

# CORNING MUSEUM OF GLASS

## ARCHITECTURE



- **1951: Original Glass Center building designed by Wallace K. Harrison**
- **1980: Gallery building designed Gunnar Birkerts**
- **2000: Rakow Research Library designed by Bohlin Cywinski Jackson**
- **2000: Admissions Lobby, Innovations Center, Auditorium and Café designed by Smith-Miller + Hawkinson**
- **2015: Contemporary Art + Design Wing designed by Thomas Phifer and Partners**

### **Harrison & Abramowitz**

In 1951, the original Corning Museum of Glass opened its doors. Wallace K. Harrison designed an L-shaped, International Style glass building that included the not-for-profit Corning Museum of Glass, the for-profit Corning Glass Center and the Steuben Glass factory. The design represented the architectural philosophy of the day, creating a light-filled space for displaying objects with similar properties.

Characteristic architectural elements of this modernist style include a square or rectangular footprint, a simple cubic “extruded rectangle” form, exposed steel and glass construction, windows running in broken horizontal rows forming a grid, and 90-degree façade angles.

These qualities can be seen in the Ben W. Heineman Sr. Family Gallery of Contemporary Glass, which exists in the original Harrison building. Visitors to the campus also will recognize Harrison’s signature architecture in the glass block, vitrolite and glazed brick building that houses The Studio (across from the main Museum building) and in the nearby Corning Incorporated office building (tall black vitrolite and glass structure to the north of the main Museum building).

### **Gunnar Birkerts**

Gunnar Birkerts explored a biomorphic, or more organic, modernist style in his 1976 design for a new addition to the Museum, which created much-needed exhibition space to accommodate more visitors. He envisioned the new building, which housed all of the glass collections, as a flowing series of galleries that held the Museum’s research library at its core. The structure curved around the original Harrison building, linking to it with light-filled, windowed ramps.

The exterior of the building reflected Birkerts’ understanding of the circle as an inherent architectural form, and the exploration of the properties of hot and cold glass. Birkerts described his building as both free flowing and amorphous, similar to when glass is heated at the furnace, and crystalline and structured, as when glass is cooled. The façade of the building’s perimeter is composed of rolled glass with stainless steel backing. Mirrors beneath the windows allow light into the building indirectly, minimizing glare and heat gain and protecting the fragile objects on display.

The new addition opened to the public on May 28, 1980, exactly 29 years after the Museum’s first opening.

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### **Bohlin Cywinski Jackson**

With the Smith-Miller + Hawkinson expansion and renovation, the Museum's Rakow Research Library, the library of record for the history and technology of glass, was relocated from the Birkerts' building to new quarters across the Museum campus. The architects from Bohlin Cywinski Jackson responded to a number of criteria for the new Library, including providing different levels of security for its rare collections and designing a series of climatic environments within the building in response to the varying needs of the collections. The building was designed to protect the Library's holdings from the risks associated with the Museum's location in a flood plain, which was also a primary component of the building designed by Birkerts.

Glass detailing appears throughout the "building within a building" that houses the collection, including features such as glass stairs and bridges. The south-facing reading areas enjoy a view controlled by a glass sunscreen or brise-soleil. This screen acts as an "environmental sculpture", its metallic and etched linear patterns interacting with seasonal sun angles to maximize visual transparency while excluding direct sunlight from the Library's interior.

### **Smith-Miller + Hawkinson**

The Smith-Miller + Hawkinson expansion included two prominent additions, one to the east and one to the west of the existing building. The western addition encompassed the Auditorium, Coffee Bar, and glass bridge and passageway (known as the West Bridge) that linked the former Steuben Glass factory to the Birkerts' building. Also included in the western addition was the Hot Glass Show demonstration stage, where visitors were first able to see live, narrated glassmaking demonstrations.

The eastern addition included a new Admissions Lobby, Intro Theatre (now the Hot Glass Show Innovations Stage), Café, and the Innovations Center with interpretive exhibitry

created by the well-known museum design firm of Ralph Appelbaum Associates. As part of the Museum's overall transformation, the glass collection galleries, housed in the Birkerts' building, were also entirely renovated.

Though made entirely from non-glass-related materials, the Auditorium mirrors glass properties with its pane-like folds and panels. The Admissions Lobby, with its monumental frameless glass plates, is supported by a complex steel structure that allows light to pour in the building and reflect off of angled glass panes. This area was designed to showcase the unique properties of glass as a material for architecture. The strength and functionality of glass is also highlighted by the inclusion, throughout the building, of glass stairs, freestanding glass walls and glass walkways, which demonstrate the material's versatility.

### **Thomas Phifer and Partners**

With a growing collection of large-scale contemporary works of art and design in glass, and increasing domestic and international visitation, the Museum announced a \$64 million expansion project in 2012.

Designed by architect Thomas Phifer and Partners, the 100,000-square-foot Contemporary Art + Design Wing features filtered natural daylight using a sophisticated light-filtering system in new galleries for the collection of contemporary works in glass. Also part of a project is an innovative renovation of the iconic ventilator building of the former Steuben Glass factory into one of the world's largest facilities for glassblowing demonstrations and live glass design sessions. The project broke ground on June 7, 2012 and opened to the public on March 20, 2015.