

Smithsonian

1995

Contemporary crafts
and a home in the
White House (p. 52)

By Phil Patton

Today's crafts join our nation's past at the White House

More than 75 craft artists have contributed to the new collection, which is currently on view at the National Museum of American Art



Dale Chihuly's scalloped blown-glass sculpture is right at home in the Center Hall of the White House.

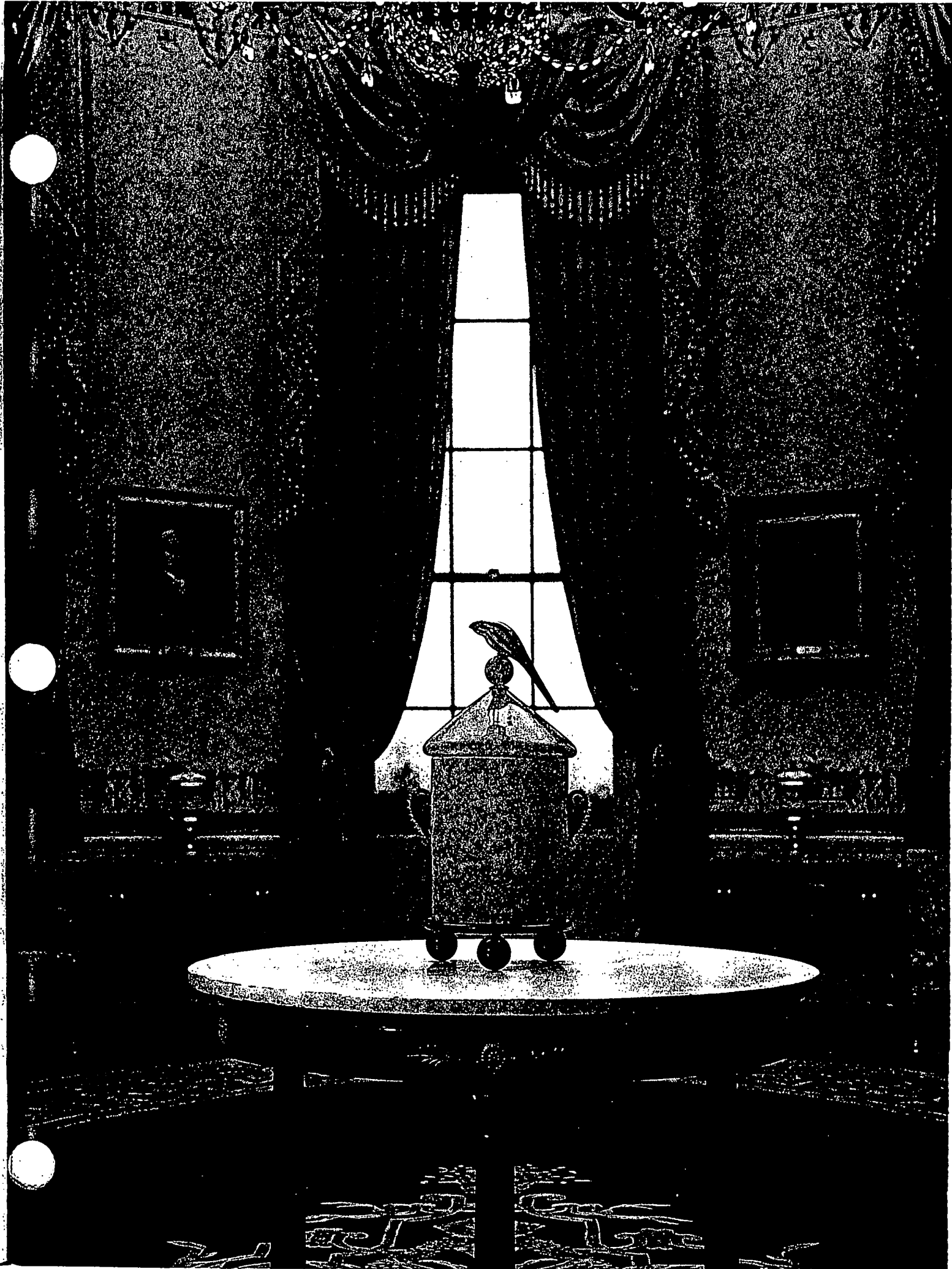
Presidential portraits in the Blue Room (opposite) preside over David Levi's two-foot-high *Bird Jar*.

Two graceful yellow shapes, evoking those of ancient Greece, sit on an antique table. Outside, through the window, the Washington Monument rises against a bright autumn sky. In the Yellow Oval Room of the White House, the two glass vases by craftsman Dante Marion, one elongated and rising, the other wide and cuplike, seem at home. Pondered for a while, they suggest wading birds of two species, or perhaps even upright Don Quixote and squat Sancho Panza (see cover).

But for a few months, Marion's work, along with those of 76 other contemporary American craft artists,

have left the White House, traveling across town to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art (NMAA), where they will be on view until September 4. In the words of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, the show illustrates "the extraordinary beauty and diversity of American craftsmanship." For those who cannot come to Washington, a catalog of the show, *The White House Collection of American Crafts*, is being published by Harry N. Abrams. Moreover, thanks to a grant from MCI, a tour of the exhibit will be available on the World Wide Web, a part of the Internet, complete with images,

