ Elizabeth Guffey, “Illuminating Texts: Louis Comfort Tiffany’s Lamps and the Rhetoric of Production, Authenticity, and Consumption,” in *Objects, Audiences, and Literatures: Alternative Narratives in the History of Design*, eds. David Raizman and Carma Gorman (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 41-42.

³¹ “Tiffany Favrile Glass Made Under the Supervision of Mr. Louis C. Tiffany,” 9.

³² United States, *Census of Manufactures: 1905* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 11.

³³ Tiffany & Co., *Blue Book* (New York: Tiffany & Co., 1908), 592

in the inimitable favrile are infinite in design, and hopeless in price.”³⁴ Newspaper and magazine articles discussing home décor that mention favrile often note its costliness and point the reader toward other decorative colored glass that would be more affordable.³⁵

Fakes crept into the market as Tiffany glass became increasingly coveted by the upper classes and the nouveau riche trying to establish their respectable class. As early as 1896, Tiffany had to specifically warn potential buyers that there were imitations of his glass in the market. The company specifically warned potential imitators against reproducing favrile glass.³⁶ A 1900 advertisement in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* proclaims to readers that, “Prosecute as we do it is still difficult to prevent imitations of Tiffany Favrile Glass.” Potential buyers are then instructed on how to spot fakes. They are told to avoid anything labeled “Tiffany” unless it has his signature, and that favrile is only available from Tiffany & Co. or Tiffany Studios in New York.³⁷ Advertisements over the years show that retailers proudly proclaimed that they were the only sellers of authentic Tiffany within a particular city or region. Tiffany’s favrile had many imitators; they ranged in location from Steuben Glass Works in New York with their Aurene glass to the iridescent works of Loetz in Austria. Other competitors included The Quezal Art Glass and Decorating Company, The Durand Glass Company, and Union Glass Company.³⁸ None of these types of iridescent glass were particularly inexpensive and accessible to the

³⁴ “Art Ware Was Never So Exquisite,” *The Washington Times*, October 3, 1909.

³⁵ “For Woman’s Benefit,” *The Star*, May 21, 1902.

³⁶ Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company, “Memorial Windows,” (New York: Tiffany Studios, 1896), 94, <https://archive.org/details/memorialwindows00tiff>.

³⁷ Tiffany Advertisement, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 11, 1900.

³⁸ Stuart Feld, “Nature in Her Most Seductive Aspects: Louis Comfort Tiffany’s Favrile Glass,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, 21, No. 3 (November 1962): 111-112, www.jstor.org/stable/3257894.

average household, and they never earned the title of “poor man’s Tiffany” the way pressed iridescent glass did.

Chapter 4: Bringing Iridescent Pressed Glass to All

Pressed iridescent glass, what collectors now call carnival glass and sometimes “poor man’s Tiffany,” was first produced in 1907, and remained popular until the 1920s. It was not always known as “carnival glass”- in fact it was not a name consistently applied to the glass until there was a revival of interest in the 1960s and 1970s. Before then it was known by many different names such as radium, aurora glass, rainbow glass, and Venetian glass. By the 1920s, there was an overabundance of pressed iridescent glass in warehouses with waning demand. Much of this glass ended up being sold at carnivals. Although many different types of cheaply made glass were used as prizes at carnivals the name stuck with iridescent pressed glass.³⁹

The first maker of pressed iridescent glass is generally agreed to be Fenton Art Glass Company around 1907-1908, and this began what carnival collectors today call the “classic era” of pressed iridescent glass which lasted until about 1925.⁴⁰ Other major companies producing pressed iridescent glass in the United States include Millersburg, Dugan-Diamond, Northwood, and Imperial. The manner in which carnival glass was made and advertised was a far cry from the Arts and Crafts ideals which inspired Tiffany- who only loosely implemented those ideas in his business practices beyond advertising original hand-crafted art. Carnival glass was made by pouring molten glass into a mold which was then evenly distributed by a plunger which placed hundreds of pounds of

³⁹ Ellen Schroy, *Warman’s Carnival Glass* (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2007), 8.

⁴⁰ Glen and Stephen Thistlewood, *Carnival Glass: The Magic and the Mystery*, 7.

pressure on the glass by a glass press. The iridescence for which carnival glass is famous was created by spraying a metallic solution onto the glass while it was still hot. Quirks and differences among these pieces are largely due to varying quality control rather than independent artistry. This was not the master craftsman bringing his original ideas to life. Carnival glass did achieve one of the goals of the Arts and Crafts movement- it was accessible to just about anyone.

