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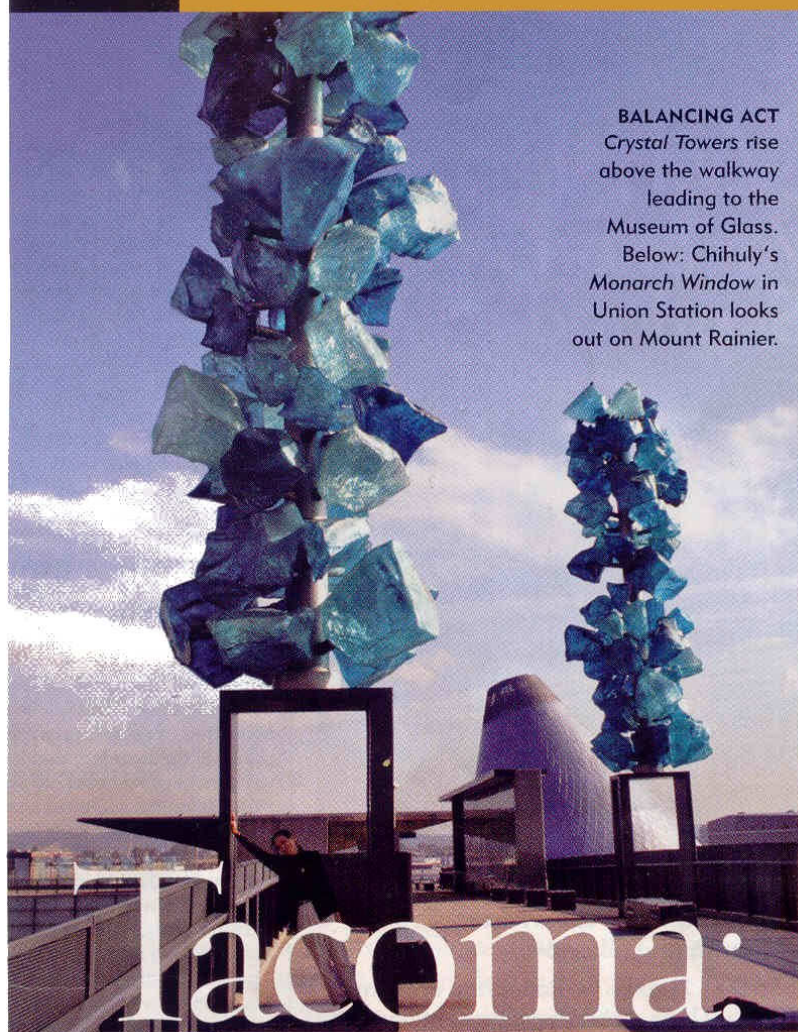
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BALANCING ACT
Crystal Towers rise above the walkway leading to the Museum of Glass. Below: Chihuly's *Monarch Window* in Union Station looks out on Mount Rainier.

Renowned artist Dale Chihuly has put Seattle's sibling city on the map

"WE CAME FROM SEATTLE to see Chihuly glass," said one of the people on the Tacoma Art Museum's walking tour. Impressive, because up until recently, nobody traveled 33 miles south from Seattle to see *anything* in Tacoma. But now, with the establishment of the University of Washington, Tacoma's fine downtown campus, the restoration of Union Station and the rise of museums, restaurants and more, the city has gotten sexy.

Tacoma: City of Glass



Much of the inspiration (and art) came from Dale Chihuly, a native son who has radically expanded the universe of shapes, sizes and colors—he's never met one he didn't like—that glass can embody. Of course, you can see a wide selection of Chihuly pieces in London and Tokyo and the Bahamas, but they are most exhilarating here in his hometown, where they brighten up gray days with fearless hues that evoke the heat and light of the ovens where they were created. What follows is a guide to his greatest hits in Tacoma.

Tacoma Art Museum

TAM shows off the world's largest permanent retrospective of Chihuly glass in a fab new building, with a few pieces in the lobby and the rest along the ramp leading from the lobby and in the Davis Gallery. These works are arranged for aesthetic impact rather than in chronological order, but since many of Chihuly's series, or periods, evolved from earlier ones, here's a key to some of the major series in the museum.

BASKETS Made in the 1970s, they seem to be falling in on one side, just like antique Indian baskets. A wonderful illusion; after all, this is glass.

