

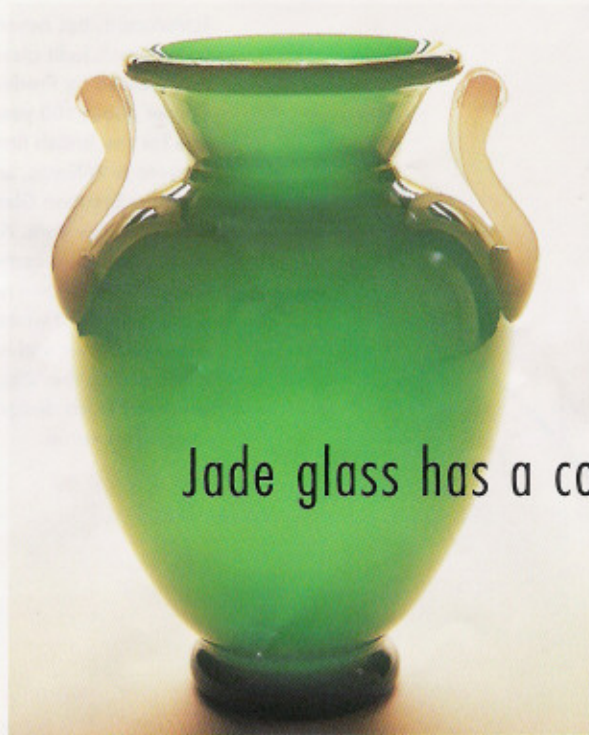
THE MANY SHADES *of* JADE

The creamy colors
of beautiful,
translucent jade glass
have lured collectors for
the past 100 years.

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Translucent, but never transparent, jade glass was created by Frederick Carder about 100 years ago for the British firm of Stevens & Williams, and later, for Steuben Glass Works in New York. A kind of art glass, jade comes in many colors. Shown here are two kinds of white jade—alabaster and ivory—made during the '20s, when Art Deco design reigned supreme.



Jade glass has a coy, seductive personality.

There's something intriguing in the milky, mysterious look of it. Always translucent but never transparent, jade glass reveals itself slowly. The creamy colors urge you to take a closer look.

What you see is a beautiful bouquet of color: two kinds of white—ivory and alabaster,

subtle Rosaline pink, citrine yellow, plum, midnight blue, turquoise, and green—the original color that first appeared in England about 100 years ago.

"In glass, color is chemistry," says collector Thomas Dimitroff, who lives in the picturesque town of Corning, New York, and could go on all day about which chemicals produce which colors. He specializes in glass made by Frederick Carder, who presided over Corning-based Steuben Glass Works from 1903 to 1932. The English-born aesthete and chemical engineer was one of the giants of 20th-century glass, not to mention the deftest hand ever to produce jadeware. "Carder had a remarkable genius for design—and a genius for chemical formulations," says Dimitroff. "It was a very happy marriage."

As for shapes, the only question for a collector is: How much time do you have? In the active period of his career at Steuben, Carder came up with more than 8,500 designs, from elaborate cut-crystal creations to simple vases. But his jade glass, which was only a portion of Carder's output, inspires a special devotion among collectors. "There is something about jade that lends itself beautifully to Art Deco lines," says Dimitroff.

And unlike many cut-glass and iridescent glass pieces, jade manages to look remarkably modern and streamlined, which may explain its growing popularity. Dimitroff notes with pleasure that eBay, the well-known auction Web site, is getting more and more traffic in jade glass these days, with a separate listing just for Steuben pieces.

"Like a lot of collectors, I deal to support my habit," says Dimitroff, who recently retired from teaching history at the local high school. In addition to producing a large volume on his passion, *Frederick Carder and Steuben Glass: American Classics*, Dimitroff has also written a book about the colorful past of his upstate New York region.