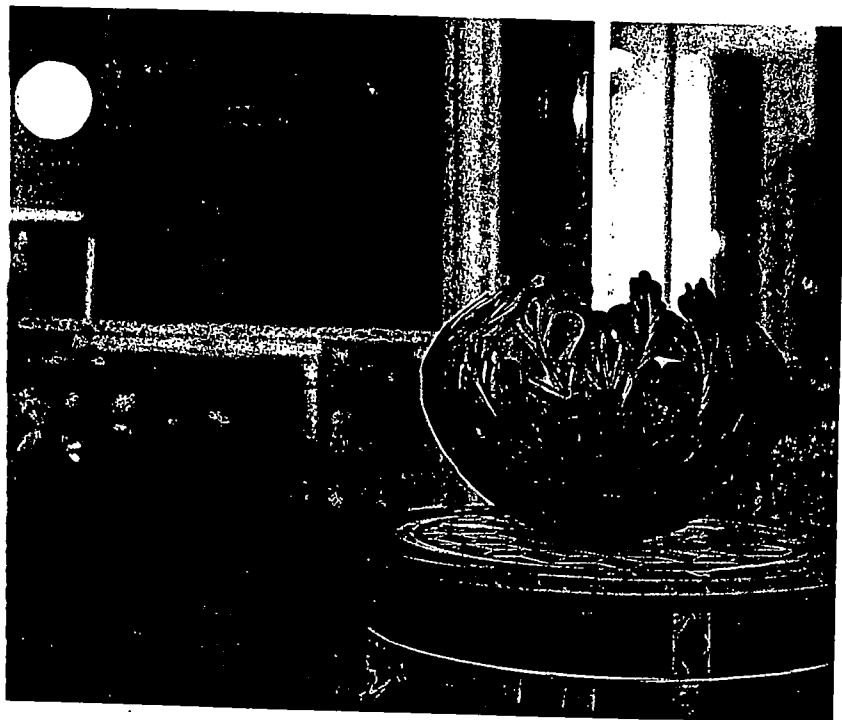
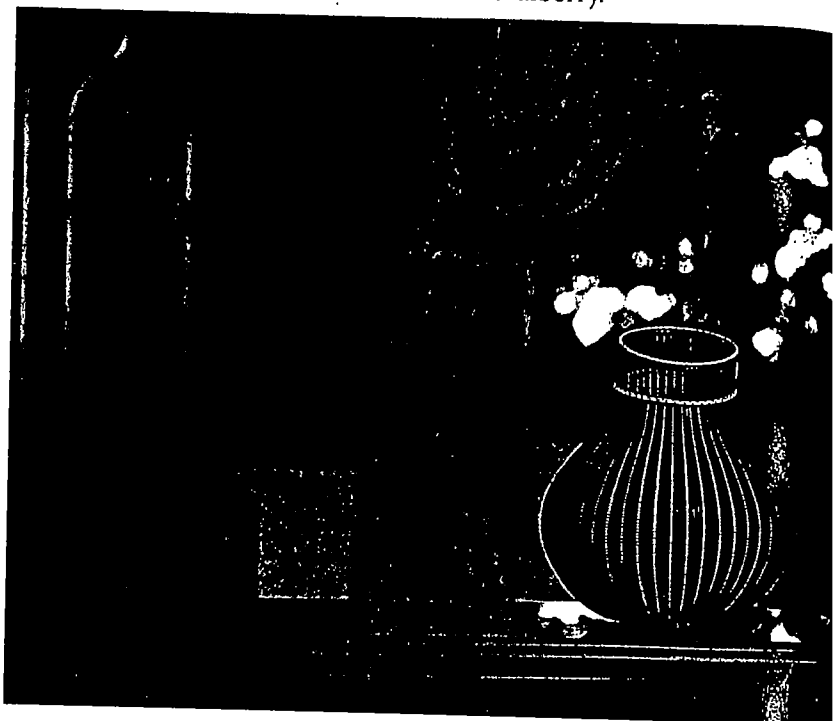
Photographs by John Bigelow Taylor





Imago Bag by Kate Vogel and John Littleton, in the Entrance Hall, looks soft but is actually glass.

Sharon and Leon Niehues created their *Eburna* basket using white oak, waxed linen thread and coralberry.



Ronald Fleming's lathe-turned, carved redwood-burl bowl resonates with the rich wood of a Red Room table.

Anne Hirondele's stoneware teapots are a natural fit with the Diplomatic Reception Room's 1834 wallpaper.



descriptions, sound and video clips. This breaks new ground; it is part of the museum's goal of reaching people who can't travel to its stately premises.

The juxtaposition of high-tech and handmade may at first seem incongruous but, in fact, the show reveals a wonderful congruence between these seeming opposites. Creating computer programs is a craft of its own, demanding talent and skill. And many crafts are more high-tech than we might think, using advanced tools and materials to leverage the vision of the hand.

"There's a lot of technology to crafts," muses the show's curator, Michael Monroe, "and we were interested in showing the connection." Monroe cites Edward Moulthrop, originally trained as an architect, who produces huge turned wood bowls. Moulthrop soaks the wood for three months in polyethylene glycol, a chemical solution that keeps the wood from shrinking or cracking. Only this solution allows Moulthrop to work pieces of wood this size. Another craft artist, Sidney Hutter, uses glues cured by ultraviolet light to bond pieces of glass. These glues, developed for the electronics and glass industries, lend a seeming fragility to the spiral patterns of Hutter's *White House Vase #1*.

The crafts collection grew out of a 1992 proclamation by President George Bush that designated 1993 as the Year of American Craft. After Mrs. Clinton's arrival at the White House, she talked with Monroe, curator-in-charge of the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery, which is a part of the NMAA. Together, they came up with the idea of decorating the White House Christmas tree with hand-crafted ornaments. Over a single weekend, Monroe worked feverishly to contact craft artists, asking them to send ornaments. Enough were received to decorate not only the White House's ceiling-high Fraser fir but seven other small trees as well.

Seeking to expand on that project, Mrs. Clinton and Monroe decided to assemble a group of larger crafts items for the White House itself. Monroe compiled a list of potential artists, expecting only about half of those he contacted to agree to donate work. Once the idea was born, "I made up the list in 48 hours," Monroe recalls, his eyes gleaming with mischief. The short time period is a sign not of carelessness but of connoisseurship; Monroe is one of only a handful of people well enough informed about the crafts world to make such decisions so rapidly. All 77 of the craft artists agreed to participate.

When the works arrived, they were placed on Duncan Phyfe tables and historic marble mantels in time for Christmas at the White House. Some of the pieces were used to serve foreign leaders being entertained by the President and First Lady; others became centerpieces

Phil Patton wrote Made in USA: The Secret Histories of the Things that Made America. In June 1993 he wrote on the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

for Presidential dinners. About a million visitors to the White House also saw them, but Monroe dreamed of showing the works to many more people than that. Since the Renwick Gallery's schedule was full, the exhibit was planned for the NMAA.

In placing the pieces in the White House, Monroe worked carefully to find locations where they would be particularly effective, although they will be rotated from time to time. Master glass artist Dale Chihuly's *Cerulean Blue Macchia with Chartreuse Lip Wrap*, a form that resembles a huge sea scallop dipped in rainbows, repeats the scalloped pattern of the fanlight in the Center Hall. David Levi conceived his *Bird Jar* with the Blue Room in mind; the arabesque of the blue bird on the jar's top contributes to the sense of calm in the elegant room, where portraits of Madison and Jefferson hang. Ronald Fleming's leaf-inspired, redwood-burl bowl rises like spring growth in the Red Room. Graceful, wheel-thrown stoneware bottles by Michael Sherrill sit near a portrait of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

