

Two of Murano's most prominent glass factories joined hands in 2008 when the Seguso family purchased CENEDESE, the 65-year-old family-operated producer.

After decades spent in friendly competition, the two illustrious masters are now making beautiful glass together.

by Amy Stavis



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Murano is a tiny island, a mile north of Venice, with a population under 5,000 living and working on the square-mile lagoon isle. In recent years, the glassblowing capital of the world has seen more ups and downs than a high speed roller coaster thanks to a lackluster global economy, soaring production costs (notably runaway prices in energy and transportation), a shrinking labor pool (young people are less willing to spend 12-hour days working in front of a hot furnace), the expense of adapting







to E.U. health and environment directives, and cheap competition from China and eastern Europe. Each of these factors has contributed to Murano's glassmakers losing more than 40% of their revenue in the last decade, shaving a once 6,000-strong workforce to

900. Most critically, about a third of Murano's glassmakers – many of whom boast lineages dating back centuries – have shuttered doors or cut back drastically on operations.

Against this backdrop it's easy to understand why two formidable businesses would band together. The Seguso family traces its roots to 1397, passed from father to son for 22 generations, has doggedly labored the past 17 years establishing an American presence for its high-end glass objects. Cenedese, es-

Cenedese is known for a variety of techniques. One of the most popular is *Canne*, shown at the bottom of this page. The collection of vases, bottles, and centerpieces are made with randomly positioned multi-colored glass canes, making each piece unique. *Spirali*, right, makes use of the submerged technique using an opaque spiral. “Cenedese’s technical artistry is beautiful,” says Pierpaolo Seguso, Seguso Viro’s U.S. president. “We think the market will respond well to the collections.”



established in 1946 in post-war Italy, was started by Gino Cenedese and is operated by his son Amelio. (Cenedese has enjoyed a small American following, directly imported by a handful of stores.) The Seguso and Cenedese families pursue a common goal – one that respects tradition and history – and realized there were synergies on which the two enterprises could capitalize. “The acquisition of one of Murano’s prestigious brands extends the Seguso group’s production capabilities” says Pierpaolo Seguso, U.S. president, group creative director. “Together the two factories can manufacture practically anything and capitalize on future sales synergies.”



The factory’s extensive stemware suites and unique techniques made the operation attractive to the Segusos. “The acquisition of Cenedese has been a great way for us to bring retailers more affordable, fresh, trendy, contemporary Murano glass,” Pierpaolo notes. Accent on affordable: Cenedese’s assortments are up to 40% less expensive than Seguso Viro’s. (The bulk of Seguso Viro’s range are \$700 to \$1,200; Cenedese’s are \$300 to \$600.) “We’re not only selling product,” avers Gianluca Seguso, CEO for Seguso and Cenedese, “we’re keeping the legacy and tradition of Murano glass alive. That’s more a mission than a business.”



The tradition of Murano as a glassmaking island dates to the 9th century when Murano – a series of islands linked by bridges in the Venetian Lagoon – was a strong commercial port, ideally situated as a bridge between east and west. Glassmaking was at its height in



SALUTE! CENEDESE STEMWARE IS BELLA

Stemware is a strong category for Cenedese, which was part of the allure in Seguso Viro's purchase of the company three years ago. Left, *Canaletto*, one of the more popular designs, retails from \$115 to \$436. *Balloton*, below, is available in a variety of colors and ranges from \$65 to \$145. "Cenedese's stemware and barware," says Pierpaolo Seguso, U.S. president, "has great appeal for a variety of customers." There are many available styles – casual to formal, colorfully whimsy to sophisticated – which has already opened a broader market to Seguso Viro, which has a limited range of drinkware.





the Middle East – particularly Syria and Egypt – and Venice was fertile ground for the specialized skills of the trade. Folklore has it that glassmaking was concentrated to the island because the great risk of furnace fires could be better contained on one small island. Venetian authorities could also control workers from revealing the techniques and production secrets of the profitable glassmaking industry. In fact, workers that left the island were forbidden from ever working in Murano again; some were even killed.