Although manufacturers of carnival glass and favrile had trade catalogs in common, the publications advertising carnival glass, and the means of acquiring it, were vastly different from the favrile highlighted in *Scribner's* and *The House Beautiful* which appealed to a largely wealthy, intellectually inclined audience. Carnival glass was advertised in wholesale trade catalogues like Butler Brothers, mail order companies that sent their merchandise directly to the consumer like Lee Manufacturing Company based in Chicago, chain grocery stores, and department stores included the glass, typically as incentives, in their newspaper advertisements throughout the United States.

Carnival glass can be found sold on its own as desirable, beautiful iridescent glass, but it was about as common, if not more so, for carnival glass to be sold as a bonus item with more mundane products such as baking powder or tea. Often, advertisements including an image of the glassware are showing it as a “free with purchase” incentive. Collectors assert that this is the root of the term “baking powder glass” which is occasionally used as a generic term for all iridized glass.⁴¹⁻⁴² This was not an uncommon

⁴¹ Schroy, Ellen. “Guide to collecting carnival glass, America’s iridescent glassware,” *Antique Trader*. <http://www.antiquetrader.com/featured/guide-to-collecting-carnival-glass-americas-iridescent-glassware/>.

⁴² I have yet to come across a source from the “classic era” of carnival glass using the term “baking powder glass”, but like many names for iridized glass, it likely came in to use as collectors became interested in the glass in the latter 20th century.

practice for the 19th century retail market, and it is possible to find different types of glassware and other small items sold as a bonus.

One such company offering carnival glass as both beautiful home décor and as a special bonus with other products was Lee Manufacturing Company. Lee was a mail-order company based in Chicago, Illinois that sold everything directly “to the consumer through lady agents.”⁴³ These agents then procured “premium gifts” for what they sold as opposed to a cash commission. A 1915 catalogue from Lee advertises a “Seven Piece Water or Lemonade Set” which is, in fact, Imperial’s Luster Rose or Open Rose pattern glass. The advertisement includes a nearly half-page image of the orange colored (called “rubigold” by Imperial at the time and “marigold” by collectors later) pitcher and tumblers. The text explains that, “It truly is a joy to possess a set so beautiful, so rich and so durable.”⁴⁴ This reflects the Arts and Crafts philosophy of owning something beautiful and useful. However, the need for small, handmade batches overseen by a single master craftsman was rejected as that would increase the price. Lee also used the glass to enhance the appeal of products that might not otherwise jump out to the buyer. Another advertisement in Lee’s catalogue includes Fenton’s Orange Blossom as an added bonus for purchasing shaving accessories. This advertisement is clearly aimed at attracting a feminine buyer. The advertisement explains that the shaving set makes an excellent gift for a “husband, brother, son, or beau.”⁴⁵ The advertiser believed that a colorful, floral mug would attract the attention of the lady of a household, who it was assumed did the

⁴³ Glen and Stephen Thistlewood, “Carnival Glass at a Premium,” Carnival Glass Worldwide, <https://www.carnivalglassworldwide.com/lee-manufacturing.html>.

⁴⁴ Lee Manufacturing Company, Advertisement from 1915?. Carnival Glass Worldwide, <https://www.carnivalglassworldwide.com/lee-manufacturing-1915.html>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

household's shopping, more effectively than a mundane, utilitarian, masculine shaving set.

Another mail order catalogue selling carnival glass was Butler Brothers which sold items wholesale to merchants around the United States. Butler Brothers was established in 1877 and continued to function in several different forms over the years until it was bought out by City Products Corp. of Ohio in 1960.⁴⁶ The success of Butler Brothers came through their mail-order business method. They advertised and sold to retailers using catalogs rather than employing traveling salesmen. The catalog, which was good for approximately thirty days after it was printed, was called "Our Drummer." As with most mail-order companies of the nineteenth century, an impressively wide range of products were advertised such as clothing, toys, furniture, and toiletries. The iridescent glassware is frequently advertised in terms of artistic value and social status with phrases like, "high class artistic principles" and "the same high class artistic principles of the expensive imported designs...."⁴⁷ They were also advertised to retailers as items that would be sure to bring in business with their brilliant colors and shimmering finish. Phrases such as, "window leaders," "showy profit payers," "business makers," and "showy extra value items" indicate that these were portrayed as an enticement to bring in customers.⁴⁸ Certainly, newspaper advertisements indicate that there were department stores and smaller shops that decided this was a good strategy to bring in customers.

