

The Bizantino Series

Arte Vetraria Muranese (AVEM)

A Resource for Collectors

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Murano Group

Murano Glass, Italian Art Glass, Empoli Group

Introduction

The Bizantino series of glass art from AVEM is very popular with collectors. Its popularity stems in part from the plethora of shapes and highly ornamented pieces that are available in the series. However, up until the 2020 publication of the book *Arte Vetraria Muranese Artistic Production 1932-1972* by Marc Heiremans, very little was known about this series. The terminology describing these glass pieces was confusing and not precise. Identification was, and still is, confounded by the use of the popular terms 'Tutti Frutti' and 'End of Day' glass which are applied to any glass piece that has scattered coloured fragments of glass in the décor. These terms do not apply to the Bizantino series at all and were never used by Muranese Master Glassblowers.

The series was apparently introduced by the furnace in 1953 although there is no archival sketch or image that explicitly identifies a Bizantino piece from this date at least not presented in Heiremans (2020). The only evidence of pieces that would fit the criteria are those of model #12065 (Figure 1). Elisabetta Ravaioli (Murano Glass Group Facebook) commented that the series was produced for about 10 years. This is corroborated by Heiremans (2020) via documented evidence in the form of AVEM archival images and sketches over the period 1954 to 1962. If it is accepted that model #12065 (produced 1952-53) indicates the commencement of the series then this spans the known 10 years of production

Bizantino Characteristics

In 2020 a clearer understanding of the characteristics and décor of this popular series became evident. Heiremans (2020) published archive images and sketches as well as images of actual pieces in collections and it is from this information that a more precise determination of this popular series could be made. It should be pointed out however, that the AVEM archives are incomplete and Heiremans (2020) states this explicitly on page 159. This means that there are probably gaps in the documentation and chronology of the numerous model numbers.

The exact description of a Bizantino piece does not exist! Heiremans (2020) states that the Bizantino series was developed empirically, that is, produced without written instructions. This is perhaps clearly evident when looking at the few archival sketches that exist. The first sketch that Heiremans presents is the 1954 model #12270. This sketch, simply described as 'Vaso-in-Bizantino', is an outline of a vase with an applied base and a scalloped edge. There are no clues to any characteristic of the décor (Figure 2) and there is currently no known example of this model. It was not until 1956 that the décor of the series appears more precisely illustrated. Model #13423 (Figure 3), designed by Anzolo Fuga, is the only sketch that shows the 'murrine a fiori' and twisted zanfirico canes, of what we now consider essential elements of the décor.