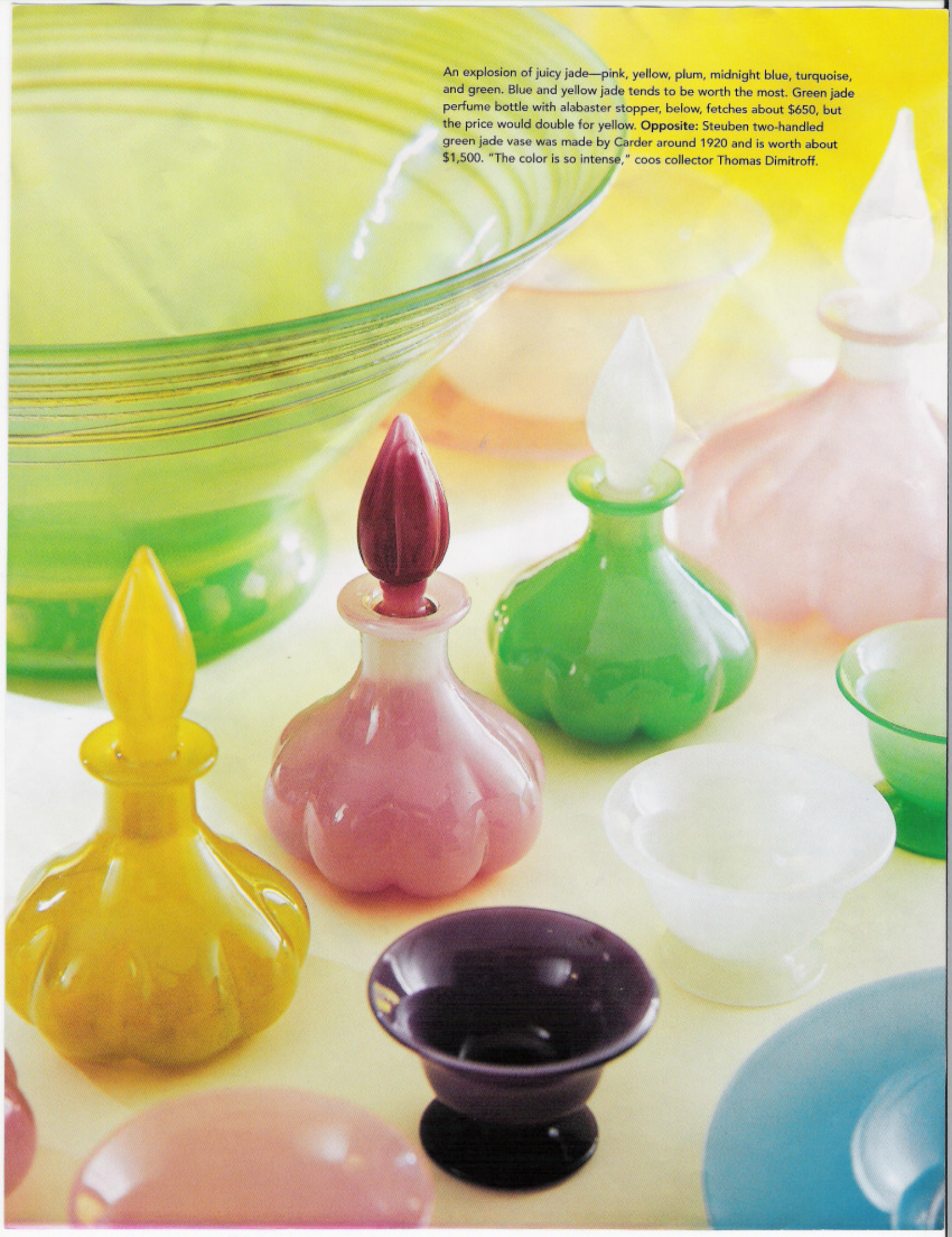
In Dimitroff's second-floor office of his grand turn-of-the-century home, a huge wall of shelves groans under the weight of his treasures. All types of glass find a home there, including a few choice examples of Steuben jade in plum, alabaster, and yellow.

Jade glass had its heyday in the 1920s. Though you often see "Depression glass," the cheaper transparent stuff, jade and most of the rest of Carder's creations for Steuben were just the opposite. Think of it as "prosperity glass."

"The emphasis was always on quality," says Dimitroff. At a time when most people weren't spending more than 50 cents on a vase, a Carder jade piece would have been \$10 or \$15—big money back then. "Carder was always much more in the English Arts & Crafts

JADE PICTURED IS FROM THE PRIVATE COLLECTIONS OF THE THOMAS DIMITROFF FAMILY; WILLIAM MEHLENBACHER; ROBERT ROCKWELL III; CATHERINE COSGROVE; RICHARD BRIGHT AND KYLE GOODMAN; AND ALBERT BRADKE AND DAVID JACOBSON.