While the iridescent glass is most frequently associated specifically as a free gift offered

⁴⁶ *Encyclopedia of Chicago. Dictionary of Leading Chicago Businesses (1820-2000)*, s.v. "Butler Bros.," by Mark Wilson, Stephen Porter, and Janice Reiff, <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2583.html>.

⁴⁷ Butler Brothers, "Our Drummer, October, 1909," in *Wholesale Catalogs Selling Carnival Glass* (California: San Diego Carnival Glass Club and Southern California Carnival Glass Club, 1994), 102.

⁴⁸ Butler Brothers, "Our Drummer, Mid-spring 1911," in *Wholesale Catalogs Selling Carnival Glass* (California: San Diego Carnival Glass Club and Southern California Carnival Glass Club, 1994), 146, 137, 210.

with baking powder as indicated by the name “baking powder glass”, iridescent glass could have easily been called “Grocer’s Glass,” “Coffee and Tea Glass,” or even “Furniture Store Glass.”

Mail order companies were not the only companies offering iridescent glass freebies. The Union Pacific Tea Company was one such brick and mortar business that believed in the selling power of eye-catching iridescent glass. They were a chain with stores primarily in the North East and Mid-Atlantic region that sold more than just tea. Advertisements indicate that they also sold sugar, spices, meat, rice, and other items found at a typical grocery. In 1910, a branch in Janesville, Wisconsin advertised a free “Pretty crimped glass nappie made of imitation Tiffany glass” which would be given to any buyer purchasing at least twenty-five cents of goods.⁴⁹ The stores were already offering other “premiums” with merchandise. A 1911 advertisement from a branch in New Castle, Pennsylvania advertised free iridescent tumblers on Saturdays.⁵⁰ A branch in Dacatur, Illinois advertised similarly in 1912 indicating some longevity in the practice as well as the geographic range of advertising iridescent giveaways.

The success of such a strategy is somewhat dubious. This advertisement was never repeated in newspaper print by the exact same store. It may have gotten expensive; in 1917 customers were informed that the chain would no longer be offering premiums with purchases at all.⁵¹ The lack of images along with the advertisements, makes it difficult to discern if the iridescent ware was in fact iridescent domestic pressed glass or imported iridescent ware. The few ads that do include images are a gold mine for

⁴⁹ Union Pacific Tea Company Advertisement, *Janesville Daily Gazette*, May 13, 1910.

⁵⁰ Union Pacific Tea Company Advertisement, *New Castle News*, December 29, 1911.

⁵¹ Union Pacific Tea Company Announcement, *The Daily Review*, June 1, 1917.

collectors who wish to learn about the glass. In 1911, the Grand Union Tea Company of Topeka, Kansas, offered a punch bowl for free along with the purchase of one pound of baking powder.⁵² Although it is not identified in the ad, the image shows that the offered glass was Imperial's Twins punch bowl. While the name "Grocery Glass" isn't catchy, it worthwhile to note that this was a significant avenue through which iridescent glass reached the general public.

The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company was another grocer advertising iridescent freebies. Known in later years as simply A&P, the company was established in 1859 by George Gilman and George Hartman in New York as a mail-order tea trading company. It is no coincidence that, like the aforementioned Union Pacific Tea Co, the word "tea" made it into the store's name. Tea had become quite fashionable in the late 1850s and tea consumption was on the rise.⁵³ Tea was particularly lucrative in the 1870s when the tariffs which had been enacted during the Civil War were finally removed and sales soared. Prices collapsed in the 1880s, and stores which previously relied primarily on the tea and coffee trade had to diversify.⁵⁴ Over the years, the A&P expanded its offerings, and it became a brick and mortar retail chain. It grew from 200 retail stores in 1900 to over 14,000 in 1925.⁵⁵

This period of enormous growth for A&P collided with the manufacture of iridescent glass and the popular advertising strategy of offering free incentives to buyers. A&P was at the forefront of employing "premium" strategy. Premiums were first offered

⁵² Grand Union Tea Company Advertisement, *The Topeka Daily State Journal*, April 28, 1911.