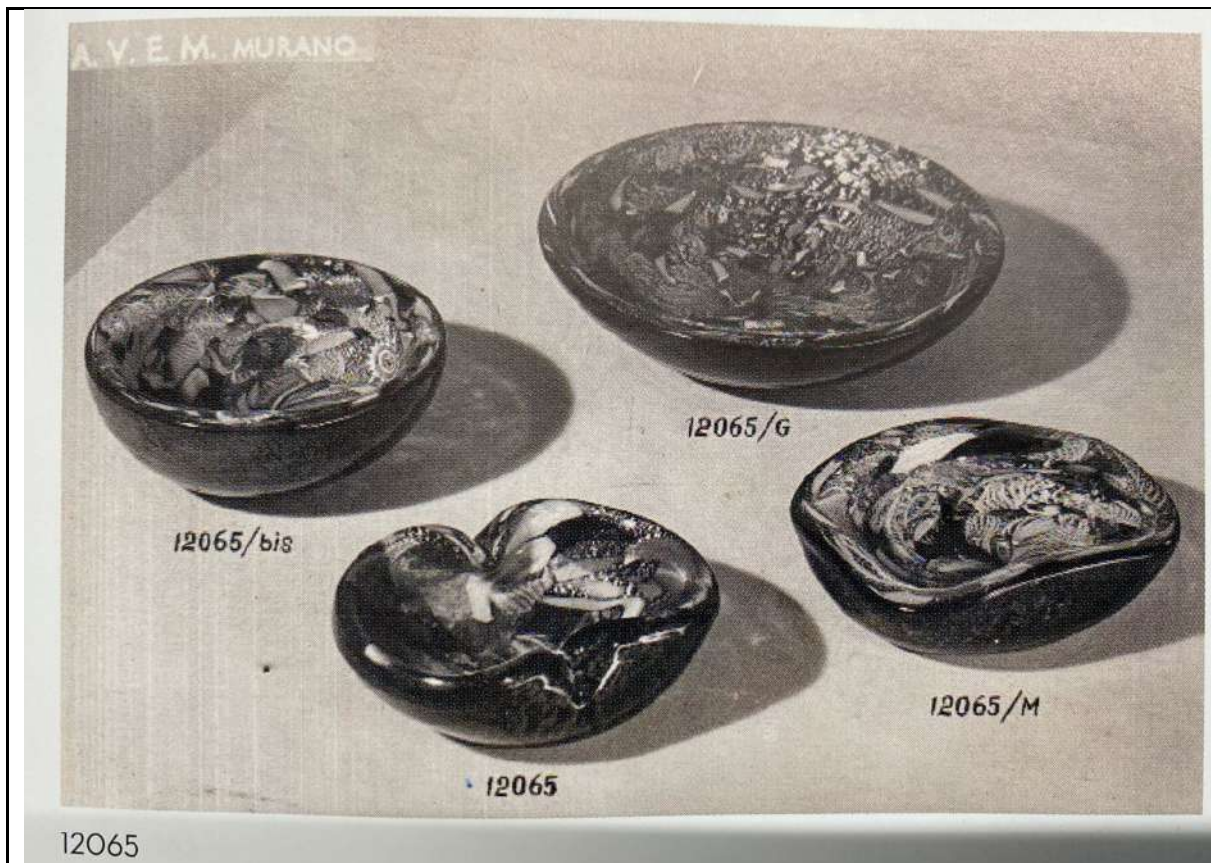


Figure 1. First documented evidence of ashtrays resembling the Bizantino series. Published in Heiremans (2020), page 209.

