

THE GLASS CLUB BULLETIN

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Kenneth Wilson sends a sampling of glass clippings for your scrutiny. Look for these brief items on multiple pages 24-25.

Part two of my Portuguese investigation was completed after returning home from Portugal and a side trip to Madeira. Both rate high on my list for enjoyment and for glass. Lisbon's **AR-CO Director, Garcia Cabral**, informs me that grants are often available for glass teachers, as Portugal is currently focused on preserving the national arts. If you are interested in teaching there please write to the editor.

The editor is also seeking submissions for the *Incomplete Credentials* page. Send photography to the editor along with the known facts (if any). The object selected will hopefully solicit missing clues from the informed readers. Check page 35 and see if you can help to identify the object in question.

The help of four volunteer proof readers was invaluable in completing this issue. Thank you for such dedication and effort.

After all the winter weather I look forward to spring and the Seminar in May. The program is everything a glass collector could hope for and more. See you there. □

Bonnie Bledsoe-Fuchs, Editor

On the Cover

The serpentine poppy stems and rosebuds climb the cast-glass panels in the fenestration of 714 Fifth Avenue.

Hidden for years under a later face lift, the remolded Art Deco Coty Building concealed the glass window panes of French designer René Lalique. They have survived in spite of modernization. First lost, then re-discovered and then again threatened with obliteration, only the loud protests of New Yorkers saved the site.

The protest was successful, and you can still see these glorious windows on Fifth Avenue today as the facade of Henri Bendel. To think of losing such a treasure is inconceivable, but Paul Hollister reminds us how vulnerable the process of preservation can be. Story on page 16.

CONTENTS

Issue 177

Some Commemorative Civil War Glasses Forrest F. Gesswein, Jr.	5
A Question of Iconography: A Stained Glass Window in the Clark Library A. M. Richard	11
Defense of Lalique Windows Paul Hollister	16
Barger Glass Collection Sold at Auction Walter B. Barbe	17
Paul Stankard Writes	19
Portuguese Glass, Part II Bonnie Bledsoe-Fuchs	21
A Few Reminders	25
Ulla Darni-Fire Forms: Glass and Metal .	26
Back Cover: 1996 Seminar Announcement	36
REVIEWS	
<i>The Elegant Epergne from the Koppelman Collection</i> Jessie McNab	28
The White House Collection of American Crafts Ursula Ilse-Neuman	31
COLUMNS	
From the Editor's Desk	2
A Letter from the President	4
Incomplete Credentials: The Object File	35

Defense of the René Lalique Windows in New York's Coty Building.

Presented by Paul Hollister, adjunct professor of glass history of the Cooper-Hewitt Masters Program, speaking in 1984 before the Landmarks Preservation Commission of New York.

Bonwit Teller, Tiffany's congenial block partner and the most sophisticated Art Deco store building in the United States, went down. It has been replaced by fifty stories of vertical stretch-Cadillac. Fifth Avenue near 57th Street—always a cross of light—is about to become a sunless canyon like Wall Street.

Sure, business is business; progress is often change; and New York is the template for change that makes it the idea center of the world.

But the big change, the *real* change at 714 Fifth Avenue would be its celebration as the jewel it is in the Fifth and 57th crown. I have looked at this building since the 1940s when my sister was a salesgirl a couple doors away at Steuben. A thousand times I have looked at its three, neglected, all-glass stories of twining Lalique poppy vines. How many all-glass fronts from 1912 are there in the western world? Is the Halladie Building in San Francisco gone?

There *are* a few glass-fronted buildings hiding in books on architecture—that most humanity-oriented of all the arts. As for 714 Fifth Avenue—if that address still means anything—it is the only one, the *unique* surviving glass shop front of its size and quality in America. UNIQUE: that demeaned, trivialized word for solitary quality. UNIQUE.

As a piece of monumental cast-glass art this spirited yet dignified, stylistically timeless, unaging glass front reduces to insignificance the sum total of every chic, yearning, sandblasted glass restaurant front in Manhattan—the sum total. It is bigger; it is better; it is the last surviving real thing.

Now you could compromise, remove just the glass before demolition of the building; and some museum might exhibit a section of it—as was done with the glass panels from the *Normandie* before a slice was stuck behind the cafeteria bar and the rest sent to storage. Or some guy from Texas might buy the whole Lalique front at auction and install it in some desert honkeytonk.

But this historic cast floral window by France's greatest designer of exuberant commercial glass is too important to be left to the whim of some agglomerator, some bulldozer operator, or some pale-faced curator forty years from now who happens to catch a glimpse of it while a wall is being pulverized. This very early, intertwining, vital glass storefront is fit to grace the atriums and gallerias of the world. Wait until it gets cleaned up; you will see. With it *in situ* Fifth Avenue can still remain our sunlit atrium, and we can still prove that New York City, after all the carnage, does truly appreciate intrinsic quality. Thank you. □



Figure 1
View from inside the atrium of Bendel today. Photographs courtesy of Henri Bendel, New York.

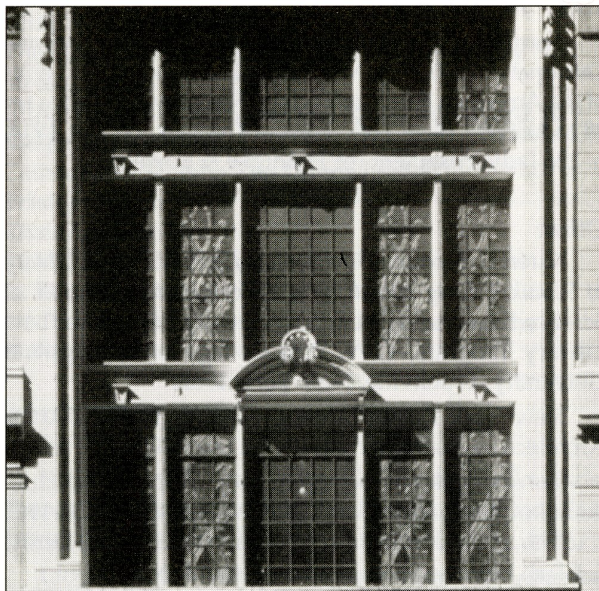


Figure 2
The Lalique fenestration of 714 Fifth Avenue, formerly the Coty Building and now the site of Henri Bendel.