



## The Motley Shade

In room after glass-strewn room, Louis Comfort Tiffany surveyed the scraps of his labor.

Heaped throughout the studio were choice pieces of the finest hand-rolled opalescent glass available in the 1890s, odds and ends that were far too small to incorporate into stained glass windows.

As Tiffany wrote in his autobiography, it was strictly efforts to "utilize by-products" that inspired his first lamp shades. To his surprise, they were an immediate sensation when introduced on the market in 1895.

At first, Tiffany's biggest problem was simply keeping up with demand. In an attempt to establish mass production quickly, he assigned several apprentices to each of his craftsmen. Overwhelmed, the craftsmen went on strike. Tiffany responded by firing them all, replacing them with young women recruited from art schools. As a result, many of his studio's outstanding pieces, including the wisteria and dragonfly lamp shades, were designed by women many years before the suffrage movement.

Basking in the success of his lamp shades, Tiffany carried the concept of "practical art" miles further, creating—with a vengeance—vases and bottles, cigarette cases and pin-cushions, cups and plates. He reasoned that the broad reach of applied arts made them "more important to a nation" than fine arts, such as paintings and sculptures.

While Tiffany's work inspired a century of artists, his innovative glass also provided them with raw materials of unparalleled beauty. His most famous patent was Favrile, the glass of lustrous spilled-oil hues that Tiffany described as resembling "the necks of pigeons and peacocks, the wing-covers of beetles." Like many other forms of glass Tiffany developed—some of which baffle modern glass-blowers—Favrile found its best-known use in the graceful lines of his individually crafted vases.

By the century's turn, Tiffany had been crowned America's premier Art Nouveau designer, the ideal ruler of a new art movement that coveted forms drawn from nature: the twisted branches of a dying tree, gentle curves of smoke. For inspiration, such a movement needed to look no further than the tendriled leaves, slender stems, and drooping lily flowers molded in glass and metal by a master visual poet.



LOTUS LAMP / Tiffany

FOUR SEASONS WINDOW, SPRING AND SUMMER / Tiffany