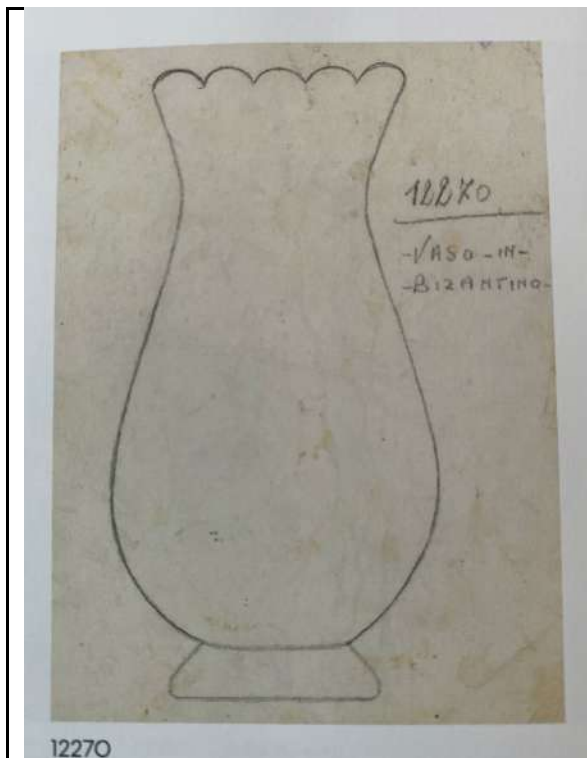


Figure 2. Model #12270 published in Heiremans (2020) Page 306

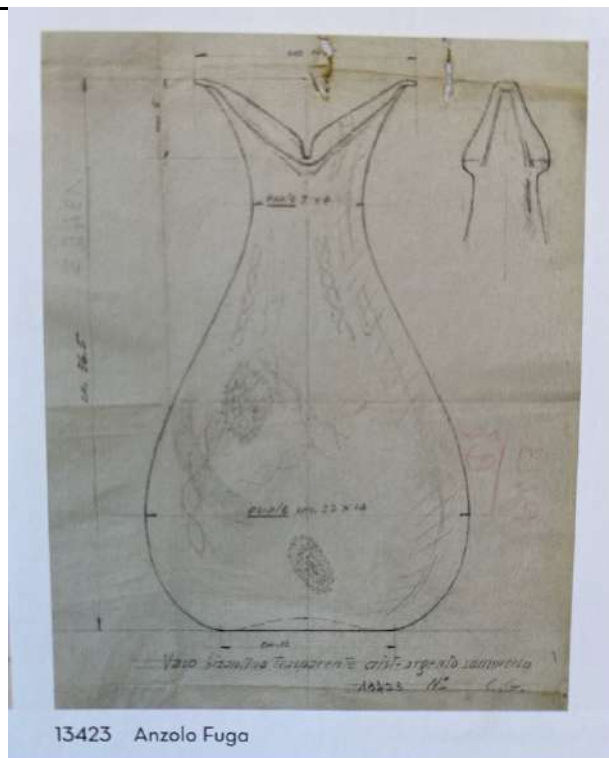
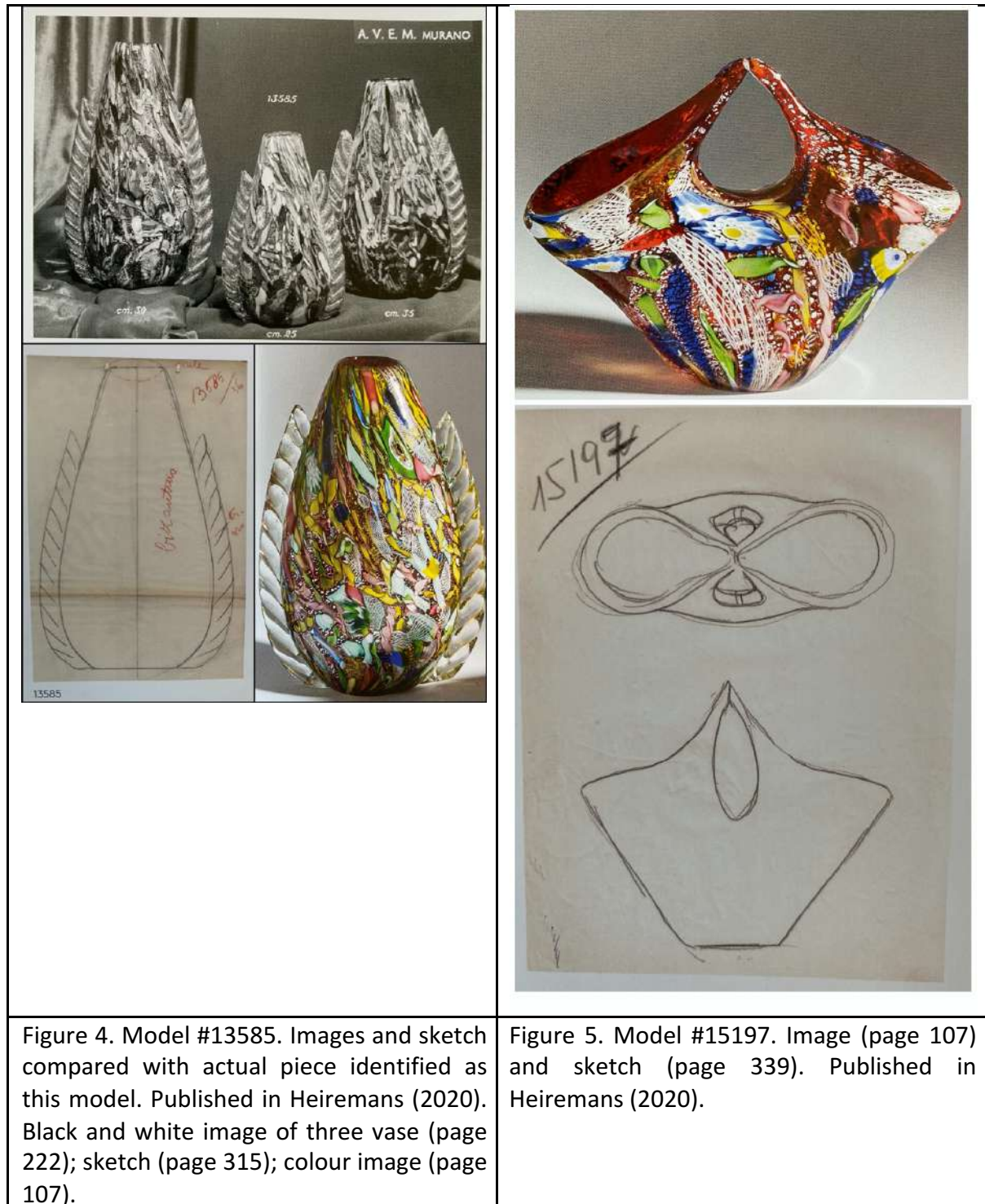


Figure 3. Model #13423 published in Heiremans (2020) Page 311.

Further evidence of the décor of the Bizantino series can be gleaned from the direct comparison of the published archival images and sketches with images of pieces identified as being of the same model number. Heiremans (2020) has published two models where direct

comparison can be made with images and sketches – model numbers #13585 (Figure 4) and #15197 (Figure 5).



It is evident from the archival material and published comparative images that the décor of the Bizantino series is highly ornamental. Clearly, the various elements of the décor are silver foil; murrine a fiori (flower murrine); numerous variously coloured (twisted) canes; zanfirico canes done in the garza (gauze) technique and clear casing.

The other characteristic that is important is the base colour. Most collectors consider that there are three base colours that make up the final element of the Bizantino décor. Only two (red and green) are shown by Heiremans (2020). The blue base colour is not yet known from authenticated pieces but is instead accepted based on direct comparison of the décor with known red and green pieces.

Currently, to be accepted as a Bizantino piece, the glass object must have all of the following elements:

1. A red, green, or blue base colour. For plates/platters and ashtrays this is the outermost coloured layer referred to as the base of the object. For toothpick/match holders, vases and bowls it's the innermost coloured layer,
2. An expanded layer of silver foil over the coloured base layer,
3. Numerous scattered (twisted) coloured canes,
4. Canes produced in the zanfirico (Garza) technique using lattimo (white) filaments.
5. at least one (flower) murrine; and
6. be cased in clear glass.