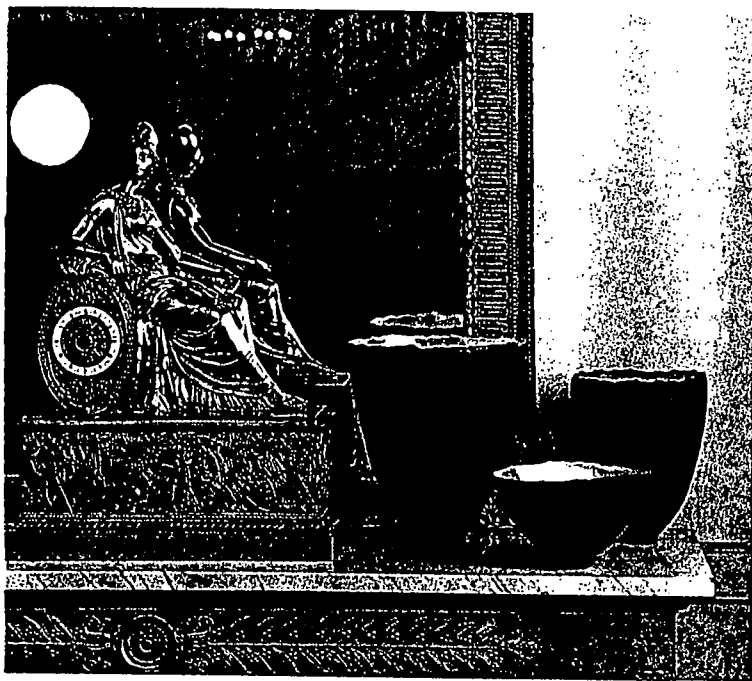
The fine-art quality of craft

All of the craft artists were surprised and delighted when Monroe originally contacted them. Nathan Youngblood—who studied with his grandmother, Margaret Tafoya, one of the last of the traditional Pueblo potters—went to the White House after his piece was put on exhibit. It was a great honor, he says, to see his *Black Carved Jar* in the stately Cross Hall. "In the last 25 years," adds Youngblood, "artists have taken pottery to such a level that people are beginning to understand there is a possibility of its being fine-art quality and not just craft."

For his part, Monroe is little concerned with defining crafts or distinguishing them from high art or folk art. And while the NMAA is renowned for its collections of high art and folk art, including self-taught art, the distinctions that NMAA director Elizabeth Broun sees are not based on function or hierarchy. To her, what distinguishes craft is a highly sophisticated understanding of materials and process; they are at the heart of the creative experience. "We don't pretend the categories are divine revelation," Broun says, "but they are useful and practical."

To be sure, crafts suffer from a bad image with the public at large. The term carries connotations of baskets made from kits and of low technology, in contrast with "high" arts such as oil painting or bronze sculpture. Part of this, to Monroe, has to do with simple ignorance of history. "In the early Renaissance," he points out, "at the top of the hierarchy of artists was the goldsmith."

In the West, the idea of crafts as a category separate from fine art emerged as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, as crafts came to be seen as a handmade, humanistic alternative to the "soul-deadening" ma-



A French pier table bought by President James Monroe in 1817 holds *Prayer Bowls*, made by Cheryl Williams.

chine. This is the tradition of William Morris in England and of Gustav Stickley in the United States. In the White House itself, the appreciation of crafts as art was evident as early as 1882, when the otherwise little-remembered President Chester Arthur commissioned Louis Comfort Tiffany to create a floor-to-ceiling stained-glass screen for the Cross Hall (it remained there until 1902).

During the 1930s, when the Depression and the New Deal moved the country into a retrospective mood, there was rising consciousness of crafts as both a historical legacy to be documented and a living, evolving set of traditions. Schools such as Penland in North Carolina, Otis (now Otis Parsons) in California and Cranbrook in Michigan developed programs to keep the crafts vital.

The American Craft Museum was established in 1956 just down the street from the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. In 1972 the Renwick Gallery, housed in a French Second Empire building next door to Blair House, the Presidential guest residence, became the nation's official crafts museum. Since Michael Monroe became curator-in-charge in 1986, the Renwick has broadened its role in the field of crafts, publishing books in the "Contemporary American Craft Series" and mounting exhibitions on everything from silverware to quilts.

For the designers of the current exhibition, an evolution in the ways that art is presented to the public seemed to match the theme of the evolution of the crafts themselves. Steve Dietz of the NMAA conceived the idea

of juxtaposing crafts and computers with a version of the show on the Internet. "It lets you go into the White House in a way you could not otherwise do," he says one day while planning the virtual exhibition. He sees many ways of organizing the images and information. "We will have an electronic light table," Dietz says, where images will appear on a computer screen like slides laid out. "Clicking" on one of these little images will cause a screen-size image to appear along with a caption. Other planned features include a look at a map of the United States showing where the craft artists live; clicking on their names will call up further information, including videotaped interviews with many of them. Viewers can also take a guided tour of the exhibit with Michael Monroe or put together a personal tour, "navigating" with the computer mouse.

All this, of course, is not the same as visiting the actual exhibition, but many people do not have the choice of a real visit. The computer tour will be accessible to people around the globe, and this version of the show will never go "out of print"; it will live on inside a pizza-box-size computer on the first floor of the NMAA (the address is <http://www.nmaa.si.edu>).

One floor above that computer, in the grand barrel-vaulted and granite-columned office of director Elizabeth Broun, the exhibition's planning group met in February to discuss the Internet version of the show. One couldn't help but notice that Broun's carefully handcrafted desk contrasts with the computer that sits on it.

At the meeting, there's a lot of talk of "hypertext markup language" and "built-on-the-fly databases." Michael Monroe rolls his eyes and smiles at the strangeness of it all. He has never seen the World Wide Web, but he has a number of very good ideas nonetheless. He has gotten images from the craft artists themselves; he has a list of those who are willing to be interviewed on videotape in their studios.

For Elizabeth Broun, there are concerns. "We're getting into all kinds of uncharted territory here," she says. How will visitors react to the idea of a stationary camera that will provide images of the exhibition spaces over the Internet? Why is it useful? "It reinforces the metaphor that you are there," says Steve Dietz.

Will there be enough telephone capacity if the virtual exhibition becomes very popular? "We call it the 'success disaster,'" Dietz laughs.

In the end, what they agree on is that the virtual exhibition must be as carefully put together as the real one, as elegant in form as the objects in the show. Says Dietz, "It has to be crafted by hand—so to speak."

Michael Sherrill's *Incandescent Bottles* echo Aaron Shikler's 1970 portrait of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.



talk of the trade

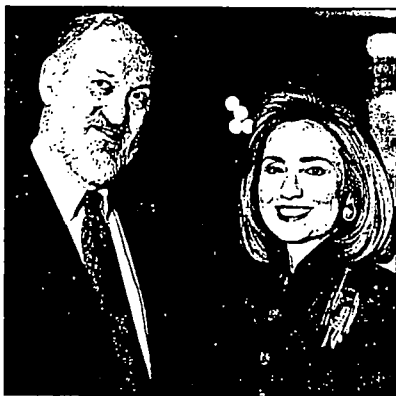
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New York

Monroe Joins Peter Joseph

From the White House to—possibly—your house. Michael W. Monroe, who spent two decades at the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., and who curated an American craft collection for President and Mrs. Clinton, has left the public sector to become curator in charge at New York's Peter Joseph Gallery.