An explosion of juicy jade—pink, yellow, plum, midnight blue, turquoise, and green. Blue and yellow jade tends to be worth the most. Green jade perfume bottle with alabaster stopper, below, fetches about \$650, but the price would double for yellow. **Opposite:** Steuben two-handled green jade vase was made by Carder around 1920 and is worth about \$1,500. "The color is so intense," coos collector Thomas Dimitroff.







The rarest of all the jades is midnight blue. Flared vase, far left, made by Steuben circa 1920 is worth about \$2,000; black-and-blue jade, acid-etched in Flambeau pattern by Steuben, \$6,000; light blue jade plate with Venetian-style applied pear, from the mid-1920s, \$800; and acid-etched light blue jade lamp, about \$4,000.

tradition, with its emphasis on craftsmanship, than American," says Dimitroff.

Jade, of course, doesn't come only in solid colors, though it happens to be one of the few glass forms that can be more striking when presented plainly, since the subtle creamy texture takes time to reveal itself.

Cased glass, when one layer is laid on another, was often used for jade. Two different jades were put together, most often alabaster and a darker color; or, for more dramatic effect, jade was partly covered with iridescent glass, known as Aurene.

It was also engraved or acid-etched like any other type of glass. Optic ribbing, often found on vases and urns, gives jade a series of regular grooves. Then there's applied decoration—a drizzle of shiny iridescence, or perhaps a coating of "glue chip"—glass fragments applied to still-hot jadeware.

The story of jade is bound up with Carder's personal history. In 1903, Carder emigrated from England, where he had been working at Stevens & Williams, the renowned British glassworks. Not surprisingly, that firm is another prominent source of jade glass for today's collectors, along with Fry, the Ohio-based American company.

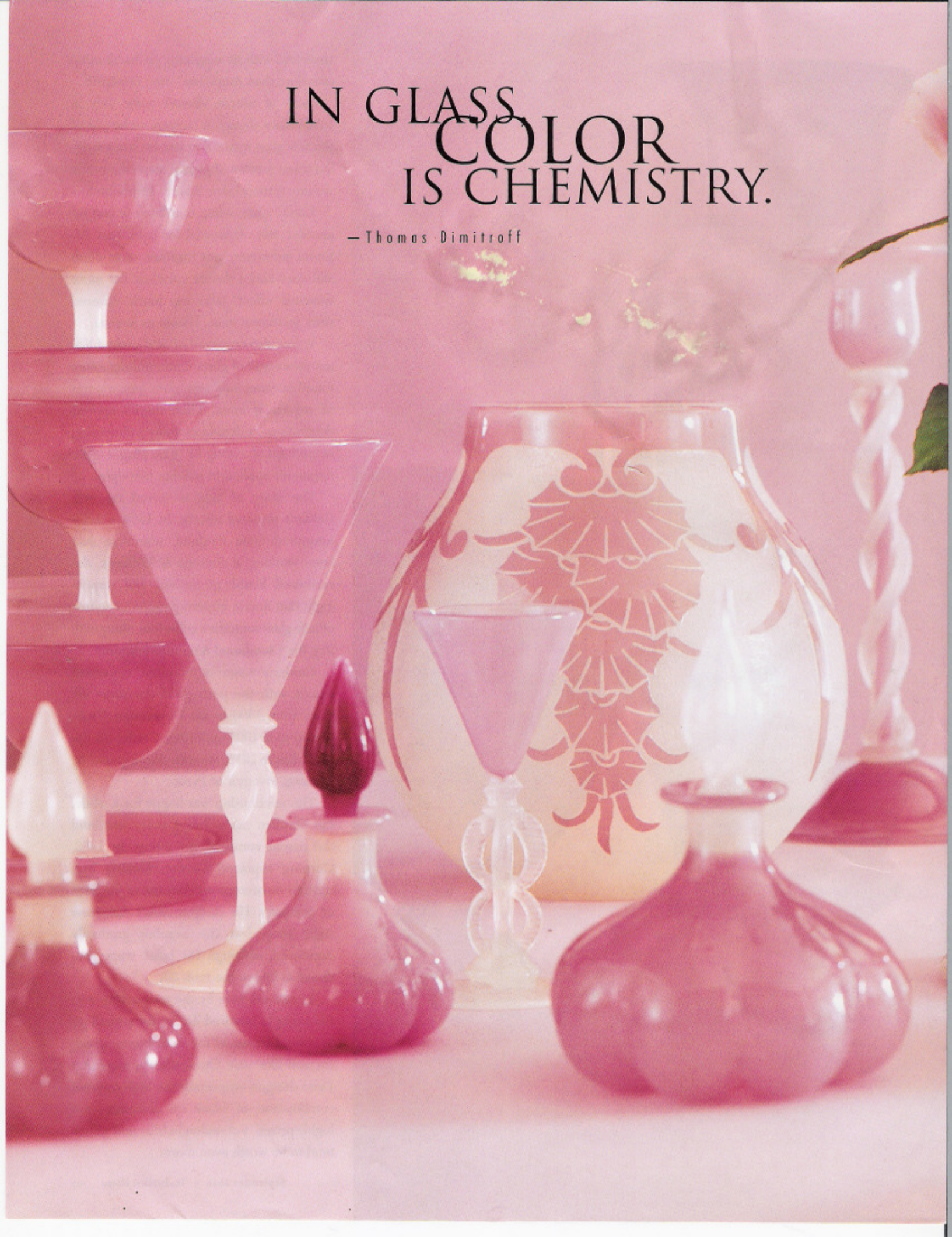
Carder's reign at Steuben coincided exactly with the peak of all American art glass, from 1900 to the Depression. From his arrival in 1903 until 1918, Carder ran the show. But in 1918, Steuben was acquired by Corning, inventor of Pyrex.