Criteria 2, 3, 4 and 6 (above) are hard and fast. Every piece of glass attributed as Bizantino has these elements. However, during the compilation of images for this paper, it became evident that two of the criteria are not fixed. It is becoming more evident as more pieces are found and shared online that the criterion of base colour (criterion 1) needs to be expanded. It appears that other base colours were used by the glass blowers of AVEM including white and and the rarer purple or shades thereof. These colours were perhaps not routinely used, but nevertheless glass pieces exist that match all the other criteria such that they should not be excluded as being part of the series. Further, at least one (flower) murrine (criterion 5) is generally present in all larger glass pieces, however, on rare occasions (flower) murrine can be absent on the smaller match/toothpick holders and even absent on some ashtrays/trinket dishes. The use of a 'murrine a fiori' (flower murrine) is also not strictly applied as an increasing number of pieces are being discovered with more general murrine shapes.

Applying this updated information, the characteristics of a Bizantino piece can be emended to include the following:

1. A red, green, blue, white, or purple (rare) base colour. For plates/platters and ashtrays this is the outermost coloured layer of the object. For toothpick/match holders, vases and bowls it's the innermost coloured layer,
2. An expanded layer of silver foil over the coloured base layer,
3. Numerous scattered (twisted) zanfirico coloured canes,
4. Canes produced in the zanfirico (Garza) technique using lattimo (white) filaments.
5. a murrine (flower or another general shape); and
6. clear cased.

Other Known Models

Apart from models #12065 (Figure 1), #12270 (Figure 2), #13423 (Figure 3), #13585 (Figure 4) and #15197 (Figure 5) cited above, Heiremans (2020) also published the following models #13311, #13386, #13387 and #13909.

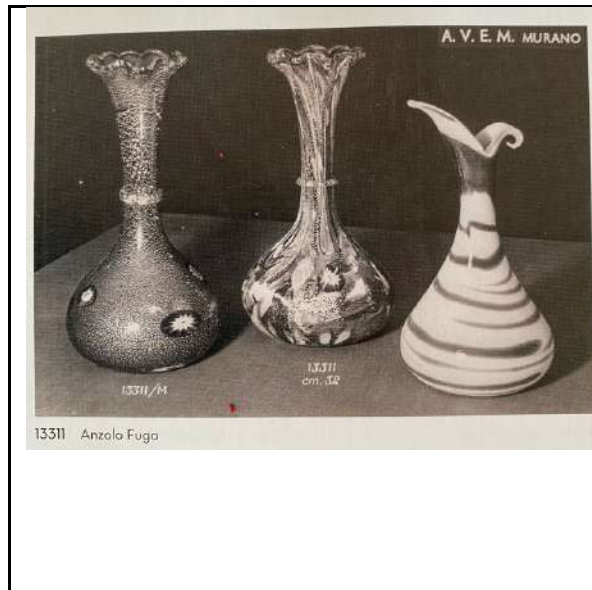


Figure 6. Model 13311 published on page 217.



Figure 7. An example of a vase with the applied rigaree neck ring matching model #13311 (photo: Worthpoint).

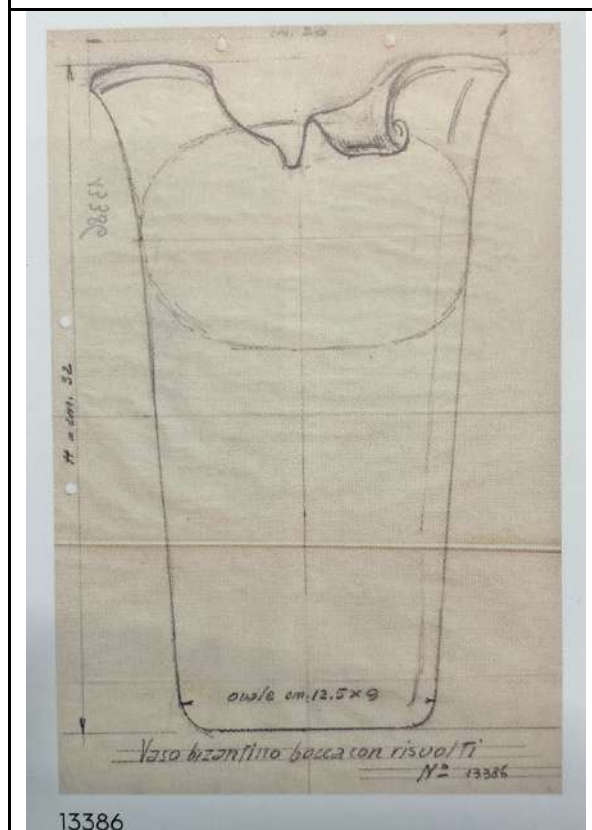


Figure 8. Model #13386 published on page 311.



Figure 9. An example of model #13386 owned by Joseph McGrath (MGIAGE).



Figure 10. Model numbers #13387 and #13909 published on page 218.



Figure 11. A example of an umbrella stand owned by Mary Shaw (MG).

Labels and other Identification

The following labels (Figure 12) have been found on Bizantino pieces. The three in the top row have links to the furnace AVEM and are known to positively identify AVEM glass. The three labels in the bottom row are considered generic labels.



