



# MANMADE WONDERS

Considering their striking symmetry and brilliant colors, it's easy to understand how **millefiori paperweights** can captivate collectors.

By Lana Robinson

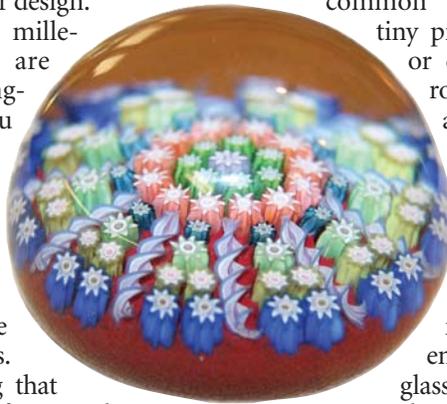
For almost two centuries, the beauty of millefiori glass paperweights has captivated the imagination of fanciers. These exquisite manmade wonders—characterized by colorful, three-dimensional collages encased in clear glass—almost rival nature in symmetry and diversity of design.

The contents of millefiori paperweights are mesmerizing, seemingly frozen in time. You feel as if you're gazing into an aquarium, viewing something akin to sea anemone or a miniature plant form, when you peer inside one of these enchanting glass orbs.

It's not surprising that what started out as a functional desktop accessory quickly caught on as a popular decorative collectible. English glassware manufacturer and politician Apsley Pellant coined the term "mille-

fiori" in 1849. It aptly describes the beautiful glass technique by linking together the Italian words "mille," meaning "thousand," and "fiori," or "flowers."

Although there are many variations of millefiori paperweights, what these palm-sized treasures have in common is "murrine"—the



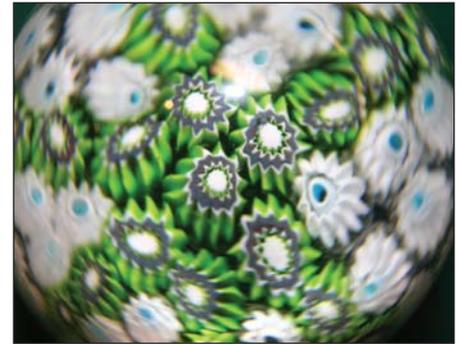
tiny pieces of floral, star, or cog-patterned glass rods inside. Using an ancient technique, the molded hand-blown rods, or canes, were pulled, cooled, cut, and fused together in a unique arrangement and then enveloped in molten glass.

The process used to create these fascinating glass canes—also used in beads, jewelry, and other glassware—harks back to the Roman Empire, but knowledge of the craft faded by the 18th century. The technique was revived in the 1840s, when millefiori reemerged in Venice and Murano, Italy, in France, and later on (1860–1900) in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic).

You'll find millefiori paperweights in a number of patterns and styles.

• **Concentric** millefiori paperweights, which boast circles of united canes at their base, are perhaps the most common. They typically feature alternating colored canes, although they're sometimes dominated by one color.

• **Latticino**-patterned paperweights combine a spiral col-



Above is an egg-shaped dome millefiori by Glass Act, a contemporary maker. Examples like these were sold in gift shops in the late 1970s. Below left: a Perthshire millefiori paperweight by Peter McDougall. Perthshire, founded in 1968 by Stuart Drysdale in Crieff, Scotland, was known for exquisite, high-quality paperweights.

lection of glass ribbons and melded millefiori canes. They're usually segmented to look like spokes and are referred to as "cartwheel weights."

• Another design called **scrambled** (or **floating**) showcases millefiori morsels dispersed inside the glass paperweight.

• The **torsade** technique involves loops of colorful strands of glass that encircle a central design.

• **Carpet** or **closepack** designs get their names from tightly fused millefiori that give the appearance of a carpet inside the globe.

• **Garland** paperweights display circles of millefiori canes strung together in a way that recalls—as the name says—garlands of tiny flowers.

• Finally, **End of Day** is a conglomerate paperweight made from canes and bits of glass remnants from other projects.

## NAMES TO KNOW

The French glass company **Baccarat**, established in 1734 and still in business today, is indisputably the best-known producer of millefiori paperweights. A classic Baccarat piece, sometimes faceted, is a configuration of alternating white canes among multi-colored

Texas-based freelance writer Lana Robinson is a collector who also sells her hand-picked finds via eBay (as "Prairie Wind Vintage Collectibles") and Etsy.com ("Bluebonnets Etc."). She wrote about treasure-hunting in our October 2012 issue.



Here's a group of paperweights made by contemporary artist Greg Hanson. (See p. 6 for more on this Portland, Ore.-based craftsman.)



This rare Baccarat piece was on the auction block at L.H. Selman Ltd. as we went to press; its estimate: \$18,000–\$25,000. The catalog describes it as: “Extremely rare antique Baccarat interlaced trefoil garland stardust carpet-ground paperweight.”

canes, trademarked with the letter “B” inside a cane.

Although Baccarat excels in reputation, millefiori paperweights by rival French glasshouses **Saint Louis** (Cristalleries de Saint Louis, founded in 1767) and **Clichy** (which operated near Paris from 1840-1870) are more highly esteemed in terms of rarity and value.

Saint Louis favored pale-colored millefiori as compared to the more vivid colors of its competitors. Production of marked weights was limited to the years 1845, 1848, and 1849. Today, a well-executed paperweight bearing the

“SL” mark can be worth anywhere from \$1,000 to \$4,500.