The relationship was happy for a while, but Steuben ran a deficit every year, and the parent company got jittery. In 1932, Corning replaced Carder, kicking him upstairs to become art director of the larger company. His designs didn't disappear right away, but the number gradually decreased, although his jades were produced as late as the mid-'30s.

In general, jade by the top makers sells for a couple hundred dollars for a small jar to several thousand for an elaborate prong (branch-like) vase. Currently, the more Art Deco designs—especially the high-contrast combination of black on alabaster—are highly prized, but midnight blue and yellow tend to be worth even more.

IN GLASS
COLOR
IS CHEMISTRY.

— Thomas Dimitroff





As sweet as cotton candy, Rosaline pink jade: Pink-over-alabaster acid-etched covered jar by Carder in "Chinese" pattern, front right, runs about \$4,000; without a lid, a pink-over-alabaster vase, left, with etched Evelyn pattern, goes for less—\$3,500; the rustic, branch-like vase, known as the stump vase, is about \$1,500.

"The condition is crucial," says Jane Prentiss, the head of decorative arts at Skinner's auction house in Boston. "Glass collectors are very particular about quality. Since the color and the shape are paramount in jade, any flaws can really detract from the price."

At a recent Skinner's auction, a Carder Steuben yellow jade vase with applied handles brought \$1,800—less than the \$2,000-to-\$2,500 estimate—because of "minor surface inclusions." But a Carder Steuben jade fan vase in green and alabaster went for \$700, well over the \$300-to-\$400 estimate, partly because of its good condition.

Bargain hunters seeking jadeware might want to hunt for pieces from Stevens & Williams, some of which were designed by Carder. The quality of the jade is high, and the experts say that European glass is often undervalued by American collectors.

On the Internet auction site eWolfs.com, a glass sale earlier in the year offered 22 lots of Stevens & Williams jade. Prices ranged from \$155 for a striking blue ice bucket to \$960 for a mixed set of eight pieces of stemware.

When examining a piece, don't expect to see it signed; most jade isn't. When it was made in sets, as much of it was, usually only one piece was marked by the Steuben fleur-de-lis or block letter acid-stamp. (The same practice was true for Stevens & Williams.) Also, because of jade's unique texture, the makers knew it would be difficult to see markings on lighter colors, so darker colors are more likely to have them.

"You buy for quality, color, and shape, not signature," says Dimitroff. "And with the rise of the Internet, I think we're seeing an increase in forged signatures, too." Authenticity of a jade piece is most often verified by shape, since the records of Carder's specific designs are extensive.

Like anything worth having, this type of glass takes a while to get to know. But once you do, be ready to follow your interest as Dimitroff has. It's easier than you think to become jaded. ■

For more information, see the Reader's Resource on page 234.