Figure 12. Examples of labels found on Bizantino pieces in the photo galleries.

A Word About Bases

Apart from the application of the correct name to this series, one of the other commonly discussed topics is the presence of an unpolished base on some pieces. Mostly unpolished bases are found on the smaller toothpick/match holders, but some of the larger cigarette holders and open mouth vases also have an unpolished base.

As is the case, the finish on a base causes much confusion in the identification of glass pieces originating from Murano. There are all manner of bases represented on glass originating from Murano. The Bizantino Series is no exception. Bizantino pieces exist with an applied foot (rigaree and other); with bases having a shallow concave depression, as well as the usual highly polished flat bases. The ground base with a matt finish found on some of the smaller Bizantino pieces is also not consistently applied to all pieces in these same category. There are examples of toothpick/match/cigarette holders and the smaller open mouth vases with both highly polished bases as generally expected for Muranese glass and the ground matt finish.

Some collectors have hypotheses for the reasons behind the ground matt finish on the smaller pieces and they centre around them being made as a match striker. It should be noted, especially for unsuspecting collectors and beginners, that this type of base has only been recorded on the smaller Bizantino pieces (Figure 13). No other pieces made by AVEM or for that matter other Muranese furnaces have bases with a ground matt finish. The different base types mentioned above can be found on examples in the photo galleries below.



Figure 13. A comparison of base types on two small Bizantino Toothpick/Match holders.

The Photo Gallery

The photo gallery presented below shows an extensive array of glass pieces that have been attributed to the Bizantino Series of AVEM. Many pieces have had extensive discussions on one or both of the largest Facebook Groups dedicated to Murano Glass.

Many of the images are taken from Bizantino Glass pieces shared on the Murano Glass and Murano Glass, Italian Art Glass, Empoli Facebook groups. Some are also from pieces presented in comments under some of the posts in these groups. All images have been acknowledged to their respective owner. The gallery also includes images gleaned from various sites including eBay, Worthpoint and various auction houses. These images have also been duly acknowledged to the owner as stated in the sales listing.

The photo galleries below have been divided into the following categories:

1. Toothpick/Match/Cigarette holders
2. Ashtray/Trinket Dishes
3. Plates/Platters
4. Smokers Set/Lighters
5. Open mouthed vases
6. Necked vases
7. Vases Other Shapes
8. Boat-shaped Bowls/Baskets
9. Umbrella Holders
10. Rare Shapes/Rare Colours
11. Member Collections

Toothpick/Match/Cigarette Holders – Green Base Colour

	
<p>Photo: Lianne Smuts (MGIAGE) No dimensions</p>	<p>Photo: Ella Hanks (MGIAGE) H – 63.5mm; W – 63.5mm; Diam., (base) – 38.1mm</p>
	
<p>Photo Johanna Pettersson (MG) H – 100mm</p>	

Toothpick/Match/Cigarette Holders – Red Base Colour



Photo: Claire Carr (MGIAGE)
H - 50.8mm

Photo: Doug Smith (MGIAGE)
H - 66mm



Photo: Jian He (MGIAGE)
H - 65mm; W - 65mm

Photo: Anna Falck (MG)
H - 100mm; W - 70mm



Photo: drangsalia (1150) ebay
H - 100mm; Diam. - 90mm

Photo: Worthpoint
H - 95mm; W - 76mm



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 64mm; W – 70mm; D – 61mm.

Toothpick/Match/Cigarette Holders – White and Blue Base Colour



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 60mm; Diam., - 55mm.



