

November/December
2011

CANADIAN INTERIORS

Clear winner
Jeff Goodman's glass art

B.C.'s dramatic new school
Reports from Paris and Toronto

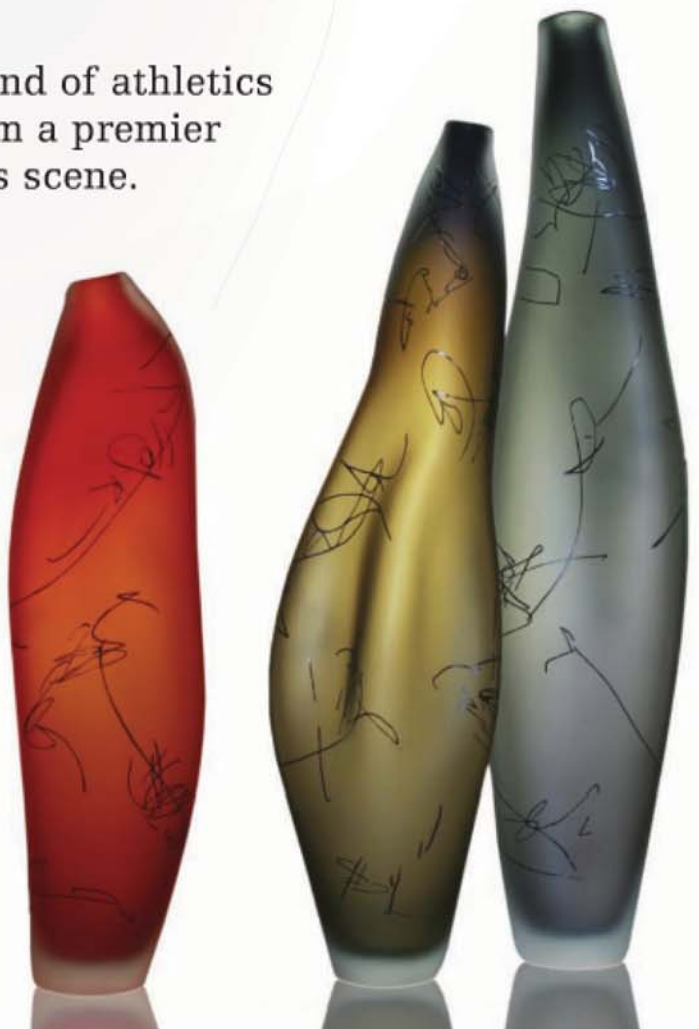
Including IDC's *Dimensions*



Blown away

Jeff Goodman's signature blend of athletics and aesthetics has earned him a premier position in Canada's art glass scene.

—By Leslie C. Smith



Playing with a scratchitti effect on his exceptional series of Scribe vessels, Jeff Goodman transfers film of his expressionistic pen-and-paper scribbles onto each surface and then sandblasts the sifted black glass into a raised cameo effect.



Goodman's latest installation, in the new Ritz-Carlton Hotel spa, in Toronto, is his 259-piece Enso chandelier: a clustered wave of simple, slightly warped elliptical shapes in varied calming tones of grey and tan.





"I'm not big on the 'art' word. We make vessels."

Every since he was a young boy, Jeff Goodman wanted to be a boat builder. The ambition, spawned from early years growing up on the West Coast in the 1960s and later summers spent there with his brother Craig, working as a salmon-fishing guide on an eight-ton ocean-going vessel, developed into obsession. (Is it just the salt air out there that gets in one's blood or was his intense boat-building desire due to race memory – some atavistic Viking legacy? His family, originally named Gudmundsun, had after all been part of the New Iceland diaspora that founded the lakefront community of Gimli, Manitoba, back in the late 19th century.)

After moving to Toronto in the 1970s, Goodman's parents bought him his own table saw and at age 15 allowed him to set up a workshop in their basement. Building furniture for a neighbourhood clientele gave him spending money throughout his high-school years and Goodman, eyes ever on the boat-building prize, decided to increase his knowledge of fine woodworking through technical training at Ontario's Sheridan College. Signing up for his first semester, he was surprised by the require-

ment to study a secondary medium. On the spur of the moment, he chose glass.

