

A COLLECTOR'S WORLD

BY BRIAN BOWDEN

Hi, my name is Brian, and I'm a Marble Collector. (*In unison*) "Hi, Brian!" Oh wait—this isn't an MA (Marbleholics Anonymous) meeting? Maybe it should be. I've found over the past five-plus years that many marble collectors can tend to get very addicted to the acquisition of marbles for some reason. When asked why this is, none of us really seems to know for sure, other than to point out that perfectly round, smooth glass spheres are just *so* beautiful and enchanting! For us, there's simply an incredible attraction that we can't quite explain. It's just there once we discover them. I've learned that it's the same for many artists as far as the creation of marbles goes. Maybe it is simply the laws of physics, which seem to favor the creation of perfect spheres in nature. Gravity and such forces are wonderful things, aren't they, especially when they are used by glass artists to create more marbles! Of course, it may simply be that we collectors are all born with the "collector gene" and can't help it.

By this time, I now have marbles from over 300 different glass artists in my collection. I have certain types of marbles and glass that I prefer. I still tend to be the type of collector, however, who likes to have at least one of every style. Yes, it's a horrible curse, at least when money and display space aren't unlimited. There are many different types of collectors, though. There are the "purists"—those who will only collect perfectly round marbles and don't want "none of them-there critters" on their marbles or bumps or facets or anything else that might mar that perfect surface. There are what I call "rainbow" collectors—those who love the brightly colored marbles and thus will tend to gravitate to the furnace-worked varieties and sometimes soda lime and satake as well, at least until the boro fully catches up in color. There are the "nature" collectors—those who love the earthy blue/green/brown tones of boro and thus can never get enough of fuming and other boro techniques. There are those who love colors, flowers, shiny dichro, space, swirls, classics, murrine, sea life, symmetry . . . and the list could go on and on.

We collectors like a *really* wide variety of styles and content in our marbles. Yet as varied as our likes and dislikes are, there are also certain things that artists can do that will make collectors want more and more of their marbles. I will try to share attributes of both the glass and the artist that I have learned collectors generally enjoy across the

board. Some of these things might be naturally intuitive for you, and some of them might be long understood. Others, however, might be areas you hadn't thought about before or maybe ones that you can still improve on. Hopefully some of this will be beneficial to all marble artists.

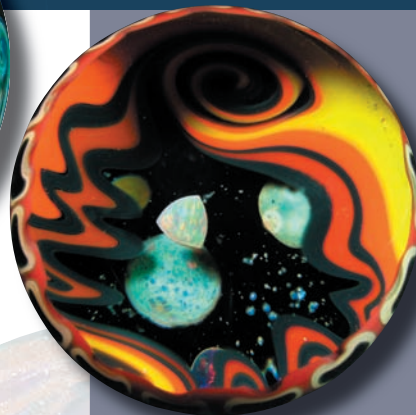
I will start by discussing the glass and the marbles themselves—how the marbles are created. When I first began collecting, really not that long ago, there were a lot more issues in these areas than there are today. I believe that this knowledge has spread quickly among artists, and newer artists now understand many of these things from the beginning. However, I'll lay them out anyway.

First off is perfect roundness. Obviously, marbles are supposed to be round, but you'd be surprised at how many marbles I have that roll like a drunken sailor. If your rounding process isn't bringing about nice, smooth rollers, then you probably need to work on it some more. A perfect sphere is a beautiful thing; an oval or egg is not—unless it was meant to be that way. Always use a mold; it's an essential tool and there's no reward for mastering gravity, since you will most likely not. Some artists even use sphere grinders for absolute spherical and surface perfection. This raises the marble cost and certainly isn't a necessity or even needed if your mold usage brings good results. However, it surely does give you a beautiful marble!

Next is perfect surface condition. If we collectors damage our marbles in any way, from a scratch to a ding or, horror of horrors, a moon, we spiral into depression. Okay, maybe it's not that bad, but it's a big-time bummer! So we certainly don't enjoy receiving marbles straight from the artist that have surface flaws already built into them. Pits from bubbles, dents or bumps from punty marks,

Top to Bottom
Space Marble Universe
by Gateson Recko
Pink Cherry Blossoms
by Ayako Hattori
Blue Cherry Blossoms
by Akihiro Ohkama
Hollow Filigrana
by Richard Charles Hollingshead





Top to Bottom
Many Murrine
 by Chris Juedemann
Travicello
 by Travis Weber
Space Wigwag
 by Stephan Pope
Goldstone Swirl
 by Chris Juedemann

join creases, devitrification, or any spot at all that's not completely smooth—we don't like to see it. see it. The better you can establish your reputation for delivering flawless surface perfection, the more often collectors will be back for more. This is one of *the* most important aspects of marble creation—achieving the perfect surface—and it can't be stressed enough.