"I'm looking forward to a more tightly focused way of working," says the 55-year-old Monroe. "At the Renwick, I was responsible for everything from taking care of the leaking roof to



Michael W. Monroe with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. Monroe chose contemporary crafts for the White House.

fund-raising to scholarship and acquisitions." Now, he says, he will have one task—"working with collectors, museums and certainly corporations to develop their collections of American studio furniture"—the Peter Joseph Gallery's specialty.

Born in Wisconsin, where he still maintains a ranch, Monroe received a master's degree from Michigan's noted Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1971. While a student there, he created the concept, graphics and slide projections for the exhibition "Have You Ever

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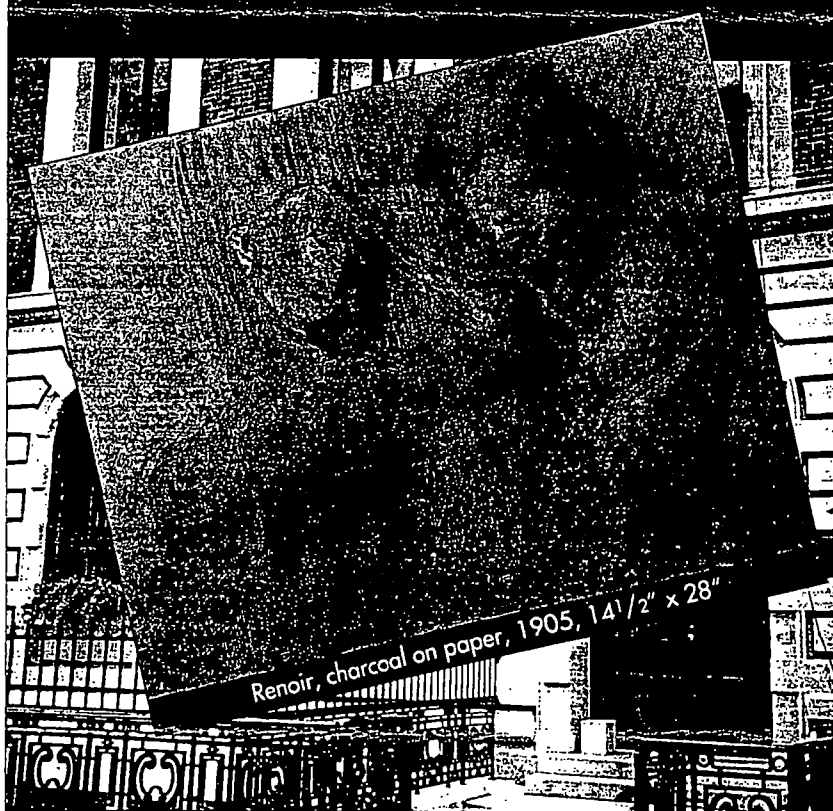
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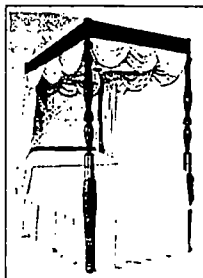


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Chippendale Armchair
New York, circa 1780



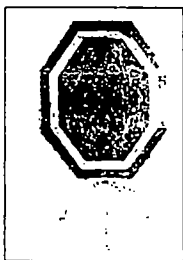
Canopy Bed
Salem, Mass., circa 1810



Miniature by Nathaniel
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Tallcase Clock From
Stearns Family, Mass.
circa 1790

talk of the trade

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Wondered Where It All Went?" The show, Monroe recalls, "dealt with the throwaway components of our society prior to America's interest in recycling."

By 1974 Monroe had become an associate curator at the Renwick, the Smithsonian's museum for American crafts; by 1986 he was running the show as chief officer. During his tenure, Monroe organized exhibitions of artists including Wendell Castle, Dale Chihuly and Joyce Kozloff and on themes ranging from American Art Deco to "The Animal Image: Contemporary Objects and the Beast," an examination of the animal form in contemporary craft. In 1977, he advised Joan Mondale, wife of then-Vice-President Walter Mondale (and herself a ceramicist), on her crafts collection. Two years ago the call came again: Monroe found himself working with the Clintons to amass 72 objects, which he eventually installed in the White House's period settings. "The White House Collection of American Crafts" (with a catalogue published this year by Harry N. Abrams) is currently on a national tour; a "virtual tour" is available on the Internet. From October 7 through November 17, it can be seen at the Memorial Art Gallery at New York's University of Rochester.

The First Couple "has a real sincere appreciation for American craft," Monroe says. "Mrs. Clinton knew all the names." Among the artists represented in the collection are Castle, Albert Paley and William Harper, all of whom are in the Joseph stable. The gallery, which has a branch in Southampton, New York, also represents Wendy Wahl, Michelle Holzapfel, Tim Philbrick and John Dunnigan, among others.

"Studio furniture is one of the most dynamic forms in practice today," says Monroe. "These things go through cycles. Ceramics had a great heyday in the 1960s. Now we're

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talk of the trade

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in the midst of an incredible moment of furniture-making by artists in this country." But whatever the trends, Monroe adds, "The most popular museum exhibitions are ones that focus on objects, often because of their accessibility through function. People can relate to chairs they sit in." *Robin Cembalest*

Trade Notes

New York—Over 250,000 people are expected to attend the SoHo Arts Festival, a "vastly expanded" version of what was in previous years merely the SoHo Block Party. Spearheaded by former dealer Simon Watson, the festival has been extended from one late afternoon and evening into a three-day celebration, running from October 6 through 8.

Zurich—The project to publish an Andy Warhol catalogue raisonné, begun by the late Thomas Ammann, is well under way. The first of five projected volumes is now being assembled by co-editors Georg Frei and Neil-Printz; it will cover Warhol's paintings and sculptures from the late 1940s through the 1960s. Owners of paintings, sculptures or drawings not already recorded by the catalogue raisonné are asked to contact either Thomas Ammann Fine Art (Restelbergstrasse 97, Zurich, CH-8044) or the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts (65 Bleecker Street, New York, N.Y., 10012) no later than May 1, 1996.

New York—Modern and contemporary art dealer Grace Borgenicht, who represented artists including Milton Avery and Wolf Kahn, is closing her gallery at 724 Fifth Avenue and retiring after 44 years in the trade. Contemporary art dealer Nicole Klagsbrun is also closing her gallery (51 Greene Street), but will remain in New York as a private dealer.