⁵³ Marc Levinson, *The Great A&P and the Struggle for Small Business in America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2011), 16.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁵⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, Inc."

by A&P in the form of colorful chromolithographs in 1871, but as the market flooded with competitors offering similar images, A&P began offering glass and crockery.⁵⁶ Advertisements from March 18, 1910 in Asbury Park, New Jersey, March 25, 1910 in Perth, New Jersey, October 14, 1910 in Galveston, Texas, indicate free glassware to purchasers of their coffee, tea, extracts, or baking powder. The dishes shown in the advertisement are unnamed, but collectors today would recognize them as dishes in Northwood's Grape and Cable and the Stippled Rays patterns. That these ads are from different regions and times of the year indicates that this practice was widespread. On July 29, 1910, there were advertisements from an A&P in Little Rock, Arkansas promising a free "Crimped Holly Nappy" to customers. There is no image, but this holly nappy was most likely Dugan's Holly and Berry. These advertisements indicate that A&Ps were offering different types of glass, from different makers, at locations in multiple regions. Based on the significance of baking powder to the trade of A&P stores at the turn of the twentieth century and the frequent use of pressed iridescent glass in newspaper advertisements, it is likely that the term "baking powder glass" originated with the advertising prowess of A&P.

Pressed iridescent wares were also offered as giveaways from furniture stores. One such advertisement was from the Greater Hub Furniture Company located in Washington, D.C. This company bought the business from Wash B. Williams, a furniture and carpet salesman, in 1902. A decade later, the business described itself as a "department furniture store" and declared a "formal opening" although it was located at the same corner it had been a decade ago. The advertisement shows that they were

⁵⁶ Levinson, 30.

offering Imperial's Luster Rose bowls as souvenirs during their "opening day" gala.⁵⁷ In 1915, the store offered another "opening day" which included prizes and music like the last event. This time, the prize offered was a free pressed glass compote with "The Greater Hub Furniture Co.," "Opening Souvenir."⁵⁸ Iridescent glass was not unique as a means of drawing in customers; stores were just as happy to use colorless glassware or other small items as an enticement to customers.

In July of that same year, Frank T. Knock Furniture Co. Inc., also located in Washington, D.C., was advertising Dugan's Floral and Grape water set although it was being sold on its own as a bargain rather than as a free incentive. Carnival glass collectors and researchers Glen and Stephen Thistlewood noted that that this was not truly the wonderful bargain portrayed to customers. The price of one water set was 69 cents at Knock Furniture, but this same set was being sold by Butler Brothers for 67 cents per dozen. Other furniture stores (indeed, other types of retailers and even social clubs) had custom advertising iridescent ware made. Sterling Furniture Co., General Furniture, and Gevurtz Bros. Furniture and Clothing all had custom glassware made that is extant today. This advertising glassware is now particularly valuable among collectors of pressed iridescent glass.

The name "Imperial" or any other domestic company producing pressed glass must not have meant much to the average shopper because the advertisements do not bother to name the glasshouses. A name that does occasionally appear in advertisements for iridescent pressed glass is that of Tiffany. The Hub Furniture Company of Washington, D.C. ran two ads in January of 1910 proclaiming the sale of a "Tiffany

⁵⁷ Greater Hub Furniture Company Advertisement, *The Washington Times*, April 19, 1912.

⁵⁸ Greater Hub Furniture Company Advertisement, *Evening Star*, April 4, 1915.

Iridescent Glass Flower Holder” for a mere eight cents.⁵⁹ It was not, in fact, Tiffany, but Westmoreland’s Corinth that was being offered for sale. This same strategy was being used on the West Coast. Moore’s furniture store in San Francisco, California advertised a carnival glass swung glass vases as “clever imitations of Tiffany” for fifteen cents.⁶⁰ The prestige of the Tiffany name was tempting to use for advertisers. They hoped customers would readily associate the bright, shimmering wares with more coveted wares which would lure in customers to purchase their more mundane goods on sale.

⁵⁹ Hub Furniture Co. Advertisement, *Evening Star*, January 30, 1910.

⁶⁰ Moore’s Advertisement, *The San Francisco Examiner*, December 18, 1909.