SEAFORMS This series from around 1980 was born when the Chihuly studio used ribbed molds to form delicate, transparent pieces that resemble clams and sea urchins. Groups of them snuggle together like some underwater *Peaceable Kingdom*.

MACCHIA As Chihuly puts it, "The Macchia series began with my waking up one day wanting to use all 300 of the colors in the hot shop."

He succeeded. Some of the bowls from this series (which was started in 1981) have so many layers of colors and *macchie* (spots), it's as if they had swallowed psychedelics.

SOFT CYLINDERS In these pieces from the mid-1980s you can see how Chihuly



fused glass drawings to the surface of works that have the same soft, caving-in look of the Baskets collection.

PERSIANS This series, which debuted at the Louvre in 1986, evokes the earlier Seaforms, but without the ribbing that gave rise to shell-like textures. What does catch your eye is the wavy lines that were inspired by Middle Eastern tapestries.

VENETIANS In the late 1980s Chihuly and friends reprised Italian Art Deco with intense colors and *putti* (cherubs) that are joyfully unhinged. Stay tuned: You'll see more of these outdoors.

IKEBANA These attention-getters from the early 1990s evoke Japanese flower arranging; they also push the limits of how large you can make things like elongated glass flower stalks.

DETAILS Open Tuesday-Sunday through Memorial Day and daily in summer; \$7.50. 1701 Pacific Avenue; 253/272-4258; tacomamuseum.org.

Union Station

Designed by Reed & Stem, one of the architectural firms that created New York's Grand Central Terminal, Union Station is now a (free) museum for large Chihuly pieces. The chandelier has a helluva lot of shapes and colors, even for Chihuly, and I'll tell you why: It was assembled from other works' leftover parts; that's why it's called *End of the Day*. My favorite installation is the *Monarch Window*, with orange jellyfish shapes that cast butterfly ghosts on the floor in the morning.

DETAILS Open Monday-Friday. 1717 Pacific Avenue; 253/572-9310.

Chihuly Bridge of Glass

Crossing a highway to the new Museum of Glass, which is on the waterfront, this walkway has three installations. The first, and only covered one, has an overhead display of Seaforms that's a test of one's cervical vertebrae (I flunked). The second consists of two powerful, glacier-blue *Crystal Towers* that seem to have been cut from frigid



VENETIAN VARIATIONS
Three of the 109 works on display on the Chihuly Bridge of Glass.



DALE CHIHULY: A TACOMA WALKING TOUR

The guides who lead these two-hour strolls offer a fine introduction to the works of Chihuly at the **Tacoma Art Museum**, the **Chihuly Bridge of Glass** and **Union Station**. Tuesday-Saturday at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.; \$10, including museum admission. 1701 Pacific Avenue; 253/272-4258; tacomamuseum.org.

Mount Rainier. The third, the *Venetian Wall*, frames 109 seductive, fantastical works in a case that lets light flood through their rich colors. Stay awhile.

Museum of Glass: International Center for Contemporary Art

Sorry, there's no permanent Chihuly collection in this museum. But the place does exhibit superb pieces by other major artists. And in the Hot Shop Amphitheater visitors can see artists stick gobs of glass into hell-fire ovens, hit the molten glass with hard objects(!) and/or blow it into complex shapes and, in general, do scary stuff that ends up as art. For sheer tension, teamwork and triumph, this spectacle sure beats watching ESPN.

DETAILS Open Wednesday-Sunday until Memorial Day, every day in summer; \$10. 1801 East Dock Street; 866/468-7386; museumofglass.org.


Vetri International Glass and William Traver Gallery

Set in a historic warehouse on the waterfront, these galleries sell Chihuly Studio Edition pieces (from around \$4,500 at Vetri) and a splendid array of works by emerging and top-dollar artists.

DETAILS Open Tuesday-Sunday. 1821 East Dock Street. Vetri: 253/383-3692; vetri.glass.com. Traver: 253/383-3685; traver.gallery.com.

University of Washington, Tacoma Library

Ask to see the room with the 23-foot *Chinook Red* (well, this is the Northwest) *Chandelier*. The power and warmth of this squiggly, near-monochromatic mass of glass will make you ponder the fact that for many years no one was interested in buying Chihuly's chandeliers.

DETAILS Open daily during the school year. 1902 Commerce Street; 253/692-4440. 

Ed Wetschler, former editor-in-chief of *DIVERSION*, has family in Tacoma, so he has closely followed the city's resurrection.