

Glass Stock East and West A Time to Share and Grow



Photo by Rob Hall

by Polly Toombs

Traveling has always been a passion of mine but not in the tourist type of way—just little adventures out into the world where you can submerge yourself in another space for a few days and see what it's like. One of the things I discovered that I love about the glass world is all the opportunities out there to go on a little adventure, play with glass, and meet other like-minded people.

The challenge for me has always been to get over my shyness, especially at some of the large events with hundreds of people. Back in 2009 in my search for classes, however, I found an interesting event that sounded different and even a little mysterious—three days of classes with games and contests mixed in for fun. There was a lottery to get in to keep the event from getting too big, and it was being held on the Oregon Coast.

Teachers and classes were listed, but nothing was scheduled other than the event date, which was just before Labor Day. It sounded great, so I signed up with Deb Crowley for Glass Stock 2009. As it grew closer to summer, more information and details about the event came in newsletters until the day in June arrived when I got to pick my classes.

A Smorgasbord of New Experiences

Finally, a road trip! I was off to the Oregon Coast and looking forward to the marble run class with Bandhu Dunham. Even though I'd tried it a little, boro was still a big mystery and I was looking forward to finding out more. One of the great things about Glass Stock is the mix of classes—not just boro, not just beads, and not even just glass. Out of the six classes you take, there are three torch classes, a demo class, and two “other” classes.

Every year the classes and featured artists change, so there is always something different to try. Even the venue has been known to change at any moment—usually the last possible one—just to keep Deb and her crew on their toes. Every year there's an assortment of classes or demos in boro and soft glass as well as some fusing, metalsmithing, and jewelry making, and even fiber arts.

Compared to the more formal conventions I had been to, this was the complete opposite and way more my style. There were about 80 people including the staff, crew, and attendees. I enjoy the mix of new and returning people that gives the event consistency without the rigidity of feeling like a customer being run through a formula. I also love all the open torch time in the evenings. It's a great opportunity to practice, play, and socialize.

One of my favorite things about this event is seeing the room lit up and abuzz with 40 torches all fired up. If there's a technique you want to see or a class you missed, chances are there is someone who

will show you during open torch. And 40 torches makes it all the more likely that there is a torch you have wanted to try but never had the opportunity to do so. In some cases it might even be one you didn't want to try at all and were happy to find out it wasn't so intimidating after all.

The Infamous Show-and-Tell

One of the things Deb Crowley does to make Glass Stock such a great event is the dreaded opening demo. Funny how often doing something you dread will create future opportunities. Doing a demo in front of everyone sounds daunting, but it's really not as bad as all that. First off, you pick something you know you can do easily. It's not a flame off, and chances are that what seems basic to you is new and interesting to someone else. Best of all, the participants are busy doing their own demos and dreading it like everyone else, so if you are really shy you might get yours done without too many watchers. Once that's over with and you realize it didn't kill you, it is much less intimidating to torch in front of everyone else. That was hugely helpful for me on many levels. By the end of the event you've probably torched near just about everyone anyway, so it's better not to waste time worrying about something that four days later you won't want to end!





Better Every Year

My first Glass Stock in 2009 was held on the Oregon coast. Glass Stock, now known as Glass Stock West, has been held in Eugene, Oregon, for the last five years, and Glass Stock East was added in 2011. Every year and every event has its own new challenges to be met. Deb Crowley keeps coming up with new themes, new teachers, new classes, and even new venues just to keep us all inspired and give us opportunities to try new techniques and make new friends.

I feel incredibly fortunate to now be part of Deb's support team. It's been amazing over the years to see what she does to deal with all the logistics of these events. Even when everything looks all planned out and ready to go, there are glitches, such as a last minute venue closure for the 2012 Glass Stock West that was saved by Cornerstone Glass stepping up with a location for the "bead ladies." They love having us there!

Glass Stock East has not been immune to venue changes either. Like so many other blessings in disguise, the 2016 event will be coming to The Glass Resort in Frederick, Maryland. The Glass Resort, north of Baltimore, is a larger venue, and we're looking forward to having more room. I love going to Glass Stock East just as much as West, and I'm looking forward to what Deb brings us for 2016.

The 2016 Glass Stock West will be hosted at Cornerstone Glass in Eugene, Oregon, and the 2016 Glass Stock East will be hosted at The Glass Resort in Frederick, Maryland. Information about both events and how to sign up are at glassstock.com.

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