THE CLINTON COLLECTION

By Heidi L. Berry

Imagine walking into the main entrance hall of the White House, with its marble columns, crystal chandeliers and early 19th-century gilded furniture, and seeing a funky contemporary clock on a side table. The clock, by craft artist Wendell Castle, resembles a person as much as it does a timepiece.

It is no more startling in its setting than the large, brilliantly colored blue and yellow glass jar, with a bird perched on its lid, in the antiques-filled Vermeil Room. There, the French neo-classical mantel and the pier table made in New York around 1810 by master craftsman Charles-Honore Lannuier, are far more in harmony with each other and the sensibility of the First Home than the whimsical container by glassmaker David W. Levi.

And that is just the point.

These pieces, part of what is now referred to as the White House crafts collection, were

meant to call attention to themselves, and thereby to the art of craft. Starting tomorrow, they will do so more publicly. The clock, the glass jar and 70 other objects will go on display at the National Museum of American Art. The exhibition, "The White House Collection of American Crafts," runs through September 4.

The collection can be seen as the culmination of an effort by Hillary Rodham Clinton to celebrate the year of craft, decreed before her arrival in the White House by both a joint resolution of Congress and a presidential proclamation. The collection, exhibition and accompanying book, published by Harry N. Abrams, for which the First Lady wrote the foreword, also can be seen as the highlight of a career for Michael W. Monroe. Retiring in June as curator-in-charge of the museum's Renwick Gallery, where crafts are the focus, Monroe selected the artists, and in many cases, the individual works of art.

Monroe sees "craft as a full-fledged art form," but he acknowledges that the field has often played "second cousin to the visual arts." Thus the collection and its attendant recognition are also a high point in the careers of the artists—even those with national reputations—who gave examples of their work, with values that range from \$600 to \$20,000, to the White House when it asked for a contribution to a permanent collection. It was only later that the White House was reminded it cannot accept the works of living artists, and so the collection has been scheduled for relocation to a future Clinton Library, presumably in Arkansas.

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"Bird Vase" in glass by Dmitri Michaelides and David W. Levi.

Mosaic white pine bowl by Philip Mouthrop, above. Fiber basket titled "Eternals" by Sharon and Leon Niehaus, right.

PHOTOS BY JOHN BIGELOW TAYLOR

Dale Chihuly's cerulean blue rippled bowl poised on an antique table in the White House.



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Startling in their White House setting, the objects gathered for Hillary Rodham Clinton are going on public display.

White House

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The genesis of the Clinton collection was in 1993. Looking ahead to their first Christmas holiday in the White House, Hillary Clinton decided to decorate the Christmas trees with ornaments made and styled by craftspeople, a creative but radically radical idea. But in a bold departure from the formal, traditional nature of the White House, she also envisioned craft objects placed throughout the rooms.

It was an adventuresome step, and it could have easily failed. Mark Hampton, the interior designer and member of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, describes crafts as "not easily integrated into decorative schemes."

They are particularly difficult to display in the narrowly focused time framework of the White House, the period 1812 to 1825, he adds. But by many accounts, it was a smashing success. The most

enthusiastic assessments, not surprising, come from craft professionals such as Janet Kardon, director of the American Craft Museum in New York. "It looked wonderful," she recalls.

Even people with a more traditional bent, such as Wendy Cooper, curator of decorative arts at the Baltimore Museum of Art and a member of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, were supportive. "As a special installation, they were well placed and most of them were very exciting," she says.

After the exhibit ended, most items were put in storage. Some went to the First Family's private quarters, others to the West Wing, near the President's office, and a number were used as centerpieces at White House luncheons.

According to Ann Stock, social secretary to the First Lady, Hillary Clinton turned to her shortly after moving into the White House to come up with specific ways in which to feature crafts there. Stock turned to Monroe.

Monroe and Stock both recall how together they walked through the White House, noting various locations they thought appropriate for displaying crafts. Then Monroe went back to his office and consulted his memory bank for objects that would "complement the historical setting of the White House" and could also "stand on their own." Within a month, he had compiled a list of dozens of artists whose work he says fulfilled the criteria he thought appropriate for such a collection.

That the objects were intended to form "the first permanent White House Craft Collection" is clear from the letter Stock sent to more than 70 artists in her capacity as "Special Assistant to The President and Social Secretary." In the solicitation, which in most cases requested a specific work, or a piece from a particular series, Stock assured the artists their contribution "will be displayed in a prominent location in the White House at events throughout the years."

That scenario, it appears, was overly optimistic. For the guidelines of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House state: "Works of an artist are not considered for acquisition unless the artist is deceased and the work executed 25 years prior to the current date." An exception is made only for life portraits of first ladies and presidents.

The intent of this restriction in large part is to allow judgments of quality to be made with the distance of time. And, in relation to the field of craft, that question seems particularly relevant. For there are many who view craft, at best, as a stepchild to the visual arts. "Crafts have been largely ignored by the mainstream art world," says Elizabeth Broun, director of the National Museum of American Art. Indeed, the word artist is rarely applied to craftspeople, who are more often called artisans.

Broun finds this term "unintentionally patronizing." And, she says, the boundaries between craft and art are slowly "blurring."

Still, crafts are a deceptively democratic art form, and their ostensibly functional nature tends to cloud the fine line between craft and art. After all, a basket or a vase or a teapot is presumably created for a utilitarian function. Clearly, some of the objects chosen for the White House are art. Interestingly, most of those that transcend the line discourage use, communicating their decorative rather than functional nature in subtle ways. For example, Castle's clock rests on intertwined and unsteady legs that suggest it should not be expected to give us the time even though it does. And the fluted handles on Levi's jar are clearly too small and fragile to be used.

The show, and Hillary Clinton's support, possibly give the artists a higher profile and more prestige than they have ever had. The collection has already achieved what Stock describes as the First Lady's goal, to "highlight the best of America" and bring visibility to their creators.

That same desire—to expose the artists to the broadest possible public—is the impetus behind the decision to ultimately house the collection in the Clinton presidential library, according to Stock.



PHOTO BY JOHN INGELW TAYLOR

Coffee server in gold plate over brass by Susan Ewing.

That decision was made by Mrs. Clinton herself, according to associate White House curator Betty Monkman. It appears to accede to the Preservation Committee's restrictions while providing the artists continuing exposure. Stock says the collection would remain on permanent display, unless lent to a museum or even the White House itself.

Another option for the collection presumably would have been to give it to the Renwick, where Monroe has worked for 21 years. While Stock and Monroe acknowledge there was some discussion about the collection going to the Renwick, neither explained why it wasn't selected. Rather, Stock points out the unique character of such a collection in a presidential library, the fact that it was formed for the White House, and the First Lady's continuing desire to expose the artists to as broad a public as possible.