Chapter 5: Comparing Tiffany, Pressed Iridescent Glass, and the Middle Tier

The differences between Tiffany and “poor man’s Tiffany” are hardly subtle despite the most optimistic comparisons found in newspapers and catalogs. The most noticeable difference is in the approach to form. Tiffany’s favrile is largely an abstract interpretation of the natural. Favrile evokes forms in nature from flowers to feathers without literally embodying or depicting these images. Tiffany’s floriform vases for example, evoke flowers without literally being shaped like flowers or having an image of a flower on them (Figure 5.1). Iridescent pressed glass, however, is most frequently a literal interpretation of the natural world. Bowls, plates, cups, and vases have images of flowers, leaves, and fruit on the surface in relief (Figure 5.2). The exception in pressed glass are the geometric patterns which mimic those seen in cut glass and swung glass vases which could be interpreted as imitating Tiffany ribbed vases. While “poor man’s Tiffany” can hardly be confused with Tiffany glass, there was a demand for middle tier art glass that was closer to the designs of Tiffany that imported glass like Loetz attempted to satisfy.

The middle tier of art glass, which more closely approximated Tiffany’s forms than carnival glass, was being sold to department stores and jewelers. In 1906 Dugan began making an art glass line that not only mimicked Tiffany’s forms, it is so close to the Art Nouveau glass imported from Austria and Czechoslovakia that it is often confused with these types of glass. Dugan’s art glass line was mold-blown and rolled in small pieces of glass called “frit” which gives the glass an iridescent look. The glass was

sold under names like “Pompeian,” “Venetian,” and “Japanese,” and can be found in Butler Brothers catalogs (Figure 5.3). Sellers also tried to associate this glass closely with Tiffany. In April 1906, Butler Brothers advertised “‘Sunset’ Iridescent Glass Salad or Fruit Dishes” which were described as, “Tiffany effect semi-transparent glass irridating [sic] all the colors of the rain bow [sic]. An artistic high class decoration.”⁶¹ Dugan became the Diamond Glass Company in 1913, and while many of Dugan’s iridized glass patterns were continued, it does not seem that the frit art glass continued to be made and sold on a sizable scale.

Another domestic company that attempted a middle tier art glass line was Imperial. By 1910 they were producing iridescent pressed glass, and in 1912 began an “imitation Tiffany style iridescent ware” called NuArt which encompassed electric lamp shades and expanded from there. In 1923 they began creating a line of “Free Hand” art glass. This was too expensive to appeal widely and become profitable, and in 1925 they began manufacturing “Lead Luster” glass that was blown into molds and could therefore be sold more cheaply. Ultimately, they were both economic failures, and Imperial struggled throughout the end of the 1920s and filed for bankruptcy during the Depression.⁶² The art glass lines produced by glasshouses in the United States do not seem to have taken a strong foothold in the market. They were competing with European glasshouses that had been making art glass of good repute at least since the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁶¹ Butler Brothers, “Our Drummer, April 1906,” in *Wholesale Catalogs Selling Carnival Glass* (California: San Diego Carnival Glass Club and Southern California Carnival Glass Club, 1994), 28.

⁶² Douglas Archer and Mary Archer, “History: A New Century...A New Company,” in *Imperial Glass Co. 1904-1938 Catalogues* (Paducah, Kentucky: Collector Books, 1978), VII.



Figure 5.1: Tiffany forms approximate floral forms without depicting them literally. Source: *Metropolitan Museum of Art*.



Figure 5.2: Fenton’s Orange Tree cup is an example of typical renditions of flora on iridescent pressed glass.

“OUR VENETIAN” VASE ASST.

Marvelous value in beautiful iridescent silver effect. These are good enough for 25 cents.

C1211—Domestic glass, exact reproductions of the expensive imported vases. Ass’t. comprises 1 doz. each of 6 fancy shapes, average ht. about 6¾ in. Beautiful iridescent silver effects, assorted colors—blue, green and amethyst. Total 6 doz. in bbl., wt. 80 lbs. Per dozen, **86c**

Figure 5.3: Dugan’s organic art glass forms mimic “expensive imported vases” in this advertisement from Butler Brother’s “Our Drummer” February 1907 edition.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Arts and Crafts movement was rooted in the ideas of Ruskin and Morris that it was important to have beautiful and useful things in a living space for people of all classes. The Arts and Crafts movement, which emphasized the role of the artisan as artist, designer, and manufacturer, ultimately failed to bring these objects of beauty to the masses. The way was paved for the industrial manufacture of beautiful and useful objects without regard for the role of the artist in the process. Carnival glass was a part of this movement which continues in the decorative arts even today. It allowed the average consumer to own beautiful iridized pressed glass with almost no financial sacrifice. This cycle of top tier, mid-tier, and bottom tier in the decorative arts continues in the twenty-first century market. Many designers are working towards providing beauty and affordability to the average consumer. Michael Graves, for example, began designing mass-produced but beautiful things available for purchase from middle class consumers for the giant chain retailer Target in the early twenty-first century. In a 2011 interview, Graves explained that,