How about bubbles? Yeah, collectors don't like them much when they're not supposed to be there. Sometimes they can be *very* cool aspects of the intended design of the marble—"bubbles in water," controlled air traps, and the like. We love those! But if the bubbles aren't supposed to be there, then work to avoid them and get rid of them, as they can be very distracting to an otherwise well-implemented design. Now, it's harder to control the bubbles in soft glass of course, since sometimes the glass starts with bubbles, so sometimes we're more forgiving about those. If you can figure out how to get rid of them, however, then you'll be rewarded.

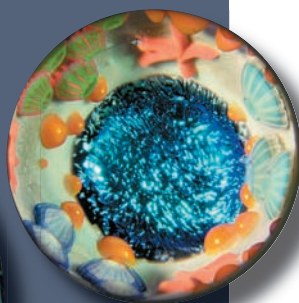
Join lines, usually between a clear lens and the main disc of the marble, should be covered up. This isn't much of an issue with soft glass, but these can be *very* distracting in boro. There are techniques to minimize this occurrence, but I haven't heard of any way to fully eliminate it yet with boro. Therefore, the marble design should include some sort of pinwheeling or other surface work that will mask the existence of these lines. We don't care if they're there—as long we can't see them. If you can master all of these marble attributes, then it's just a matter of coming up with sweet designs that we can't live without.

There are a few points to be made about marble design as well. One of these is symmetry. In general, marble collectors *love* symmetry in their marbles. The sphere lends itself beautifully to this application, since a sphere can always be partitioned into evenly matched sections no matter how small you go. For the nonabstract designs,

we love to see tight divisions, controlled and even dots, and straight lines (if they're supposed to be straight). Really focus on quantity control in your dot creation and get just the right amount of glass every time for just the right size dots. Focus on the placement of those dots so there's just the right number in each hemisphere or quadrant. The tighter the design, the more appealing it is, and you can garner a reputation for being an artist who pays attention to the details. We like anal retentiveness in our artists. Woo-hoo!

Color is another all-important factor that I think is often overlooked by artists, especially when they are starting out. There are some artists who are masters of color combination in glass and who can actually talk your ears off about it. This is a *good* thing, because ears can always grow back! Take some color classes if you can or simply study color wherever you can find the knowledge base.





Top to Bottom
Tidal Pool
 by James Daschbach
Jack Kerouac
 by Chris Judemann
Dot/Splat Pattern
 by Daniel Trilli

Learn how colors interact, especially within the context of glass. It's just a fact that some combinations are pleasing to the human eye and others make you want to dive off a building. Few things make me want to jump as much as having a marble that has a wonderful design in the lens and a wonderful design on the backside, and yet the colors in the two different designs (inside and out) clash like a wolf in a chicken coop. A perfect marble

design needs to flow all the way around and through the design. Make sure the colors you are choosing are going to bring contented grins to the mugs of your collectors.

Okay, enough about the glass. Let's talk about the people, the artists who are creating the marbles. Some of you hermits might not realize it, but the collectors of your glass really like to get to know you! All of the collectors I've talked to, including myself (my other personality), say that they love chatting with the artists, getting to know who they are, where they come from, what their story is. The more we know and like the artist, the more we like the glass. It's as simple as that. And, of course, the opposite occurs as well. If you do things to upset a collector, then the glass just doesn't look as pretty or cool any longer. It's basic human nature, whether we like it or not. In light of that, it behooves you as an artist to find ways to let your customers get to know you. Going to shows is a great way to do that. Spending time online in community is another. Three and a half years ago my friend, Craig Saxton, and I created an online forum called Glass Addiction (go to glassaddictionforum.com). Our vision was to bring marble collectors and artists together where we could chat, share pictures, sell glass, and generally get to know one another. We talk a lot about marbles but also other glass as well, and it's been a wonderful success and a great way to get to know each other. Recently some of the artists from our community gathered together to create a Glass Addiction marble, which will now travel around the world to visit members of our community. We do a lot of different fun activities. Come join us if you'd like!