Cooper notes that the objects were "kind of a gift to the nation. I kind of hoped they would go to a national museum." It is likely that the collection would get broad exposure in a national museum in the nation's capital.

More than 100,000 people saw the collection while it was displayed during Christmas 1993. The craftspeople who made the objects were invited to a reception then and saw their work at the White House. Neither metal worker Albert Paley nor wood turner Philip Moulthrop recently had been notified that their gift would not permanently reside in the White House. Yet neither seemed distressed when told of the circumstances by a reporter. Instead, each was positive about the public acknowledgement paid to craft by government. It was, Paley said, the "first attempt to bring awareness to the arts in this way," by the "government



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Ceramic bowls with gilded interiors by Cheryl Williams were used as centerpieces for a White House dinner.

recognizing one of its cultural resources and the people who make it."

Mrs. Clinton is not the first First Lady to bring crafts into the White House. Ellen Wilson used rugs and bedspreads made in Tennessee and the Carolinas. Eleanor Roosevelt had furniture for a bedroom made through her own crafts project and textiles made under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration. Even presidents have focused on crafts in their homes. In 1902, Chester Arthur commissioned a large stained-glass screen made by Louis Comfort Tiffany for the front hall.

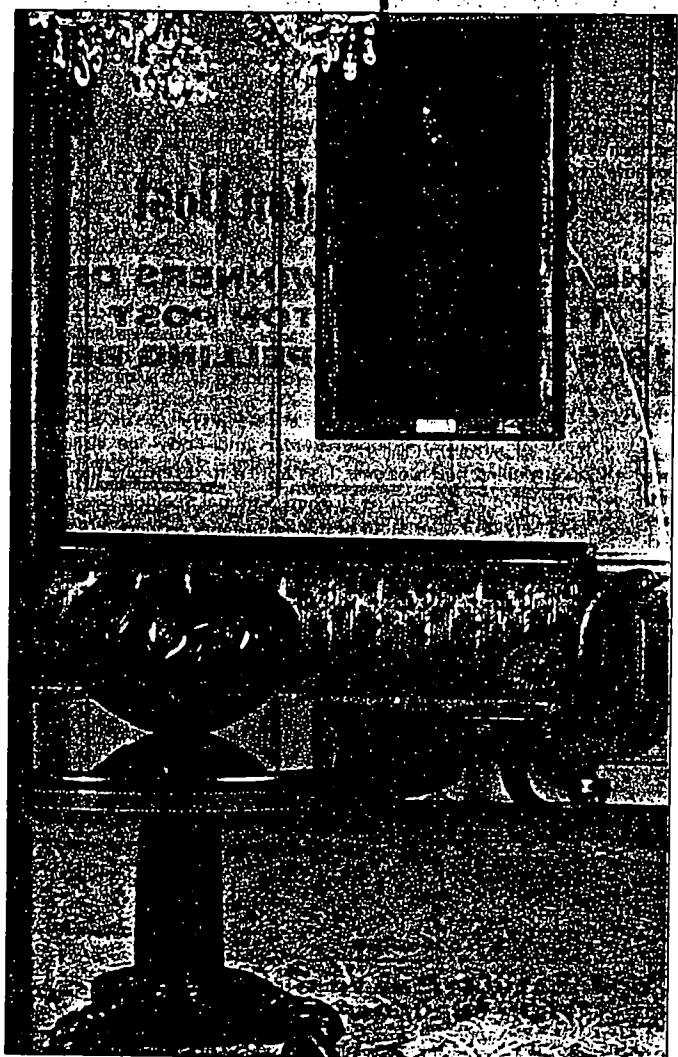
As wife of the vice president, Joan Mondale, herself a potter whose work is represented in the collection assembled under Mrs. Clinton, focused great visibility on the field of crafts and brought the work of many craft artists to the vice president's residence. "The line between art and craft is slowly dissolving," says Mondale, now in Tokyo where her husband, Walter, is ambassador to Japan.

But the objects have not always fared well through changing administrations. Wilson's textiles have disappeared, either worn out or replaced, according to Monkman. Roosevelt's furniture is still in the White House and used on occasion, but the Tiffany screen was removed in 1902, dismantled and sold at auction. Its whereabouts are unknown, Monkman says, and it may have been destroyed by fire. And much of what Joan Mondale assembled for the vice president's house is in storage.

Mondale herself is one of the thousands of craft artists enjoying the current renaissance of craft. Renwick curator Monroe dates this flowering to university classes, which began after World War II, and he credits the role played by schools, museums, collectors and the media. Monroe estimates there were only a handful of craft fairs in the early 1970s. Now, he says, there are "hundreds and und-

Monroe does not consider this entirely a bit collection." Instead, he sought to gather pieces that would present the full range of craft, from usable pieces to purely decorative or sculptural work. He included established, mid-career and emerging artists. Castle, glass makers Dale Chihuly and Harvey K. Littleton are in the first group, while metal worker Susan R. Ewing and ceramicist Mara Superior are in mid-career. He wanted to demonstrate the "generational exchange" in the field, with artists like Moulthrop, whose father, Edward, is also a craftsman with a piece in the collection, and to include artists who were completely self-taught, such as furniture maker Sam Maloof, as well as those who were highly schooled. In addition, he wanted the collection to be geographically and ethnically diverse and to include all craft media: clay, glass, wood, fiber and metal.

His passion for the art form emerges as he describes "a marriage between exquisite technique and unusual vision." He points to a free-form bowl by Chihuly of Seattle, among the best known of the artists in the collection, as "alive in rigid form," demonstrating the "molten quality



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of his material frozen at a moment in time."

When the exhibit ended in February, 1994, this bowl went to the upstairs Center Hall, which the Clintons use as a private living room. Until it left the White House for this show, it sat on an 18th-century English octagonal desk. Also there was a porcelain cocoa pot, complete with its own pedestal, by Massachusetts artist Mara Superior, which was placed on a table in a corridor on the third floor. It is painted with delicate designs derived from embroidered samplers, and like many of the objects in this collection, Superior's pot demonstrates a sense of humor. Its spout tilts down, as if it is about to pour the cocoa itself.

The Clintons must also have admired the stunning cut-glass vase by another Massachusetts artist, Sidney R. Hutter. His purely sculptural vase, an intriguing mix of classical form and modern technology, also went to the family quarters after the exhibit. It is composed of a spiral of cut and polished clear glass and gives off a hue that ranges from deep purple to pale lavender. The shade comes

Ronald F. Fleming's redwood burl bowl, "New Beginnings," introduces an eclectic note to a formal room in the White House, above. Blown-glass "Imago" bag by John Littleton and Kate Vogel, right.



PHOTO BY JOHN BIGLOW TAYLOR

from the glue, which Hutter colors using a technique developed for the electronic and glass industries.