I had been designing for...high-end people, and people always complained, "Michael, we'd love to buy your stuff, but it's too expensive."... We have behind us all this mass production, so why not take advantage and bring the price down for everybody? It was Target who called it the "democratization of design." I figured, if it's going to get designed, let's do it well.

It's not just Michael Graves who has worked to bring good design to the masses. Gordon Segal of Crate and Barrel also saw a need for high quality design that was affordable. While he did not design for the company, he worked to bring affordable housewares to the middle class. Segal traveled around Europe and the Caribbean shortly after college, and he noticed attractive, affordable designs he could bring back to the United States. One fateful night in 1962 he looked at some of the cheaper but beautiful wares he and his wife purchased abroad, and he said to her, "You know, this is great stuff. There has to be other young couples like ourselves with good taste and little money. Why don't we open a store?"⁶³ Bringing good design and affordable home furnishing to the middle class has continued to be a trend in the twenty-first century market of the United States. Tiffany favrile, art glass, and carnival glass fulfilled the desire to be surrounded by objects of beauty, but it is mid-tier art glass and pressed glass that made these designs accessible to a wider market.

A history without reference to material culture is missing a huge portion of what shapes our world, what we experience, how we think, and how we define ourselves and others. What does the stuff we buy and surround ourselves with say about our priorities? How we perceive ourselves? How we *want* others to perceive us? The objects with which we surround ourselves communicate how we answer these questions. Thorstein Veblen in his 1899 work, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, gives us the term "conspicuous consumption" by which he indicates that the wealthy (and the trying-to-appear-wealthy) are not satisfied with good "pecuniary repute" through leisure time, upper-class etiquette, or knowledge of subjects such as music or the visual arts. Their wealth and power are

⁶³ Gordon Segal, American Furniture Hall of Fame Oral History Interview, interview by Tony Bengel, July 24, 2012, <https://www.homefurnishingshalloffame.com/gordon-segal-crate-and-barrel>.

communicated through the display and consumption of things. Veblen states that, “The basis on which good repute in any highly organized industrial community ultimately rests is pecuniary strength; and the means of showing pecuniary strength, and so of gaining or retaining a good name, are leisure and a conspicuous consumption of goods status, particularly when they are not necessities, which gives them a special importance.”⁶⁴ In other words, our stuff communicates notions of class better than almost any means other than a bank statement.

A century later, Thad Logan wrote *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study* in which she argues that Veblen’s analysis is too simplistic, and that much more can be extrapolated from what is displayed in a middle class home. Objects in the Victorian parlor could communicate meaningfully about social values or religious perspectives upheld by occupants of a home. A family photo album, for example, could communicate a proper emphasis and value on family and a conspicuously placed Bible would signal to guests they were visiting a pious household.⁶⁵ Tiffany glass was very much a part of this conspicuous consumption. It could communicate, not only financial status, but the cultivated artistic tastes of the home’s residents. The customers of Tiffany Studios could also signal their morality by avoiding association with materials tainted by commercial mass production. Morris depicted such wares as the result of the “slave-trade” of employing people in a repetitive, mindless job. Tiffany glass was advertised as being overseen by an artist-craftsman- Louis Comfort Tiffany himself. Mid-tier art glass imported from Europe and sold by domestic companies that imitated Tiffany could easily

⁶⁴ Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class* (Project Gutenberg, 2008), Chapter 3. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/833/833-h/833-h.htm#link2HCH0001>.

⁶⁵ Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 92- 93.

be viewed in a positive context due to its close visual association with the forms of favrile. Carnival glass allowed even those with limited budgets to brighten their homes with practical but useful pressed iridescent wares. The United States has continued to grow as a primarily consumerist culture, and identity and the ownership of certain goods continue to play a major role in society. Owning objects that beautify the home and communicate visually about the intellectual cultivation, moral superiority, and social importance of the owner significantly affect lifestyles well into the twenty-first century United States.

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