Photo: Worthpoint
H – 70mm; W – 57mm



Photo: Worthpoint
H – 66mm

Ashtrays/Trinket Dish – Green Base Colour



Photo: Rebecca Case (MGIAGE)
H – 190.5 mm; W – 152.4 mm



Photo: Mike Arntson (MGIAGE)
H – 152.4mm; W – 152.4mm



Photo: Joachim Aursland (MGIAGE)
H – 46mm; W – 110mm



Photo: Steve Alder (MG)
H – 57.15mm; W – 127mm; D – 120.65mm



Photo: Anna Falck (MG)
W – 130mm; D – 90mm



Photo: Cindy Millan (MG)
H – 50.8; Diam., - 127mm



Photo: Jian He (MGIAGE)
H – 60mm; W – 175mm; D – 125mm

Photo: Jian He (MGIAGE)
H – 70mm; W – 205mm



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 75mm; W – 210mm; D – 170mm

Photo: Worthpoint
H – 191mm; W – 57mm

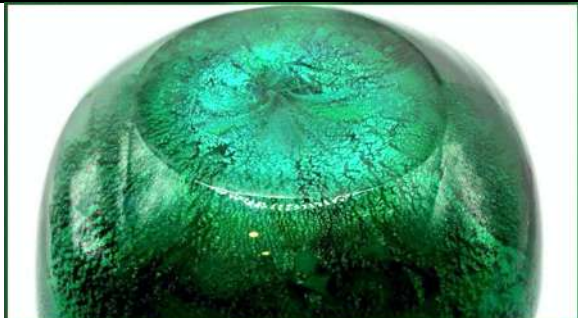


Photo: Worthpoint
W – 127mm; W – 114mm

Ashtrays/Trinket Dish - Scalloped edged – Green Base Colour



Photo: modvintagesmith (496) eBay
H – 83mm; W – 196mm; D – 133mm

Photo: macie1983 (108)
H – 90mm; W – 170mm; D – 135mm

Ashtrays/Trinket Dish – Red Base Colour



Photo: Peter Jones (MGIAGE)
H – 800mm; W – 150mm; D – 170mm



Photo: Shroff Karrie (MGIAGE)
H – 63.5mm; W – 127mm; D – 127mm



Photo: Joachim Aursland (MGIAGE)
H – 650mm; W – 135mm



Photo: Joachim Aursland (MGIAGE)
H – 70mm; W – 160mm



Photo: Lisa Griffin (MGIAGE)
H – 50.8mm; W – 114.3mm



Photo: Kevin O'Shaughnesy (MGIAGE)
H – 63.5; W – 139.7mm; D – 114.3mm



Photo: Joachim Aursland (MGIAGE)
H – 55mm; Diam – 130mm



Photo: Justin Rimes (MGIAGE)
H – 50.8mm; W – 127mm; D – 101.6mm



Photo: Cath e Lijne (MG)
W – 165mm



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 75mm; W – 222mm; D – 144mm



Photo: Wanda Smith (MG)
W – 178mm; D – 152mm



Photo: Vincent Schoen (MG)
No dimensions

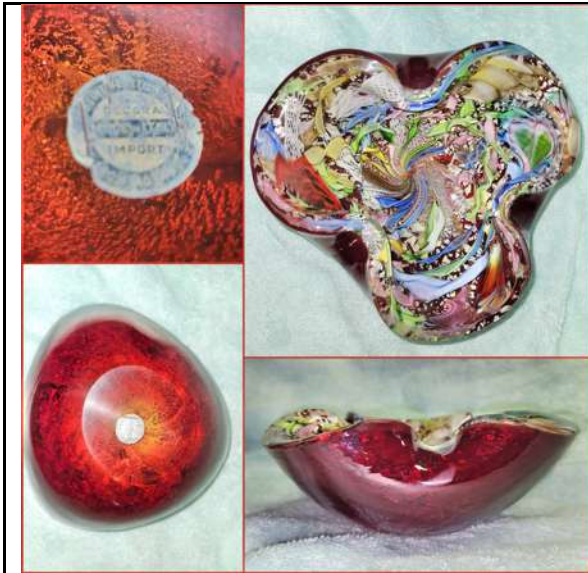


Photo: Amanda Sheperd (MG)
H – 70mm; W – 165mm



Photo: Dave Sowerby (MG)
No dimensions



Photo: Jian He (MGIAGE)
H - 65mm; W – 165mm



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 45mm; W – 122mm; D – 94mm



Photo: peartree_retro_glass (2329) eBay
H – 70mm; W – 220mm

Ashtray/Trinket Dish – Blue Base Colour



Photo: Joachim Aursland (MGIAGE)
H – 50mm; W – 120mm

Photo: Joachim Aursland (MGIAGE)
W – 180mm



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 45mm; W – 120mm



Photo: Jian He (MGIAGE)
H – 45mm; W – 125mm

Ashtray/Trinket Dish – White Base Colour



Photo: Wayne Stephens (MG)
No dimension

Photo: Worthpoint
H – 57mm; W – 152mm



Photo: Worthpoint
H – 67mm; W – 159mm

Plates/Platters – Red, Blue and Green Base Colour



Photo: Jian He (MGIAGE)
H – 50mm; W – 310mm; D – 220mm

Photo: peartree_retro_glass (2329) eBay
H 50mm; W – 180mm; D – 250mm



Photo: olivierc33 (3670) eBay
H – 65mm; W – 280mm; D - 440mm;

Photo: the-sweet-tricorn (3995) eBay
H – 310mm; W – 220mm

Smokers Sets/Lighters



Photo: Andrea Minicozzi (MGIAGE)
H (both) – 76mm; W (ashtray) – 152mm

Photo: Shari Wallace (MGIAGE)
H – 102mm; Diam., - 83mm.