Clichy specialized in overlay paperweights that sometimes included the company’s rose motif. At Sotheby’s in 1990, an antique Clichy paperweight set an all-time record by drawing \$258,500.

Only several hundred millefiori paperweights created by the smaller **St. Mandé** factory, another mid-19th-century French glassmaker, are known to exist today. English glasshouses, including **White Friars Glassworks**, began mimicking the techniques of the French paperweight makers around 1848.

The American Classic Period, which extended from 1852 through the 1870s, involved a number of U.S. makers, among them **Boston & Sandwich Glass Co.** on Cape Cod; **New England Glass Co.** and **Pairpoint Glass** (originally **Mt. Washington Glass Co.**), both located in Boston; and **Millville (Whitall Tatum Factory)** of Millville, N.J.

### A COMEBACK COLLECTIBLE

Interest in paperweight making as an enterprise waned around the end of the Victorian age. Then, in the 1940s, American glass artist **Charles Kazium Jr.** sparked renewed interest in collectible paperweights with his dazzling designs. Kazium’s weights are usually signed with a gold “K” or an initialed millefiori cane. His son, **Charles Kazium III**, continued the tradition for



This colorful Clichy classic features canes, various shades of pink, Naples yellow, thalo and cobalt blues, amethyst, cinnamon, white, and an all-pink rose arranged around a central Clichy pink and green rose cane. It was estimated at \$17,000–\$25,000 by L. H. Selman Ltd.

about a decade starting in 1992. While the younger Kazium’s style is similar to his father’s, his paperweights tend to be larger and can be identified by a distinctive silver “K” mark.

Paperweight making also developed in Scotland in the 20th century. **Monart** and **Vasart** paperweights both originated with descendants of **Salvador Ysart**, a Spaniard who took his family and glassblowing skills to Crieff, Scotland in 1922. Such fine retailers as Tiffany’s sold Ysart’s exquisite paperweights.

By the 1960s, two more notable Scottish makers rose to fame—**Perthshire** and **Caithness**, located in Crieff and

## A CLOSER LOOK



Greg Hanson, a paperweight artist in Portland, Ore., is pictured at left in his studio. At right is a close-up photo of, as Hanson explains, “millefiori I made, ready for designing new paperweights.” Among the paperweights he designed is the colorful example above; see also photo on p. 5.



At right is another standout offering at the November L.H. Selman Ltd. sale: a Mount Washington magnum pink rose paperweight. The large, multi-dimensional rose, with its several layers of shaded pink petals, is bordered by five green leaves. Estimate: \$20,000–\$30,000.



Wick, respectively. Some, but not all, Perthshire paperweights have a concave top and typically have the letter “P” mark on a center cane. Caithness endures as a producer of high-quality, limited edition paperweights and Royal collectibles.

### WHERE TO FIND THEM

The casual collector, if observant, can still find millefiori paperweights for \$20–\$50 at junk shops and flea markets. But the true devotees acquire most of his or her pieces through dealers who specialize in paperweights, from auction houses, and via private treaty sales (where prices aren’t advertised, and where buyer and seller negotiate toward a mutually agreeable price).

Value depends upon age, maker, beauty, condition, and complexity of design. Rare antique paperweights can be very expensive, as can iconic contemporary weights. If you’re patient, though, it’s possible to amass an impressive collection without spending an arm and a leg. This

is especially true if you collect purely for fun and ornamental purposes.

For those interested in building a valuable collection, careful research is especially important. A number of good books and online resources are available (see “Sources & Resources”); among them are guides that will help you identify paperweights. Knowing what clues to look for is an acquired skill and thus can take time.

According to Larry Selman, author of a book, *All About Paperweights*, published in 1992, says that the factors that most influence the value of a paperweight are design, workmanship, condition, and rarity. “Acquiring a first-rate paperweight collection, therefore, rests heavily on the collector’s ability to evaluate good design,” he says.

A partial checklist of common imperfections cited by Selman include bubbles, a design that’s not well centered, and a design that’s too close to top or sides of dome. Others imperfections:

- Broken or unevenly spaced millefiori canes.
- Missing or overcrowded millefiori canes in garland motifs.
- Distortion in concentric circles of millefiori canes.
- Incomplete spiral torsade or air rings.
- A broken color ground or latticino cushion.

Also, avoid paperweights with scratches, chips, and surface bruises. Although they can sometimes be polished out, Selman warns, the process may lower the value of the paperweight. ❁

## INSIDE INFO

Here’s a selective list of paperweight-related books and websites.

### BOOKS

- *All About Paperweights*, by Lawrence Selman (Paperweight Press, 1992)
- *Paperweights of the World*, by Monika Flemming/Peter Pommerencke (Schiffer, 2006)
- *World Paperweights: Millefiori and Lampwork*, by Robert G. Hall (Schiffer, 2001)

### INTERNET

- **TheGlassGallery.com:** Larry Selman’s website offers paperweights for sale along with all kinds of information about the category, including a list of “Paperweight Collector’s Clubs and Associations.”
- **Hanson-Stone.com:** Contemporary artist Greg Hanson (see also facing page) showcases his glass creations at his website.
- **NEPaperweight.org:** The website for the New England Paperweight Collectors Association presents informational essays about the hobby (click on “Paperweight-Related Stuff”) along with back issues of the club’s newsletter (click on “Info and Links”).
- **Paperweight.org:** The Paperweight Collectors Association’s website offers a calendar, gallery, links to dealers and artists, and information on its conventions (next event: June 5–8, 2013, in New Orleans).

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