

# Collector Editions

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*Faberge's Fabulous Spring Egg from the Forbes Collection*

# Collector Editions

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Robert Forbes, who photographed Carl Faberge's "Spring Flowers Egg" from the Forbes Magazine Collection, shares in the traditional family passion. He is the son of *Forbes Magazine* founder Malcolm Forbes.

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# A Search For Inner Form

*Steven Weinberg's innovative casting technique opens new glass vistas*

by Paul Hollister

The Studio Glass movement has something for just about everybody. But if you were to set it all out according to types on tables in one huge armory, you'd find most of the tables supporting fat, heavy vases of a few basic shapes with colored, layered designs. There would be tables bearing a variety of rather large, important looking sculptural or 'conversation pieces,' several tables loaded with 'fun things' in bright colors, a few tables of rather pretentious 'weirdies,' and one table of glass that doesn't seem to fit into any category but keeps catching your eye. Here you are confronting the glass that could make glass history.

On the special table are several thick glass squares of a pleasant, greenish sea-wave tint, that look at first glance like complicated ashtrays. You touch one that conceals a frosted design deep inside. You probe for an opening but your finger stubs against the glass. What is creating this illusion of inner space? What are these objects and how are they made?

Glass artist Steven Weinberg calls them "one of a kind tabletop modules." The frosted inner design is actually hollow, or as Weinberg likes to call it, "a negative space," like foam trapped in a wave. Weinberg traps his designs inside the glass by casting; in other words, he makes a mold that represents the inner design and then pours (casts) hot glass over it. The soft green tinge comes from iron in the soda lime glass.

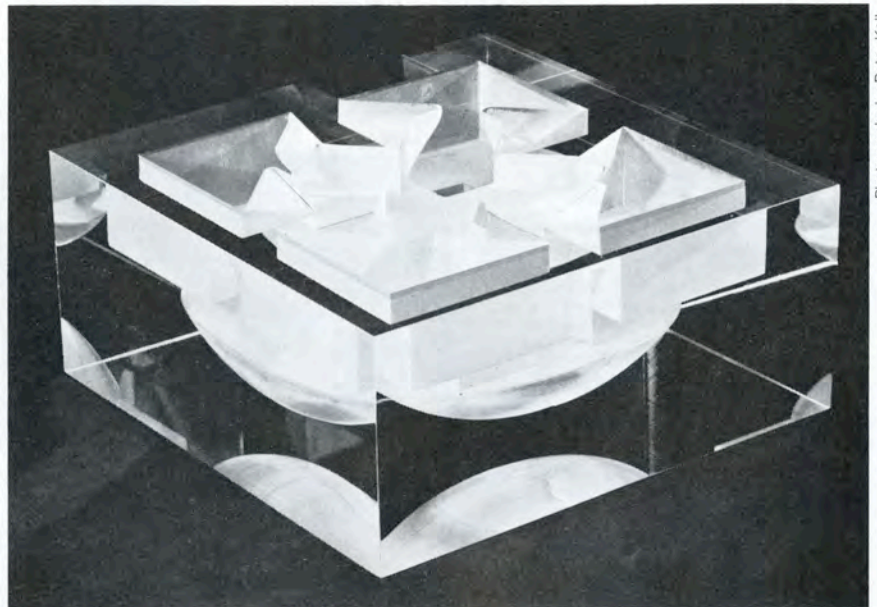
One area of Weinberg's Providence, Rhode Island studio looks like a child's playroom. Basic geometric forms in plaster, the modular units of his art, are everywhere. Weinberg molds the plaster—actually a mixture of plaster and powdered silica—into cubes, squares, semi-spheres, and plays with these building blocks until he gets a combination he likes. He cuts the final design with a band saw, which leaves its mark on the rough, grainy edges of the design, something like the texture we see in buildings where concrete has been poured into wooden molds.

After he has cast the glass over the mold, and the piece has been annealed, the curved inner surfaces not marked by the band saw are frosted by sandblasting,

