

# Dream Glass Studio with Ocean View

by Kay Bain Weiner

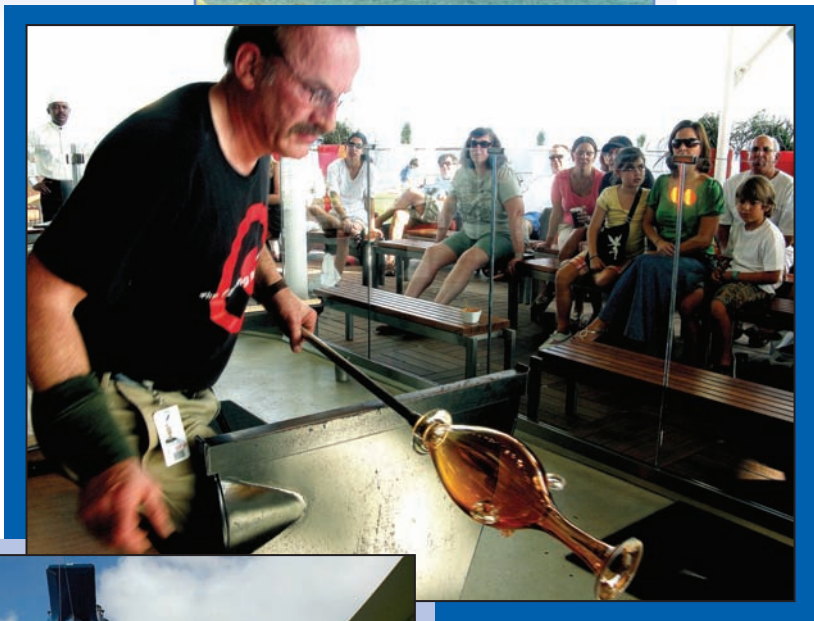
Balmy breezes gently caress the sail-like structure atop the new cruise ship *Solstice*. The large abstract configuration, fifteen stories high, houses a sleek, sophisticated hot glass studio. Celebrity cruise line in collaboration with the Corning Museum of Glass has created a history making first—a glassblowing studio with a surrounding amphitheater at sea. Set in a country club environment known as “The Lawn Club,” the grassy area features an exciting hot glass presentation that takes place three to four times a day.

## Hot Glass Demonstration at Sea

The glass studio is staffed by four flameworkers, who are often referred to as gaffers, from the Corning Museum who demonstrate the art of blowing glass. These specialists work in pairs or teams to create unique vessels and sculptures of all shapes and sizes for each one-hour-long presentation.

Demonstrating to fascinated spectators, one of the glass artists explains the tools, equipment, and procedures while another begins demonstrating by gathering on his blowpipe a small gob of molten glass from the hot glass batch. The gaffer blows through the tube, slightly inflating the glass gob with air, using centrifugal force or gravity while shaping the glass with simple tools such as a metal spatula, marver, or damp cloth or in a mold. Meanwhile twirling the pipe in his fingers, from a nearby table he gathers more glass frit on the hot glass gob and quickly places it in the glory hole. When the mass becomes molten once again, the gaffer removes it from the heat and blows into the pipe as he twists and turns the pipe and manipulates the molten glass into a shape. This process is repeated until the glass is blown into its final form. It is then cut from the blowpipe. The completed blown piece is placed in the annealing oven where it will remain for hours.

The Hot Glass Show on the ship is modeled after the live glass-making program that began in 1997 at The Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York. It was designed to engage, educate, and inspire about the art, history, and science of glass. The narration is friendly, articulate, and entertaining. Screens above the demonstration area allow the audience of approximately 125 people to see details closely. Their goal is to work for the glass process and not the product itself.



## Bringing Glass Art to the People

Questions from the audience are encouraged. People want to know, for example, how difficult it is to keep the thickness of the glass even on all sides. Steve Gibbs, manager of the group, explains how gaffers get in the habit of moving their fingers while continually turning the blowpipe evenly. And what

happens if the glass falls off and breaks? “It is placed in the glass recycle bin and reheated,” Steve explains. “It is easier to start with recycled glass then to make a new batch.” Each show is different, but all relate to particular techniques or cultures appropriate to the current itinerary. By refraining from making repetitive pieces, the demonstrators keep each show unique. The finished art is given away periodically to delighted members of the audience.

“We are the glass evangelists who bring the ancient, mystical, and magical material to life,” Steve relates. Each staff member has had at least six to eight years of in-depth training and working experience. Not only do the flameworkers need to be very adept at their craft, but glassblowing can also be very strenuous work, since the molten glass is very heavy and can weigh as much as forty pounds. Working with the public requires that staff members are outgoing and friendly. However, they must also be flexible as schedules, duties, and unforeseen situations onboard the ship can change the routine. As flameworkers, they have the opportunity to work on the *Solstice* for a period of three months while visiting various ports throughout the world. Their job is demanding but rewarding, as they work three to six hours every day. Glassblowing demonstrations take place periodically each day, even as late as



midnight. They can enjoy all of the ship's facilities and activities available onboard that do not coincide with their presentations. The glass artists receive board and a private stateroom, and a family member is permitted to be a guest for a one-week cruise at no cost during that period of time. After the inaugural season, gaffers for the *Solstice's* Hot Glass Show will come from a worldwide pool of master glassmakers, all of them chosen and trained by The Corning Museum of Glass.