Ewing, from Ohio, is a generation younger than Castle. Her gold-plated brass coffee server has a severe geometric quality that explores the subject of the cylinder and the cone with humor.

The elegance and beauty of Moulthrop's lathe-turned white pine mosaic bowl is striking; he was asked specifically to donate this piece, he says. "It is one of my distinctive ones that I'm doing." His complex and unique process produces a wooden bowl with white pine suspended in black resin that shimmers and glows, the effect of a kaleidoscope of wood.

Leon and Sharon Niehues of Huntsville, Ark., are another multi-generational craft family. This husband and wife team makes beautifully detailed baskets woven from white oak and enhanced by waxed linen thread. Monroe describes their asymmetrical basket as a "swelling form" whose angled top gives an otherwise static piece a "sense of life." The Niehuses are essentially self-taught.

The energy of the Niehueses' baskets is in direct contrast to the elongated, classically inspired glass vase forms by Dante Marioni, of Seattle. The bright yellow glass is a thoroughly modern touch.

The current show will travel to at least three additional locations, exposing the vibrant work of the 77 artists to an even wider public. And it will, as Monroe explains crafts should, "take us to an area we haven't been to before," where we can discover something "new about ourselves."

Heidi L. Berry, a writer on art and antiques and a collector, contributes regularly to Washington Home.

The White House Collection of American Crafts runs through Sept. 4 at the National Museum of American Art, 8th and G streets NW. Free. For tour details, call 357-3111. Beginning April 28, a virtual tour of the exhibit on the Internet can be reached through World Wide Web by accessing the NMAA's home page at <http://www.nmaa.si.edu>.

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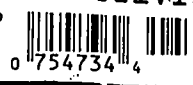
AMERICA AT ITS BEST

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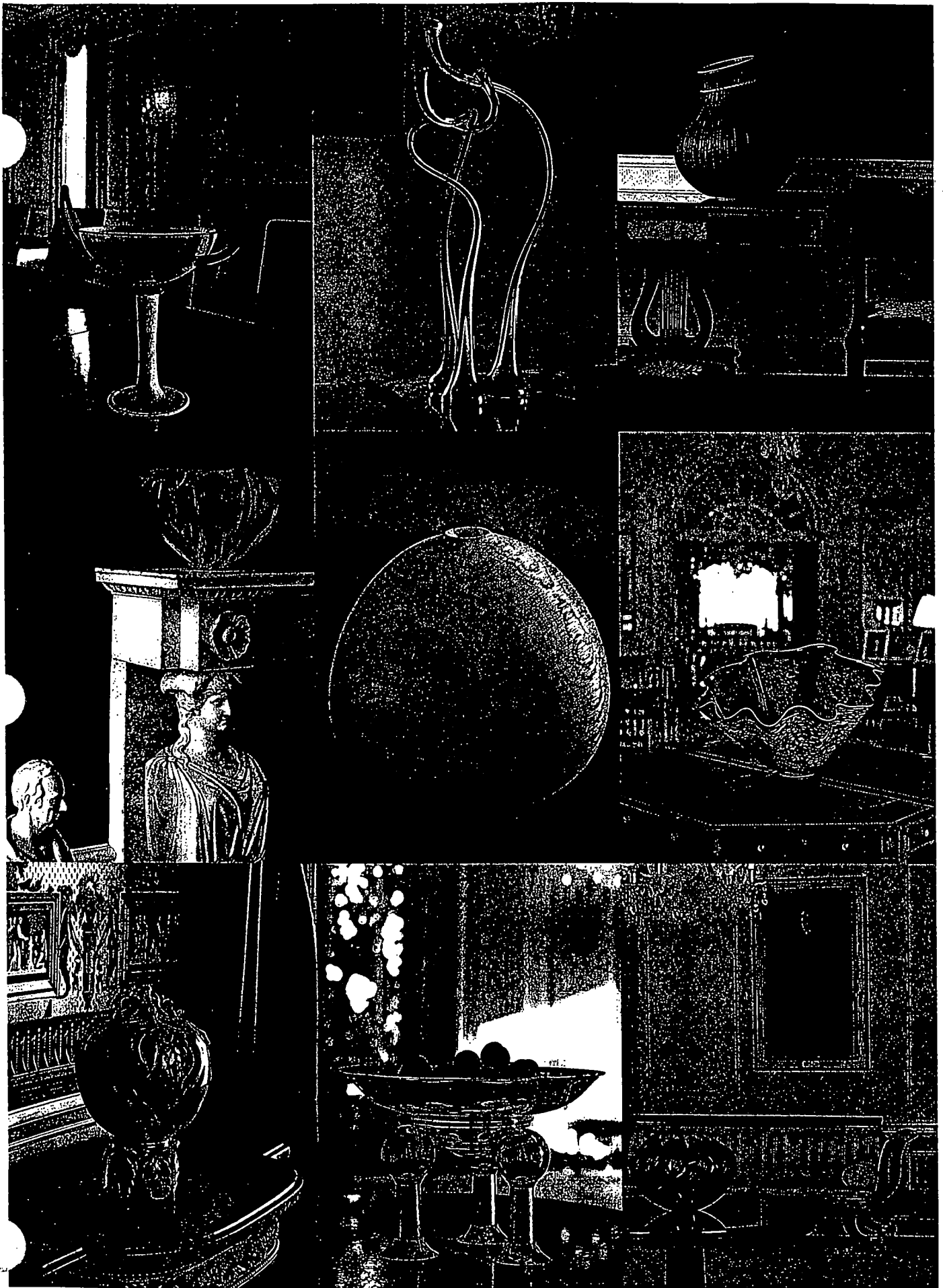
RESTORATION
AND REMODELING



*To mark the Year of American Craft,
over seventy leading artists donated their finest
works to the White House collection*

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Sheryl Williams, now having their glowing lineage of gold, were used as ornate pieces for a small White House dinner. White House white collection placed such on the State dinner and in the family apartment in the Grand Canyon. Prince Diana, Mother of the Nation, after having her very first white blown glass sculpture, Sharon and the son, Nicholas, later back to date. Finally, blown glass bowl, Ronald Reagan's wood bowl, and Randy Strong's, and all other bowls. On Lee's wood and glass bowl, a 100% 75% 5% millipore fused glass bowl. On the David Wells's wood and glass bowl.





This spring and summer, the public will be able to see these objects at the National Museum of American Art in Washington

BY MARIAN BURROS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF
McNAMARA
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CAPONIGRO

As guests were leaving the White House after a state dinner last year, one of them, Dale Chihuly, dressed in a dinner jacket and his trademark paint-dripped sneakers, was spirited upstairs to the family quarters for a glimpse of his spectacular bowl. It is one of 72 pieces of 20th-century American crafts that have been donated by artists to the White House. The objects are displayed on a rotating basis in the Executive Mansion's public and private spaces. In 1993 First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton began the collection to celebrate the Year of American Craft.