Whatever the reason for the concentration of glassmakers, the effect was a tremendous cross-fertilization of ideas that led to a monopoly of developing technologies which became celebrated around the globe. But so many of the glass factories didn't, or couldn't, keep pace with changing times, content to generate income

from tourists who contributed mightily to the island's boom decades in the 1950s and '60s, when a majority of the island's inhabit-

ants made their living from glass. In time it became more challenging for the insular nation to thrive, and the industry spiraled into crisis mode after Septem-

ber 11, 2001, when foreign orders plummeted and tourists stayed close to home. Recovery has been hampered by the recent global financial crisis, resulting in revenue from the island's glass producers dropping to about \$200 million. "This is nothing new really," sighs Pierpaolo. "Murano has always had the same problems. Few companies move in the same direction. Each factory does its own thing. But the fragile economy makes the island more vulnerable today." What's saved Seguso Viro was sticking to what it does well. "We have respect for the island and the origin of our work as we grow distribution around the world," Pierpaolo says.

Seguso Viro's acquisition of fellow Murano producer Cenedese created a winning synergy for both businesses. It was a strategic partnering beneficial for both family enterprises, says U.S. president Pierpaolo Seguso. "There are natural complements and balances between the two companies," he says. "It will make both companies stronger as we continue the history of Murano glassmaking."



arrying the two operations almost physically doubled the size of each business; there's now a total of 60 employees. "It's been a good fit," says Pierpaolo. The 50,000-square-foot Cenedese factory – a five minute walk from Seguso Viro's 40,000-square-foot workshop – is one of Murano's largest. While there are currently 35 Cenedese employees, during the heyday of the 1970s there were as many as 300 people working at the factory headed by founder Gino until his death in



THE CENEDESES CREATE HISTORY

Since 1946, the Cenedese family – inspired by founder Gino and his son Amelio – have poured their passion for glass into magnificent collections. Gino started at the age of nine, learning his craft at the hands of several glass masters. After the war, in 1946, he started his own enterprise. Under his rein, the company became known for continually developing new and interesting techniques as well as collaborating with esteemed artists, sculptors, and architects like Alfredo Barbini, Napoleone Martinuzzi, Riccardo Licata, Fulvio Bianconi, Luigi Scarppa Croce, and Antonio Da Ros.



Silhouette is a colorful range of bottles whose sinuous lines come in various shapes and colors. The bottles – which retail from \$473 to \$730 – use the popular canne technique which features opaque and shiny glass colored strands.

1973, after which son Amelio assumed control. Cenedese's collections include goblets, vases, plates, lamps, one-of-a-kind chandeliers, and large installation projects. The company may be best known for a range of aquarium sculptures – large clear blocks of glass filled with suspended fish and seaweed originally designed by Alfredo Barbini. "The Cenedese factory has been a major tourist destination over the years, one of the best visited places on Murano," proffers Pierpaolo. "Celebrities and VIPs would stop there when they came to Murano, walk through the museum and showroom, and buy pieces."

Cenedese has collaborated with a distinguished variety of artists over the years. "Their artisans have a high color sensibility and interpret colors in different and interesting ways," says Pierpaolo. In addition to the factory's fresh use

of vibrant color, Cenedese is known for innovative techniques and organic shapes, making their collections unique and relevant across many demographic groups. “The product is especially appealing to young audiences who like the casual, everyday look,” says Pierpaolo. “And that’s good for us because it helps to grow the sensi-



bilities of future collectors.” With upwards of 500 pieces – just 15% are available stateside – stemware and drinkware retails from \$40 to \$200 and intricate *objets d’art* are \$250 to \$1,800. “It’s a great company, a great product, and a great story that perfectly complements what we already do at Seguso,” affirms Pierpaolo. “We think the Cenedese assortments will continue to do well for us.” □

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