Open Mouth Vases – Red Base Colour



Photo: Joseph McGrath (MGIAGE)
H – 305mm; W (mouth) – 178mm



Photo: Wes Hines (MGIAGE)
H – 203mm; W – 152mm;



Photo: Anna Falck (MG)
H – 110mm; W – 80mm



Photo: Liz Ryley (MG)
No dimensions



Photo: 123-gavriel (6808) eBay
No dimensions



Photo: Worthpoint
H – 260mm; W – 165mm

Open Mouthed Vase – Green Base Colour



Photo: Louis Edwards (MGIAGE)
H – 146mm

Photo: Monique Verbick (MGIAGE)
H – 216mm; W (top) – 159mm



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 105mm; W – 105mm; D – 80mm

Open Mouthed Vase – Blue Base Colour

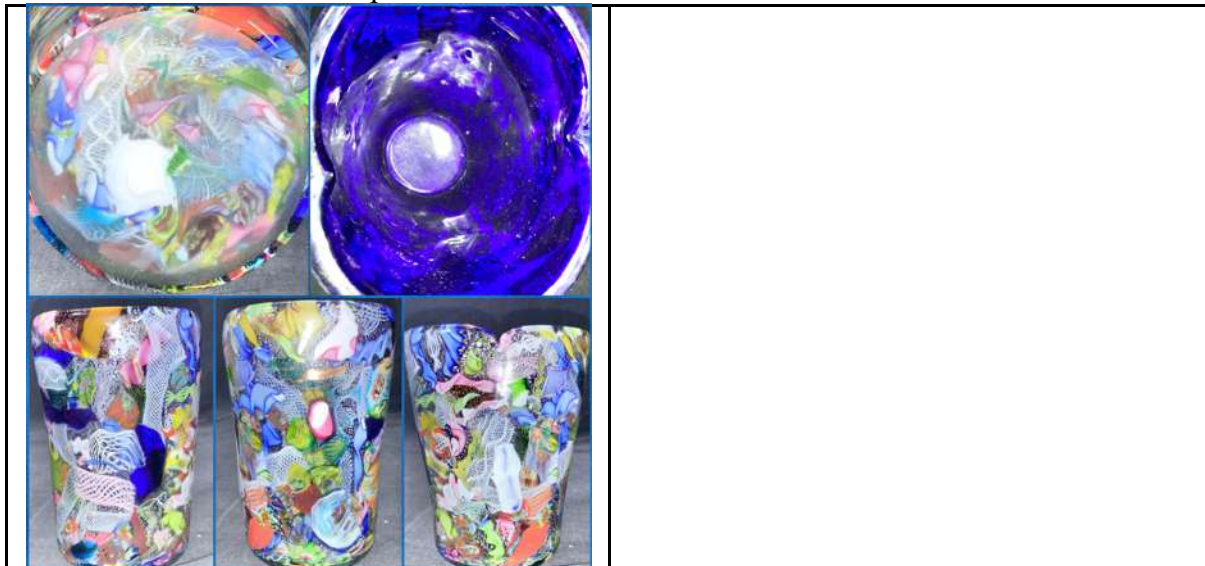


Photo: The Benefit Shop Foundation NY
H – 159mm

Necked Vase – red, green, blue and white base colours



Photo: Chris Gonko (MGIAGE)
H – 159mm; Diam., - 108mm

Photo: Jian He (MGIAGE)
H – 160mm; W – 100mm



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 160mm; Diam., - 110mm

Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 250mm; Diam., - 165mm



Photo: Mary Mehalic (MG)
H – 356mm; Diameter base - 89mm

Photo: tuun (1749) eBay
H – 165mm; Diam. – 114mm



Photo: Worthpoint
H – 197mm; Diam. – 89mm



Photo: Worthpoint
H – 330mm



Photo: planete.collections (7013) eBay
H – 160mm; Diam. – 104mm



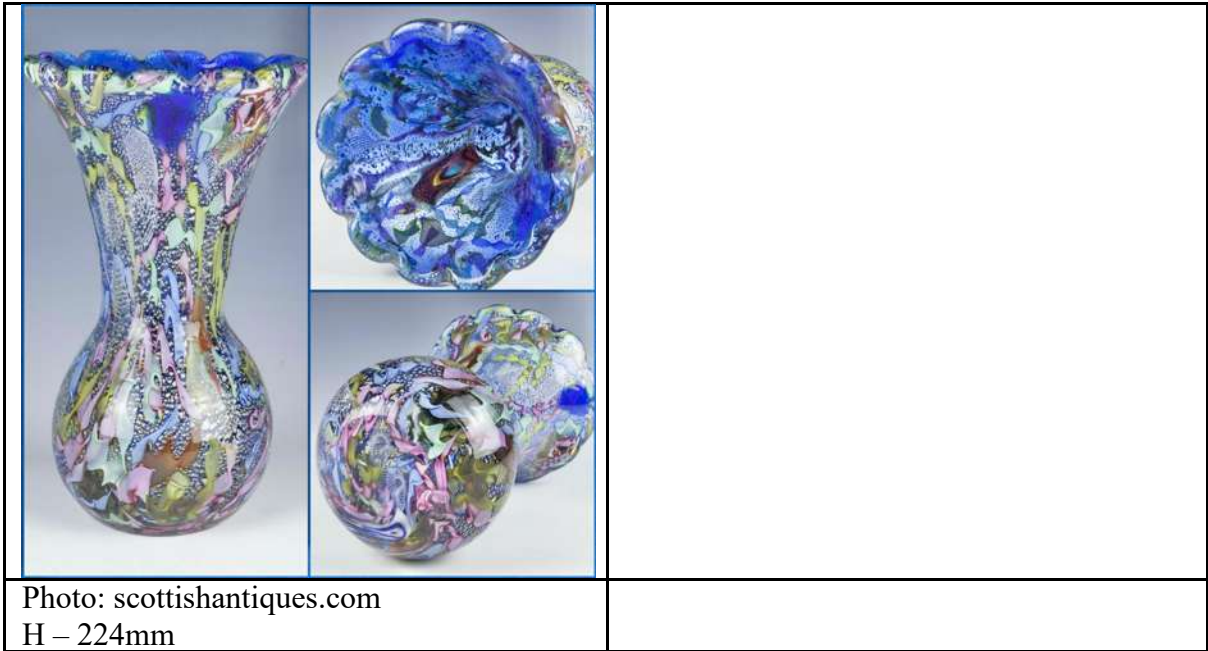
Photo: olivier33 (3670) eBay
H – 224mm; D – 85mm