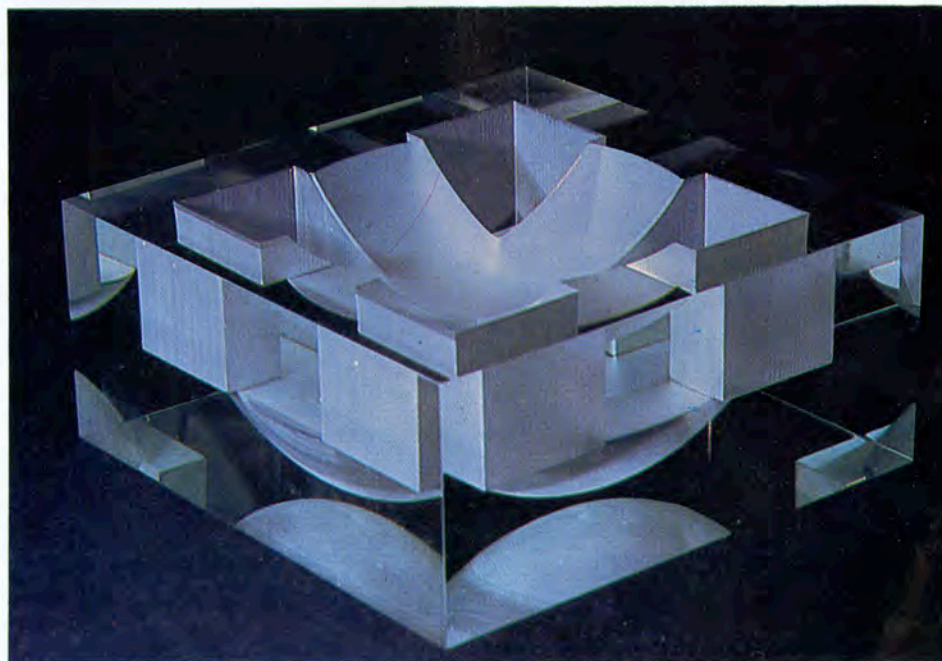
to give the three-dimensional design a consistent texture. All the outer surfaces of the glass are clear and polished, which sets off the inner design.

The finished results, each one of a kind, are marvelous to study, touch, turn over, or stand on end. Weinberg, who won't be twenty six until June, already has a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Rhode Island School of Design, and his

work is in the permanent collection of the Corning Museum of Glass and other museums. He began casting eight-inch glass squares a couple of years ago after trying other geometrical shapes. The first designs were relatively simple—egg crate effects, intersecting semi-spheres, squares within squares—with the big clear glass square acting as a rigid frame. As he experimented, each piece hopefully repre-



Photographs by Peter Kolik



senting an advance in design over the previous one, Weinberg overpowered the visual rigidity of the big square by making the designs less symmetrical and more complex. Since one side of the plaster mold rested on the bottom during the casting process, it left openings in the glass, "dangerous avenues," as he calls them, something like entrances to unexplored caves.

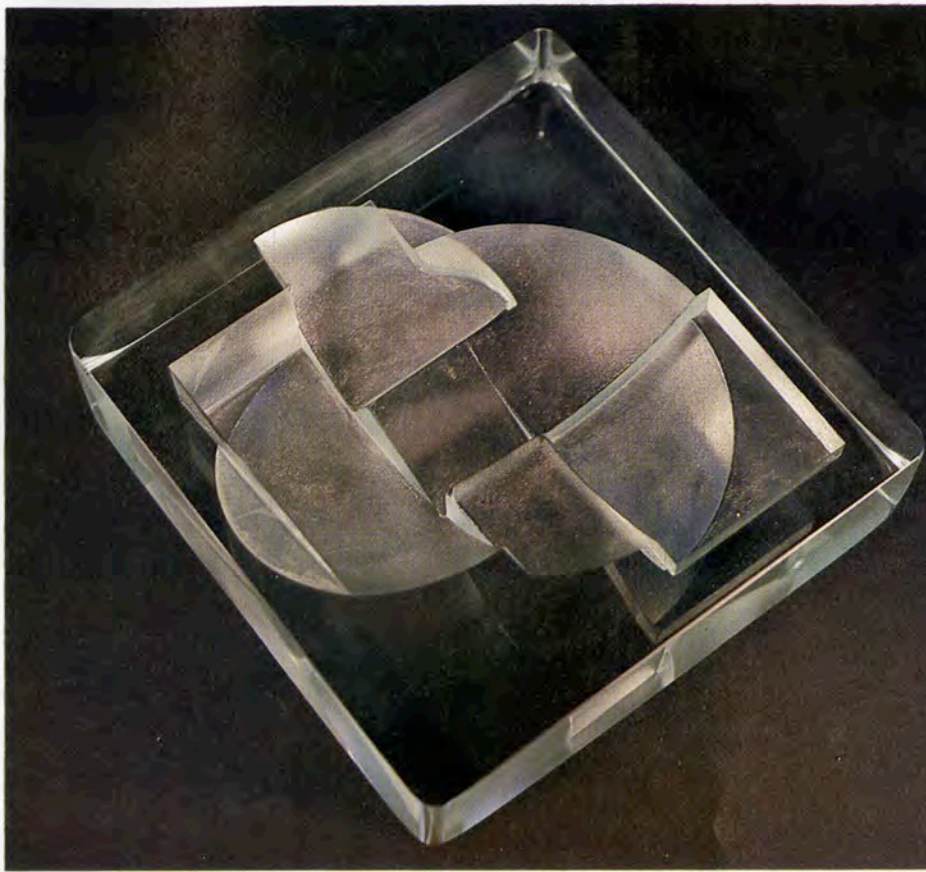
The negative/positive look of each piece is elusive, but, says Weinberg, "I want to keep away from the 'kitschy' acrylic look of frosted, encapsulated space—"I don't want my work to look as if it were blasted out of lucite." I asked Weinberg if he had thought of making his pieces clear inside as well as out? Yes, he had given it a lot of thought. "Inside, where no polishing tool can reach, my glass could be polished by a very fine sandblasting technique that sprays wood pulp in the final polishing. But a better method might be polishing with hydrofluoric acid, though the health hazards are frightening." Hydrofluoric acid, the only acid that will dissolve glass, can also dissolve the lungs or burn a hole through the hand. Weinberg is concerned with health hazards of glassmaking in general. "It's not just playing," he says, "I always wear a respirator when I'm sandblasting."

