The Secrets of Millefiori – The Most Recognized Murano Glass Technique

Millefiori (“a thousand flowers” in Italian) is one of the best-known and highly sought after techniques of Murano glassmaking. It is a complex technique resulting in unique and beautiful pieces that are unmistakably Venetian.

Aug. 4, 2009 - PRLog -- Millefiori, also known as Murrine, is one of the best-known and highly sought after techniques of Murano glass making. It stands for “a thousand flowers” in Italian, and indeed, the end result of this painstaking work often reminds a field of whimsical flowers showing off their beautiful colors. Looking at the amazing Murano glass rings, pendants, figurines, paperweights, vases, and even lamps made in this technique, it is hard to imagine just how Venetian glass masters can create such multitude of patterns and richness of colors out of glass. So in this article we’ll uncover the secrets of this technique known since antiquity and perfected by Murano glassmakers, and give you a glimpse of the rich history behind it.

In the sixteenth century some of the Murano glass artisans started attempts to imitate the beautiful ancient glassware created by Romans. They were successful in doing that, but as with many other glassmaking techniques, the secret they uncovered had subsequently been lost again until the interest in these Roman pieces sparked anew in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time when archeological discoveries became more frequent and many beautiful decorative items were unearthed, Murano glass artists again became fascinated with glassware from classic antiquity created by the ancient Romans and exhibited in the famous Murano Glass Museum. Some of the beautiful objects that came to us from those times include glass vases, bowls, urns, and plates with flower or abstract patterns spread around the inside and outside surfaces of the objects. Venetian glass artisans understood conceptually that these items were created using glass rods shaped in various patterns and then cut up and fused together. However, it was not so easy to work out a precise technique for reproducing these types of glassware, since that required persistent and passionate research by trial and error. This was just what a driven and curious man named Vincenzo Moretti set out to do. At first, he worked as a glass-paste mixer at one of the most prominent Murano glass companies of that time, Salviati & Co., which then turned into well-known Venice and Murano Company. Vincenzo spent countless hours and finally uncovered a secret to producing Millefiori glass, which instantly made Venice and Murano Company world-famous thanks to the millefiori works they showcased in Paris Universal Exposition in 1878. Vincenzo Moretti not only learnt how to achieve the beauty of Millefiori patterns, he also managed to create exact copies of the amazing glassware produced by the Ancient Romans and used in Pompeii and in other Roman cities that was on display in world-famous Archeological Museum of Naples.

Thus, this special technique that once again made the world stand in awe of the enviable skills of Murano glass makers is no longer a secret. It is a very complicated and painstaking glassmaking technique and requires an exceptionally high level of skill, and maybe for these reasons it is still the trademark of Venetian glassmakers. Making of a millefiori pattern is a multi-step process, but it all starts with a glass rod prepared in a special way. It contains multiple layers of semi-liquid glass paste applied one-on-top-of-another around the cylindrical rod. Each layer is molded to have a certain shape (usually star or flower-like) and color. The preparation continues as the resulting multi-layered rod is stretched and then cut up into small cylindrical pieces called “murrine”. The murrine are then cleaned up and arranged in a desired pattern within a special heat-resistant mold to give the product the necessary shape. Next, the mold containing the murrine pattern is placed into the special furnace. These furnaces are the cornerstone of the glassmaking craft, as the artisans use them to heat up the glass mixture and work it while it’s in a liquid state. Once murrine start bonding with each other inside the furnace, the mold is removed and its contents are pressed upon to create a continuous Millefiori surface with no gaps. After that, it’s back to the furnace.
again for creating and shaping the final product.

The results of this labor-intensive process are gorgeous patterns and deep intensive colors unseen in any other glass creations. From Millefiori pendants and earrings worn by discerning jewelry lovers around the world to museum-worthy millefiori vases, figurines, and other Venetian glass creations, these distinctive products that come out of Venetian glass masters’ furnaces are artistic and unique. These days, not only the nobility or the wealthy can enjoy Millefiori decorations, but anyone who admires Millefiori and Venetian glass can buy a piece of this centuries-old art. From small Murano glass rings, cufflinks, earrings, and pendants, to figurines, ashtrays, lamps and bowls – a variety of Millefiori products one can buy is astounding, and so is the price range, which stretches from just a few dollars to over a hundred.

And with the advent of the World Wide Web one does not need to travel to Venice to get a special Millefiori piece, but can choose it from her own armchair and get it delivered. The internet has made Venetian glass and Millefiori glassware more accessible and more affordable, yet there are a few things to look out for while shopping for these products online. In recent years there have been many fake pieces and counterfeits from China and other countries offered for sale as “Murano Glass”. It is more difficult to create fake Millefiori glass than some other types, but people still do it though they often use very different simple techniques or just plain decoration over glass to achieve the effect on pictures. Of course once you finally get your hands on such fake product, you will see the difference right away, but by that time it may be too late and very hard to get your money back. For this reason every Murano glass buyer needs to know that Murano glass can only be produced on Murano Island within Venice, Italy. All other places of origin produce counterfeits. Look for assurances on the website of the origin of their products such as certificates of authenticity, assess the level of Murano glass knowledge that the seller possesses by looking at product descriptions and informative articles on the site, and survey the site’s policies carefully before deciding to buy.

Once you find a trustworthy seller and buy your very own beautiful Millefiori glass product, you are guaranteed to enjoy it every day and get lots of compliments and questions about it, because everyone is enchanted by these gorgeous unique patterns, the rich history and tradition behind them, and the artistic expression that shines through them.

Keywords: millefiori, millefiori pendants, venetian glass, murano glass, venetian glass jewelry, murano millefiori, venetian pendants

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About GlassOfVenice: GlassOfVenice was created with passion for Venice and everything it has to offer to those who appreciate art, beauty, and history. In Murano Glass we see a reflection of all those things and a unique way to enjoy the heritage of Venice. We feel that the handmade colorful and precious Murano Glass objects allow us to go back in time and capture the fragile beauty of Venice, and we are happy to share this opportunity with our customers worldwide.

In our search for perfection we found the best artisans on the island of Murano and we work with them directly to bring their products to you at the lowest cost via our secure internet store. We sell only 100% authentic Murano glass from the artisans that have been in business for over 75 years and are members of Consorzio Promovetro trade association. This association guarantees that its members produce only the highest quality original Murano glass made according to the ancient techniques and traditions.

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