Or did glass choose him? A philosopher at heart, Goodman could argue that point. Instead, he credits the late Daniel Chrichton, head of Sheridan's glass program, for inspiring him to switch his major, saying simply: "He had great reverence for the vessel, which he conveyed to his students."

Although Goodman revels in rough surfaces and aggressive competitive activities, glass represents the mirror opposite: smooth, fragile, demanding immense delicacy of touch. What was the attraction?

"I love ellipses, they way they curve in space. And I love how virtually every shape is subtly unique."

In part, he cites his admiration for Japanese ceremonial tea bowls, mid-century abstract expressionism and Scandinavian ceramics, aesthetics he attempts to reinterpret through his glass work. Then too, the immediacy of the glass-producing process has its appeal. Each piece is like a gesture drawing to him – a quick sketch rendered with authority.

He talks of the automatist way a glass artisan must make split-second decisions,



Top left Goodman's favourite work to date is the porte cochère at the Hazelton Residence in Toronto's Yorkville. Carved from thick sand-cast glass, each LED-backlit panel is unique. **Top right** The artisan in action. **Above** Like quirky otherworldly sentinels, Goodman's signature Ovelle vessels – forming a sculpture – stand guard at the One Bedford condo lobby in Toronto.



Top left The blown-glass Hearsay installation graces the Royal Ontario Museum's C5 Restaurant/Lounge. "The core of the restaurant experience is communicating with those around you," says Goodman. "We wanted to develop an abstracted version of the intimacy of communication: leaning up to the person next to you and sharing a story." **Top right** For a private home, Goodman created a cast-glass fireplace illuminated by interior LED light. **Above** A one-of-a-kind hand-poured sand-cast glass tile.

reacting to the challenge of the instant like an athlete swinging a bat at a ball. A man who loves pushing himself physically, Goodman also enjoys pushing glassblowing to its limits, comparing the anywhere up to an hour spent in the extreme heat and hazardous intensity of his glassmaking process to playing a strenuous game of squash. "When you come out, you're sweating, exhausted."

"My 'aha' moment came when I was 14, alone on the ocean with the mountains and sun. I thought, 'I have to make the most of this life.'"

Two years studying all aspects of glass craftsmanship and artistry at Sheridan College, another year at the renowned Alfred University in Alfred, New York, and a final year's BFA from the University of Illinois. A three-year stint as a student resident glassblower at Toronto's Harbourfront studio, with work thereafter as the centre's technical advisor. Six years teaching at Sheridan in addition to founding the first of successive Toronto-based studios in 1989. Somewhere along the way, time for marriage to graphic designer Mercedes Rothwell, as well as two children: Zoë, now aged 16, and Dylan, 9.

Jeff Goodman was and is a busy man – a good thing too for his concentric circle of fans. The artisan's prodigious output of chandeliers, art glass and sand-cast panels punctuates the upper-crust

landscape from Montreal to Los Angeles. In his home-base of Toronto, Goodman's work forms the focal point of the Royal Ontario Museum's C5 Restaurant/Lounge, the luxurious Hazelton Residence, and Toronto's ritzy new Ritz-Carlton Hotel. George Bush, Sr. owns one of his pieces.

"The Jeff Goodman studio isn't me. It's the group."

Crafting art and architectural glass is not a singular occupation. Goodman credits his core staff: David Williamson; Aidan Crichton (son of his former Sheridan teacher); Blaise Campbell, "the best glassblower in Canada," who provides vital assistance on bigger projects; and especially Sylvia Lee, his workaholic designer and manager.

For someone who faces occupational danger every day, Goodman's limbs are surprisingly unmarked, save for a slight burn on his inside right forearm. "I was getting pizza out of the oven. My kids laugh at me because I work every day with kilns running at 2,500 degrees Celsius, but I only ever seem to burn myself at home."

Speaking of home, does he ever envisage returning like a salmon to his original obsession? "Absolutely. I still want to build that boat." ❧