At first glance the designs are deceptively simple, but these are no easy conversation pieces. To begin with, the design takes a minimum of three days to compile. The casting and annealing require another six to eight days. Subsequent grinding and sandblasting averages a week for each piece. To finish a single work requires from three weeks to one month. Weinberg casts about thirty

pieces a year. Of these only fifteen or twenty are acceptable to him, and the rest are cut up and remelted as cullet for other pieces. Though casting is an ancient technique, no exact parallel to Weinberg's combination of techniques comes to mind in the whole history of glassmaking. But his pieces are not only technically innovative, they are visually powerful.

As he explores the possibilities of his restrictive, eight-inch square form, Wein-

berg's designs are changing. Simple, balanced forms include asymmetrical elements, static patterns appear to jump around, new avenues of entry and exit tunnel through the clear glass, designs burst their confines. In the past year Weinberg has been reheating some apparently finished pieces, letting the flat top sag like a hammock into the inner void to create additional sculptural form. "Each piece suggests something new to me," he enthuses. "When I get what I planned I



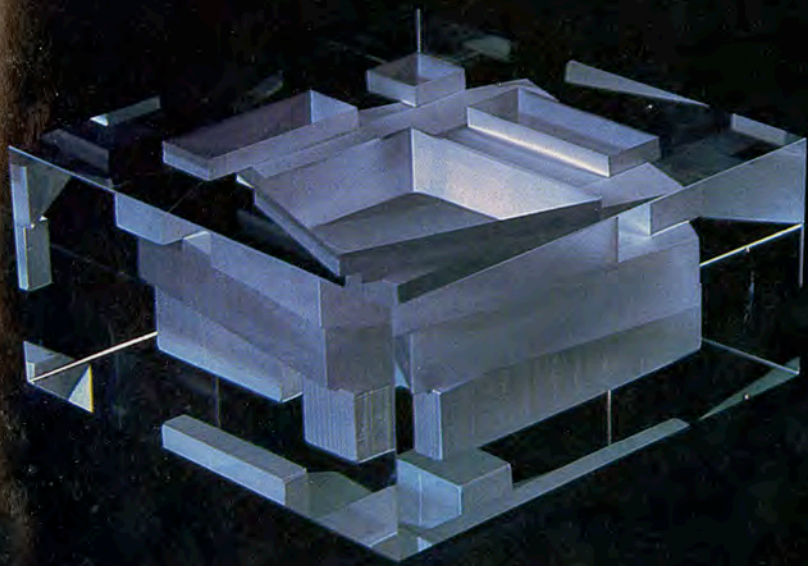
**Above:** Square block of interlocking semi-spheres was earlier Weinberg abstraction with an Art Deco look.

**Left:** 1978 square contains sunken garden of architectural forms.

**Opposite page, top:** Square form frames inset pyramids leading to frosted interior.

**Opposite page, bottom:** Sagged upper surface adds extra visual element to already three-dimensional piece.

Photographs by Ira Garber



may end up with something boring. People often ask me what I am going to do next. I really have no idea, but it wouldn't surprise me if I were casting glass twenty years from now."

Given the enormous time and labor involved, Weinberg's prices of \$750 to \$1500 seem reasonable enough—but don't wait. If the Studio Glass movement has proven anything, it has proven that fine glass has entered the mainstream of arts for which collectors are paying more each year.