Mrs. Clinton sees the contemporary collection as a continuation of the crafts the White House has been gathering for nearly 200 years. "Now crafts have moved into a different realm and it seemed we should bring the holdings up to date," she said.

For that the White House turned to Michael W. Monroe, the curator of the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. What he chose represents the diversity of the

American crafts scene. "It mirrors what is going on culturally," he said. "There is no one clear movement but a wide latitude and opportunity for expression. Old and new techniques link 20th-century technology and traditional form. These pieces are full of energy, a tour de force of technical skill, a marriage of wonderful technique and wonderful vision."

The mediums of glass, ceramics, metal, wood, and fiber are represented. Among the most important is Chihuly's sculptured blown-glass bowl. "What's exciting about Chihuly's work is his sense of baroque-ness," said Monroe. "He is a master at capturing the power, fragility, and fluidity of glass."

Harvey Littleton's three pieces of elongated glass in blue with pale pink cores are also in the family quarters. Other pieces like Mary Ann "Toots" Zynsky's fused glass bowls are rotated on the state floors of the White House. Monroe likens her bowl to pieces of colored spaghetti. "It's as if she is painting an abstract expressionist work with big brushstrokes," he said.

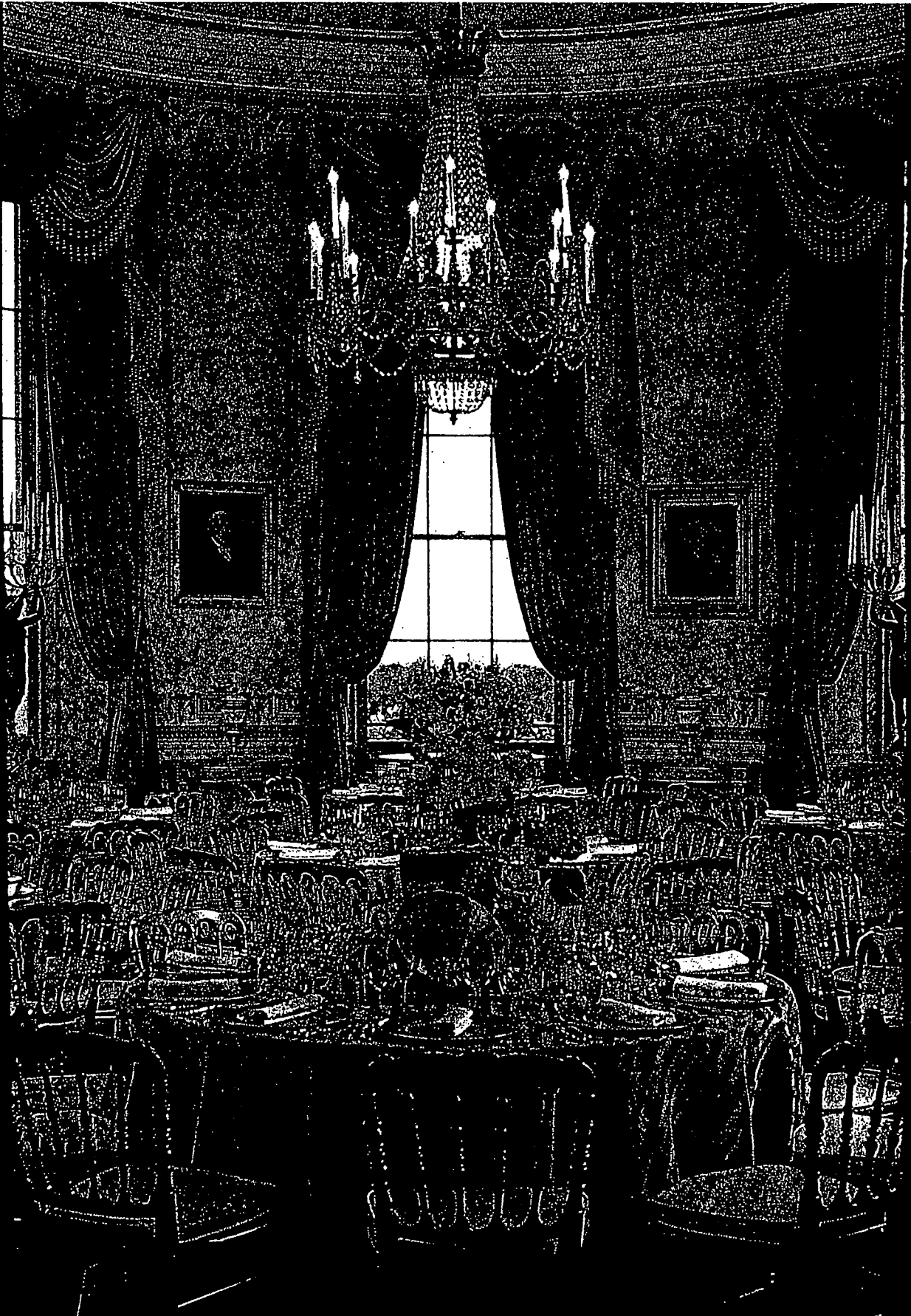
Among the artists represented at the White House who use classical forms, the glassblower Dante Marioni is known for his electric colors. He contributed two pieces, including a shallow footed bowl in vivid yellow accented with black. James Randy Stromsøe also borrows

from the classics, using precious metals. With gold leaf, pewter, and silver he created a bowl of elegant proportions that makes a strong architectural statement. Drawing on a different classical tradition, Cliff Lee's beautifully articulated peach-shaped porcelain vase is related to his Asian background.

The stoneware Prayer Bowls by Cheryl Williams reflect a very different ceramic tradition. "Refined, elegant, and precious," pronounced Monroe. "Out of fire, water, and mud emerges luminosity. The interior gold is a surprise, like breaking open an egg."

Looking at a bowl made by Ron Fleming of a single burl of redwood, Monroe said, "Technically it is spectacular, and it has an incredible vigor." In contrast with Fleming's highly decorative open form is the simple closed form of master wood turner David Ellsworth's wooden vase; it lets the grain of the wood speak for itself. "The vase is straightforward and direct," said Monroe, "the perfect meshing of form and material."

"There are a lot of these pieces I'd kill to have across the street," Monroe added, referring to the Renwick's location on Pennsylvania Avenue opposite the White House. From April 28 through September 4, the crafts objects will be on exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art.



The Blue Room at the White House set for dinner guests, using pieces from the permanent crafts collection. OPPOSITE: Details of this dinner, from the left, show the Cheryl Williams bowls in use, the First Lady's place setting, elongated ceramic vases by Michael Sherrill.