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ART & ARCHITECTURE
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 present, and the future
 of the industry.



THE ARTISANS OF MURANO

Behind the scenes with the masters of jagged glass.

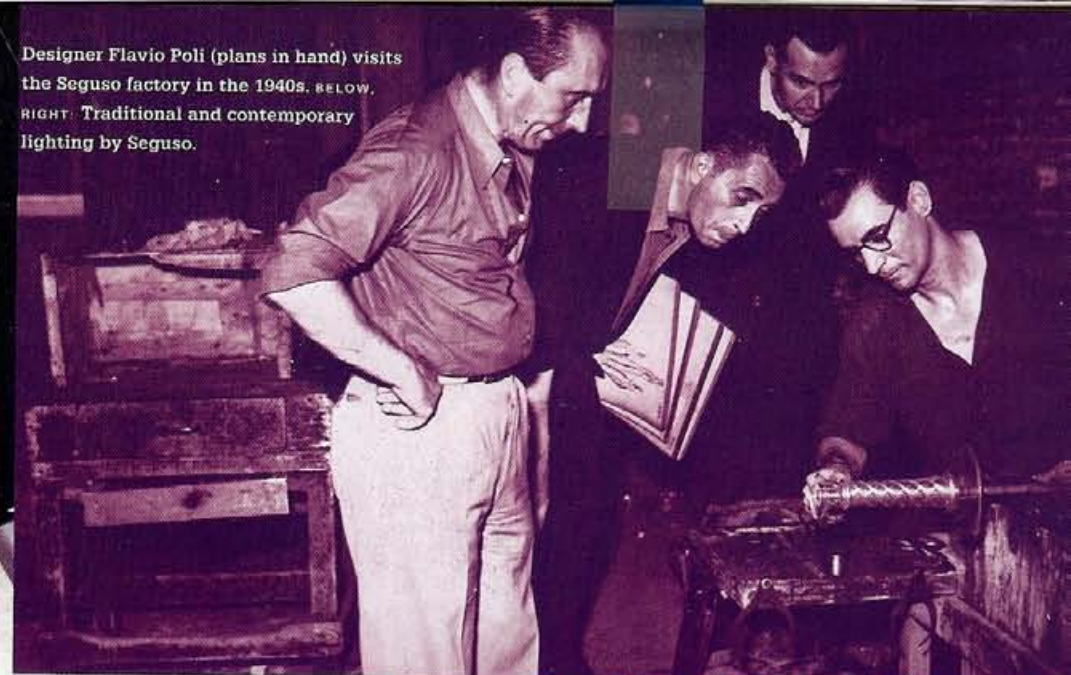
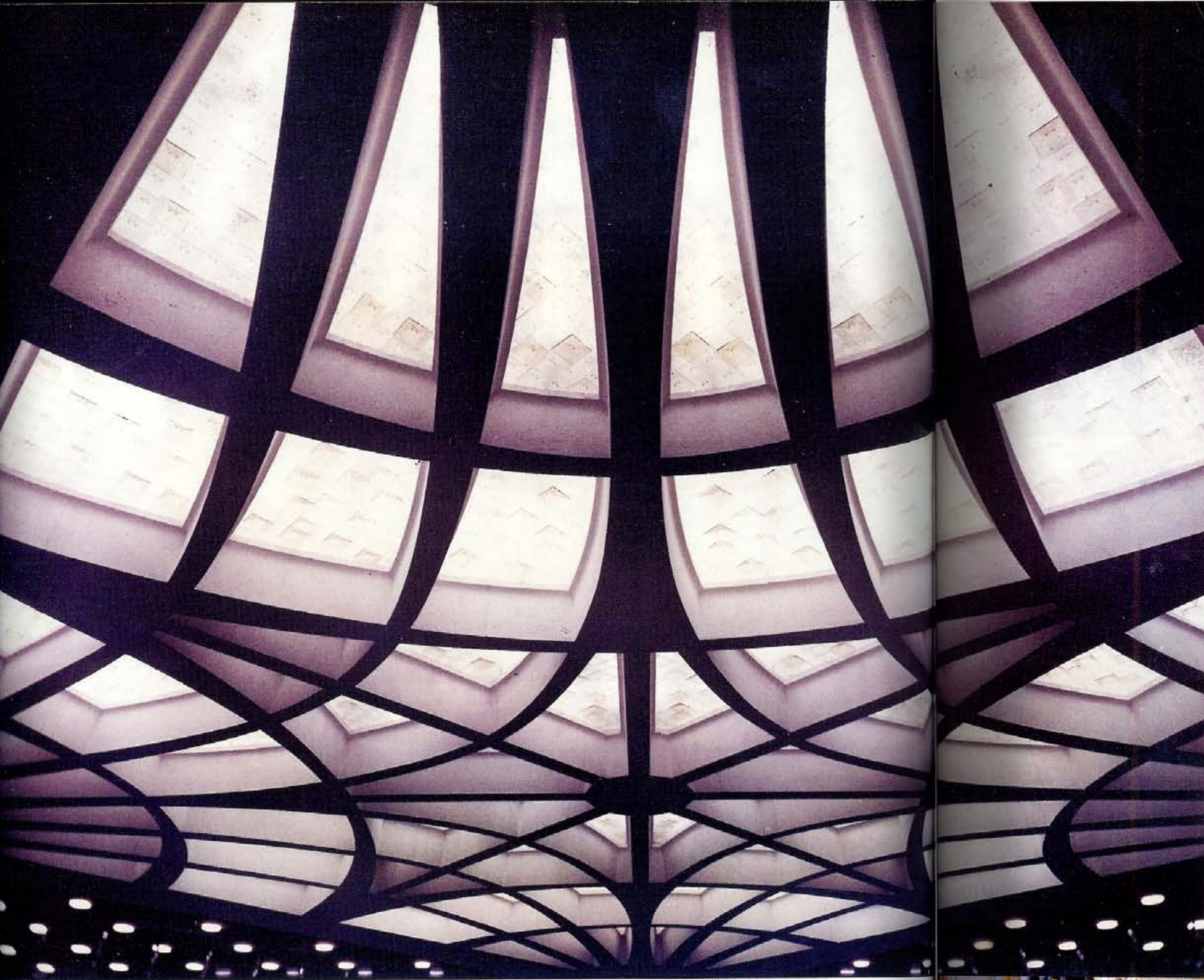
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HARLEM ROOFTOP