You've heard the saying, "Out of sight, out of mind"? Well, it applies to marble artists. If we're not seeing you, we're not thinking about you, and then we're not buying your work as much. Some of this is basic marketing, but hey, it works. Find ways to stay in our consciousness. Shows, forums, e-mails, phone calls, cards, or any other way you can think of to communicate with collectors—do it! It is time well spent as long as the quality of your work doesn't suffer from it. One major pet peeve of us collectors is not getting a response to communication we initiate, often through e-mail. Take the time to at least acknowledge the e-mail even if you don't want

to do a special order or commission or whatever. It's much better to politely say no with a short explanation than to simply ignore a potential customer.

Make customer service a priority. You may hate it, but it's a necessity if you want to truly be successful. Pay attention to the details or find somebody who will do this for you. I know many artists who work with a partner since, let's face it, many artists aren't wired for these kinds of details. When a collector buys a marble, it's literally like waiting for Christmas to come in the mail. There's nothing like Christmas all year round. Woo-hoo! Just make sure Christmas comes quickly—get to the post office the next day—and a simple thing like this will endear you to your collectors. Not sure what to do with all those seconds? Throw them in as a lagniappe (a freebie) occasionally. Collectors really enjoy getting things like this, and they inspire loyalty.

And there's your bottom line right there—loyalty. This is the golden goody that you're searching for from your collectors. Do the little things that create loyalty and keep us coming back for more. Do the things that cause those marbles of yours to bring happy smiles to our faces every time we see them sitting there perched on their little stands. Make us want more, more, more!!! Not that this is very difficult with a collector like me, but hey, a sense of loyalty makes it even worse.

Another thing that marble collectors enjoy is stories. If you're creating something artistic that means something to you, then it often has a story behind it, and we love to hear these stories. I don't know how many times I've only had a partial interest in a marble, but then I heard the story behind it and had to have it. Once something becomes personal it can gain a lot of meaning for the collector, so tell those stories and let us know what is behind that marble. Was there some particular inspiration for creating that design, that pattern, using those colors? Was there an event in your life that led to the creation of the marble? Did some people you know help bring about the design? Is there a particular landmark or place or song that you were thinking about when you created the marble? What was the inspiration behind your art? Knowing the story, if it has one, adds value every time, so when you go to sell your work, tell that story, whether it's in an eBay description, on a gallery card, at a forum, or wherever. Inquiring collectors want to know!

Finally, a few words about signatures on marbles. Bottom line—always, always sign your work—all of it! Even your earliest creations and seconds should be signed if they are being given away or sold to the public in any way. In the future—who knows how far in the future—somebody is going to be looking at your marble and wondering who made it. Without a sig, they may never know whose it is, and you'll get no credit for that creation. Most collectors really hate getting marbles that aren't signed, and I even keep a list of marbles that need to be signed once I see the artist. However, there are good ways and bad ways to sign marbles.

The sig should be small (but not too small), neat, and legible. It should be placed in an inconspicuous spot on the marble, one that





Off
with their heads!

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doesn't distract from the viewing of the marble. It's very irritating for a sig to be placed smack dab in the middle of a prime viewing location. The bottom pole is often the best spot but not always. The equator, if it has one, is usually another good spot. Many collectors, but not all, prefer signature milli chips if you are able to make them and if you are making marbles that allow for their use in a nondistracting way. The titanium pen is the other great option for signing and is highly recommended. Rarely do collectors like to see a sig scratched into the marble anymore, when a ti pen could be used. There are a few artists who are really good at scratching a thin, neat, legible sig, but only a few. Most often, it comes out very ugly, so back away from the dremel! Make sure you sign with the year. A simple 07, 08, or whatever is fine, but the full year is okay, also. It's very frustrating to not know for sure what year a marble is made. Collectors just really like to know these details! When signing seconds, you may want to sign differently or add something that indicates it is a second. Lastly, take advantage of publications and places such as the Glass Addiction forum where you can record your various signatures for historical reference.

To all the marble artists from all the collectors—thank you—for creating such beautiful, intriguing, miniature works of glass art! You will probably never know how much your little orbs of goodness bring happiness and peace and other great things to our lives, sometimes at moments when we really need them. But they do, and we are blessed that you've chosen to use your gifts to create these little balls of beauty! Thank you!!

FLOW
bkbowden1@yahoo.com



Thunderbolt Milli
by Josh Sable