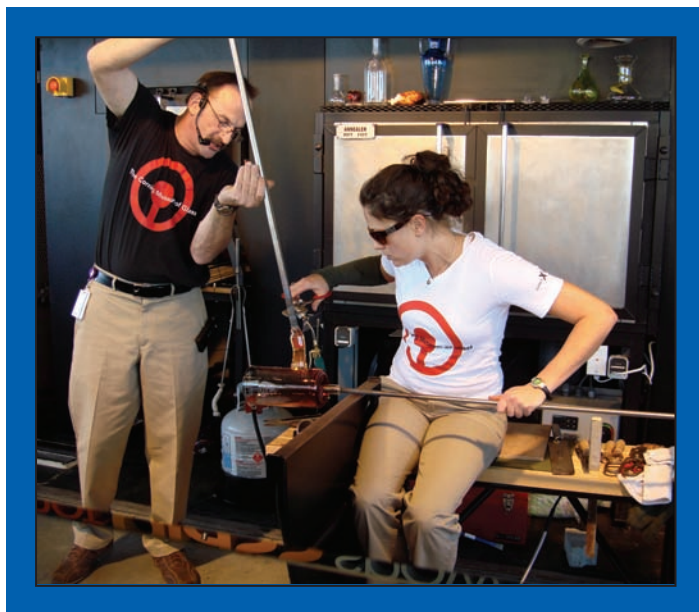
### Special Requirements

The studio's color-coordinated equipment was specially designed for the ship at a cost of thousands of dollars. Most hot shops use a combination of gas, propane, and electricity to power glassmaking equipment. Because of the ship's specifications, however, this hot shop must be 100 percent electrically powered and was constructed with precedent setting technology. The furnaces and annealers run twenty-four hours a day and are turned off approximately one time a year, which is when the refractory is replaced in the annealer oven. In the rare instance of fire, there is emergency equipment in place.

Weather and the ships' motion can sometimes affect how the studio equipment is set. Therefore, the temperature of the equipment may need adjusting in response to various wind or air temperatures. The show is subject to be cancelled due to extreme weather conditions or trade winds.

### A Grand Ship

Celebrity's *Solstice*, which will sail the waters of the Caribbean in the winter and the Mediterranean in the summer, is a premium-category ship that boasts impeccable service and luxury amenities



in every stateroom and lounge. The ship's decor is highlighted by an important art collection that consists of work by ninety-eight artists from twenty-six countries. It is the result of over two years of curating, creative planning, purchasing, production, and installation—and represents an investment of approximately five million dollars. For example, the artwork displayed onboard is a roll call of many of the most respected artists in the contemporary art world. The artists and artwork carefully chosen for these areas portray light or water symbolically, stylistically, abstractly, or realistically.

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The focus is glass art, with cast divider glass walls and ceilings, sandblasted glass elevator doors, and handblown and cast colorful vessels and sculptures of all sizes and shapes. In the atrium, located midship, dramatic glass stairs that are accentuated underneath by green neon lighting have been christened the “Stair of Light” and the “Stair of Water.” There’s even a gift shop onboard that markets exquisite glass pieces.

### Glass Conference Aboard Ship

You can come aboard and be part of an unprecedented event. A glass Conference and symposium for glass artists and lovers of glass will be held aboard this elegant ship. The KBW Art Glass Educational Foundation will be sponsoring a unique, national one-week glass conference to be held on the *Solstice* beginning January 10, 2010. Sailing round-trip from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, to three ports in the Caribbean, the tour will feature art glass lectures, slide presentations,

and demonstrations presented by nationally renowned glass artists. The conference tours will be invited on a private art tour of the ship’s award-winning art and glass collection. Some of the lectures will include: *Collecting Art and Glass for Pleasure or Investment*; *Hot Glass Techniques*; *Photographing Your Glass and Artwork*; *Tiffany’s Contribution to the Art and Glass World*; and *Computer Tips for the Glass Artist or Collector*. Panel discussions, get-togethers, and cocktail parties are some of the special events planned. If you love glass, you will enjoy the camaraderie while getting acquainted with glass authors, retailers, publishers, instructors, manufacturers, glass artists, hobbyists, and art glass lovers from all over the country who will be joining us. There is a wide assortment of accommodations to fit every pocketbook. The glass conference is open to everyone from novice to experienced glass artist, even plain folk. So come along. We’re gonna have some fun!

FLOW

*The special conference is available through the efforts of the board of The Kay Bain Weiner Glass Art Educational Foundation, also known as the KBW Foundation. The Foundation was developed in 2006 as a non-profit (501)(3)(c) organization. Its mission is to stimulate public interest in glass art and growth in the art glass industry through educational projects. This includes the distribution of books to high schools and colleges and provides scholarships to various conferences held in the United States. For more details about the Foundation, the upcoming cruise, or a brochure, go to the KBW Foundation website at [www.kbwfoundation.com](http://www.kbwfoundation.com). You can also call (760) 603-8646 for details or to sign up for the cruise with special rates and register for the conference. A nominal refundable deposit will hold your place until October.*

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