Photo: lucycooper (3052)
H – 285mm



Photo: Parks Collection (Alderfer Auction)
H – 241mm; W – 177m



Vase other shapes – Various colours



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
H – 195mm; Diam. – 190mm

Photo: Mary Shaw (MG)
H – 305mm; W – 200mm; D – 100mm



Photo: Jian He (MGIAGE)
H – 180mm; W – 110mm; D – 70mm

Photo: 02pg059 (1909) eBay
No dimensions



Photo: peartree_retro_glass (2329) eBay
 H – 120mm; Diam. – 120mm

Boat-shaped Bowls and Baskets



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
 H – 95mm; W – 345mm; D – 135mm



Photo: Dale Dixon (MG)
 H – 80mm; W – 220mm; D – 70mm



Photo: Worthpoint
 H – 135mm; W – 165mm

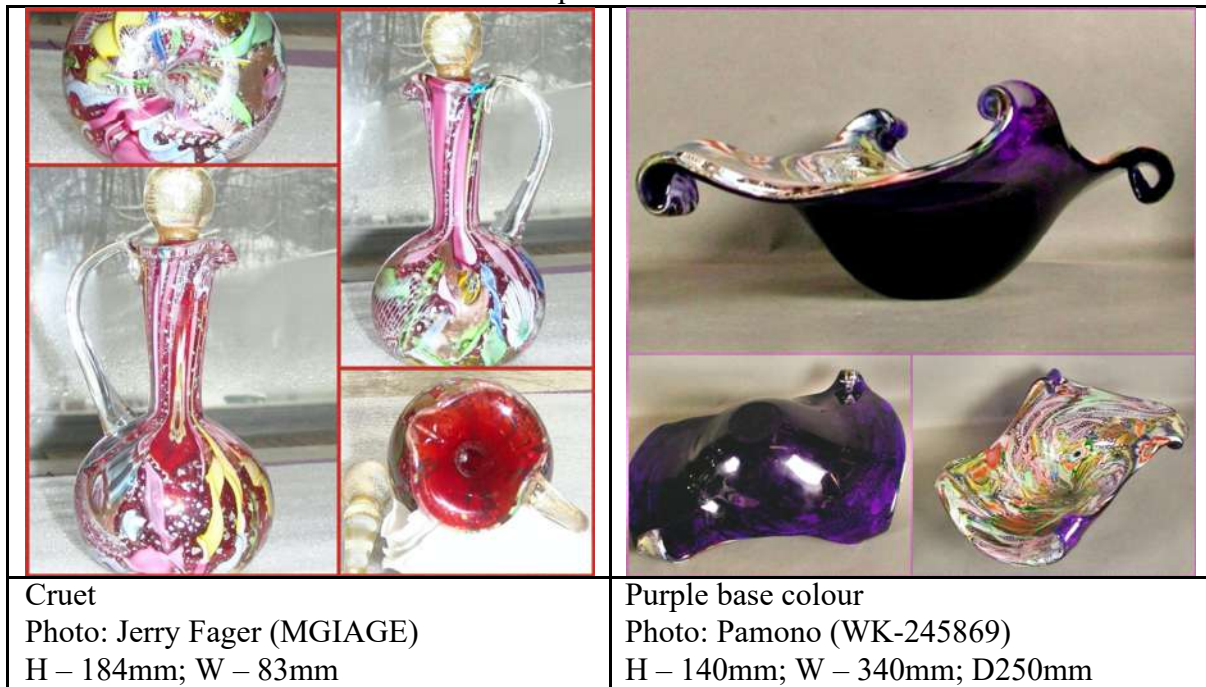


Photo: peartree_retro_glass (2329) eBay
 H – 130mm; W – 220mm

Umbrella Holders



Rare Shapes/Rare Colours



Member Collections



Collection of David De Beurme



Collection of Dale Dixon



Collection of Tony DiBasilio



Collection of Chris Parry