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Designer Flavio Poli (plans in hand) visits the Seguso factory in the 1940s. BELOW, RIGHT: Traditional and contemporary lighting by Seguso.

ART & INNOVATION

LEFT: Glass tiles, in the ceiling of the central bank in Venice. BELOW, LEFT: Balusters of glass. BELOW AND OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: Two vessels made of Sommerso ("dipped") glass, an overlaying technique perfected by Seguso's glass masters in the 1950s.



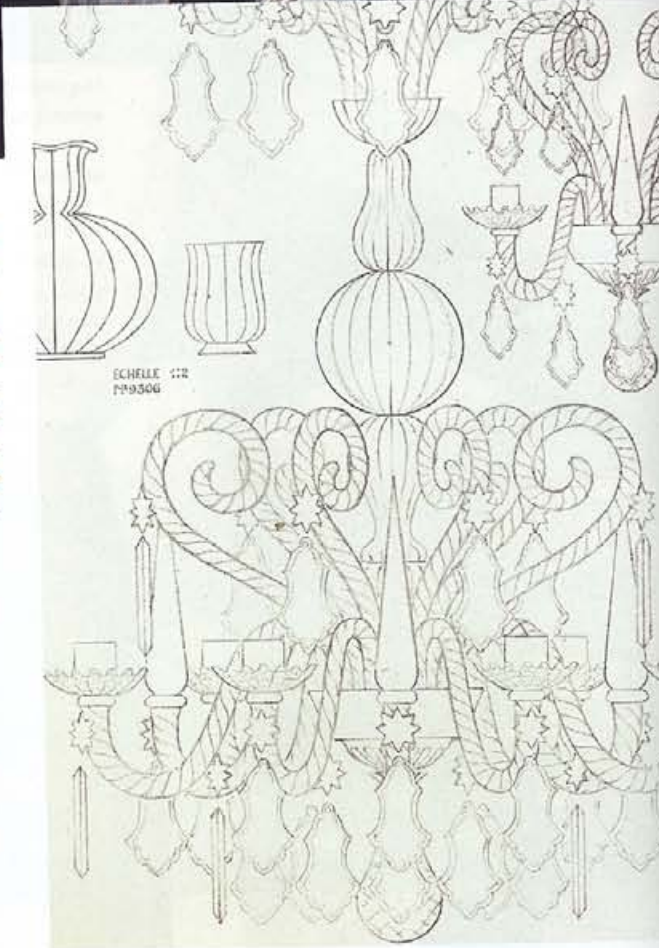
THE ARTISANS OF MURANO

Behind the scenes with the makers of Seguso glass

TEXT MARJORIE E. GAGE

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SEGUSO





"At Seguso, we still make every piece of glass individually, by hand, so no two pieces are exactly the same," says the company's creative director, Pierpaolo Seguso. ABOVE: A vase takes shape, from its molten state. TOP RIGHT: Seguso patented a glass furniture leg in the late '90s. RIGHT: Every design is drawn to scale by hand. LEFT: Two more examples of Sommerso vessels.



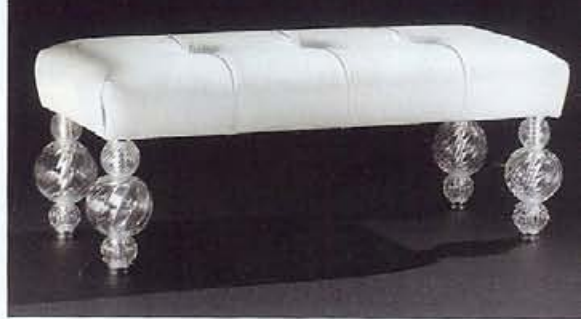
"ONE HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE CHRISTOPHE COLOMB CAME TO AMERICA, our family was already manufacturing glass on the island of Murano," says Pierpaolo Seguso. "We are there still, 23 generations later, making glass by the same methods developed by Venetian glass masters in the 800s and 900s—every piece by hand, one by one."

As the Creative Director and spokesman for Seguso in the United States, Pierpaolo is the latest in a long line of family members to carry on a glassmaking tradition born in the Venetian Republic one thousand years ago. "Venice, being on the water, was an international city,



UNIQUE DESIGNS

"We work directly with designers to create whatever shapes they imagine in glass," says Pierpaolo Seguso. CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE: A two-tone chandelier; a sconce, from the Vinto ("wind") collection; a fiber-optic installation, inspired by bamboolike lagoon grass; a glass-legged bench; lighting for a hotel in Manila.



a door to the rest of Europe and the Middle East, and Venetian glass became well known throughout the world through trade," explains Pierpaolo. It was a 13th-century mayor of Venice who—fearing destruction to wooden buildings by the glass-factory fires—mandated that all glassmaking activity move out of the city to the Venetian island of Murano, a name that became synonymous with art glass. Here, new colors and techniques were discovered, and a tradition that began with the production of functional goblets grew to include glistening chandeliers and sculpture. The Venetian government considered the alchemy behind the

artistry a state secret: "Murano was a place of serenity, but also a place of very strict laws," Pierpaolo explains. "Glass masters were respected for their art and treated like nobility, but they lived in a golden cage: They were not permitted to leave the Republic to work for competitors in France or England or Holland or Scandinavia, by penalty of death. And so, of course, our family stayed," he adds, laughing. "But we are now also in New York, on Madison Avenue." Here, Seguso continues to explore the possibilities of a material that—in the hands of a master artisan—can take any shape a designer's imagination allows. — See Resources.