

# Gardens & Glass

How does **Dale Chihuly's** garden grow? With blown-glass swirls and rhythmic swirls and colorful forms that catch light's glow.

by Allison Malafronte

A native of the Pacific Northwest, Chihuly often displays an affinity for the fluidity of water in his art. The 20-foot-tall **Sealife Tower**, part of the Sealife Room, suggests swirling currents and the creatures they harbor.

Glass sculptures by Dale Chihuly are immediately identifiable and distinctive art objects that can be found in museums, galleries, luxury hotels and public spaces around the world. But only at the Seattle Center's ongoing exhibition, "Chihuly Garden and Glass," can the artist's unique vision be viewed in the context of lush gardens and galleries devoted to his work and process. Having long been fascinated with glasshouses, conservatories and gardens, Chihuly has an innate understanding of how glass fits together with nature, and the designs featured in "Chihuly Garden and Glass" are proof of his ability to beautifully harmonize both worlds.

## CRYSTALLINE VISION

Chihuly is considered a pioneer in the sculpture world, someone who pushed the boundaries of glass as an art medium not only conceptually but also in his materials and creative process, as well as in the innovative ways he has chosen to present his pieces. The artist was introduced to glass while studying interior design at the University of Washington,

and after graduation he enrolled in the first glass program in the U.S., at the University of Wisconsin. Chihuly eventually made his way to the Rhode Island School of Design, where he established and taught their glass program for more than a decade. In 1968, after receiving a Fulbright Fellowship, he traveled to Venice and worked in the Venini glass factory. There he observed the team approach to blowing glass, which still informs his process. In 1971, Chihuly cofounded Pilchuck Glass School, in Washington, which became an international center known for the avant-garde development of glass as a fine art medium.

Since that time, Chihuly has completed several important series, including *Cylinders* and *Baskets* in the 1970s; *Seaforms*, *Macchia*, *Venetians* and *Persians* in the 1980s; *Nijima Floats* and *Chandeliers* in the 1990s; and *Fiori* in

The organic shapes in the installation **Mille Fiori** (Italian for "thousand flowers") resemble an array of botanicals, such as reeds, lily pads and grasses, as well as the graceful curve of a heron's neck.





## INSIDE THE GLASSHOUSE

Composed of 1,340 individual elements, the blown-glass flowers adorning the roof of the Glasshouse is one of Chihuly's largest suspended sculptures.



the 2000s. In 1986, his solo exhibition “Dale Chihuly: Objets de Verre,” was on view at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, in Paris. From 1995 to 1996 he worked on “Chihuly Over Venice,” for which he created sculptures at glass factories in Finland, Ireland, Mexico and Italy that were then installed over the canals and piazzas of Venice. In 1999, Chihuly created the monumental exhibition “Chihuly in the Light of Jerusalem” at the Tower of David Museum, where one million visitors came to view his installations. In 2001, the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London, curated the exhibition “Chihuly at the V&A.”

While best known for these series and other ambitious architectural installations, Chihuly has also, throughout his career, created works in the context of botanical and garden settings. His “Garden Cycle” began in 2001 at the Garfield Park Conservatory, in Chicago, and he has also exhibited at the Royal Botanic Gardens, near London, in 2005. The intersections of flora, fauna, light and color became an ongoing fascination for the artist, and he continued to develop conceptual motifs and designs of this nature.

### GLASSHOUSE IN THE GARDEN

The artist's appreciation for gardens and conservatories blossomed further when, in 2012, “Chihuly Garden and Glass” opened at the Seattle Center. This continuing exhibition is housed next to the Space Needle, which has been an iconic staple in the Seattle community since the Seattle Center hosted the World's Fair in 1962. The

exhibition includes eight galleries and two walls of the artist's drawings, the centerpiece Glasshouse and a garden filled with unique species of flowers and botanicals. In these galleries visitors can see several of Chihuly's significant series and installations, including *Glass Forest*, *Northwest Room*, *Sealife Room* (see *Sealife Tower*, page 8), *Persian Ceiling*, *Mille Fiori* (page 9), *Ikebana*, *Float Boats*, *Chandeliers* and *Macchia Forest*. Running along the wall bordering the Garden Plaza are the seven sculptures of *Chandelier Walkway*.

The Glasshouse, a 40-foot-high glass and steel greenhouse-like conservatory, covers 4,500 square feet of light-filled space. The inspiration for the design was derived from two of the artist's favorite buildings: Sainte-Chapelle, in Paris, and the Crystal Palace, in London. Light streams in through the Glasshouse's arched, glass window-walls, and the ceiling drips with a 100-foot-long installation—a kaleidoscope of glass blossoms in bright reds, oranges, yellows and ambers (see Inside the Glasshouse, above.)

Complementing the Glasshouse and indoor galleries is a sprawling garden (see Outside the Glasshouse, opposite). Like an art gallery itself with an array of rich colors, shapes and fragrances, the garden makes an appropriate backdrop to the glass sculptures on display. On the paths lined with trees, plants and flowers, visitors encounter crimson camellias, scarlet day lilies, dogwoods, fuchsias and handkerchief trees setting the stage for Chihuly's *Viola Crystal Tower*, *Citron Icicle Tower* and the *Mexican Hat Tower* on view in the outdoor space. At the

## OUTSIDE THE GLASSHOUSE

The gardens outside the Glasshouse offer striking day and night aspects. In the foreground of the daytime view, at left, are sculptures of **Cobalt Reeds**, **Fiori** and spherical **Nijima Floats**. In the background is the 16-foot-diameter **Pacific Sun**. In the foreground of the night view, below, the 30-foot-tall **Citron Icicle Tower** glows like an otherworldly sentinel.



center of this lush landscape, on a bed of black mondo grass, is the artist's 16-foot-diameter sculpture *Pacific Sun*, which illuminates the outdoor space with a striking arrangement of yellow and orange glass. A collection of *Neodymium Reeds* and *Seal Pups* can be found nested among nearly 500-year-old, salvaged old-growth Western Red Cedar from the Olympic Peninsula.

Completing the exhibition experience is an on-site theater, where short videos on Chihuly's work and process can be viewed. Through interviews and footage of the artist in the midst of the creative process—blowing glass

in his studio and working on-site for installations and exhibitions—visitors get a big-picture introduction to the artist as innovator, art advocate, educator and more. ♡

*Allison Malafronte is an arts and design writer, editor and curator based in the greater New York area.*

▶ FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE CHIHULY GARDEN AND GLASS, VISIT [CHIHULYGARDENANDGLASS.COM](http://CHIHULYGARDENANDGLASS.COM). FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CHIHULY, VISIT [CHIHULY.COM](http://CHIHULY.COM).