



MADE IN CAPE COD SINCE 1837

The Revival of Pairpoint, America's Oldest Operating Glass Company

DESIGN By JOHN ZIENTEK Photo by ANDREW CONNOR

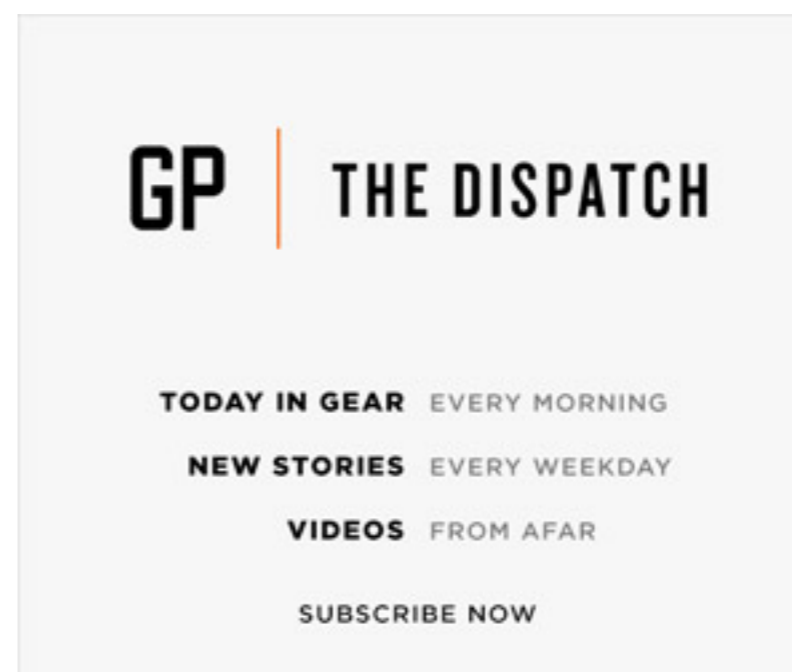
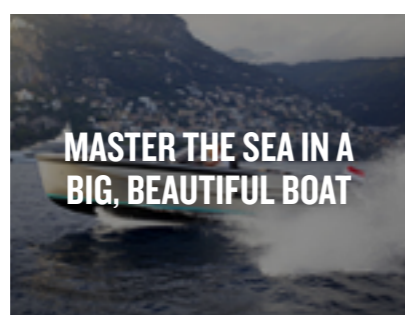
Jeff Tulman — who consulted for debt and equity holders of non-performing real estate assets — had seen in his years countless businesses in various states of decline.

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In 2015, when he saw [Pairpoint](#), a glass company in his home state of Massachusetts, he saw a failure that resonated in the best possible way. Pairpoint showed potential — a team of skilled craftsmen, a fascinating backstory and a historic catalogue of incredible products.

Originally founded in 1837 as the [Mount Washington Glass](#) company, Pairpoint is the oldest operating glass company in the United States. Over the years, Pairpoint has produced an array of luxury glassware, and historic pieces are now sold at auction houses and housed at museums (notably the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) in New York City and the [Museum of Fine Arts](#) in Boston). Pairpoint has done pieces for presidential families (Kennedy and Bush), and they work with interior designers for the Four Seasons and the Ritz-Carlton. They produce table lamps and chandeliers for high-end homes and [yachts](#).

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The company went on the decline in the latter half of the 20th century, when the then owner of Pairpoint wanted to make the [glassware](#) accessible to a wider audience by producing less expensive products. This inadvertently created new competition for Pairpoint in the form of producers in China that used machines, as opposed to artisans, to craft glassware. In order to stay competitive in the marketplace, Pairpoint had to sell their products below cost, a business plan that eventually drove the company into the ground.

Tulman, along with his brother Gary, acquired Pairpoint in 2015 and immediately got to work revitalizing the company. As part of regaining financial stability, Pairpoint looked to refresh its catalogue. Though the Tulmans did not want to alienate current clients or occasional buyers (who dabble in hand-blown [Christmas ornaments](#)), they took pride in the brand's historical standing and started to reintroduce Pairpoint back to collectors and luxury glass buyers. To do this, they followed a simple process: look to the archives, take design elements that are true to the brand, aim to integrate those elements in products that fulfill modern tastes, and then allow the craftsmen's creativity to shine through in the work.

“Gary and I aren’t designers, we just assemble teams,” says Tulman. “We just put together the overall excitement to make everyone want to produce these things.” There is an open dialogue between the employees at Pairpoint. The management and the craftsmen (glassblowers, glassmaker, glass etcher) talk as a team in the product-development stage, as they naturally should — these men are the brain trust, with well over a century of combined years working at Pairpoint. Master Glassblower Guy Maxwell has been working at Pairpoint for 38 years. Iain Ross, another master glassblower, has been working with the company for 26 years. He followed in the footsteps of his father, who was also a glassblower at Pairpoint.

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One of the revitalized design features Pairpoint is focusing on is the controlled bubble ball, a luxury touch of handmade craftsmanship. Using a pineapple-shaped mold and two gatherings of molten glass from an incredibly hot furnace (at 2,150 degrees Fahrenheit), the technique traps air bubbles inside a piece of glass in a uniform pattern and, done correctly, it can be applied to anything from ice buckets and decanters to glassware and decorative pieces.

Historic Pairpoint pieces are also sought for their striking colors. Tulman takes pride in that fact, noting, “We have the original recipes for all the colors that made it famous for over 175 years.” Along with a striking array of color recipes, Pairpoint is sitting on a wealth of museum-quality glass presses and molds. The combination of the two can produce an endless number of historically informed products.

Tulman’s favorite product, recreated from the archives, is a set of Pairpoint door knobs. A modest size, these door knobs feature a bubble-ball pattern, custom metal mountings and multiple color options. (We viewed them in two color options: cobalt and clear.) “This is something I can say we brought back for the collector, for the person who has been a fan of Pairpoint for a long time,” says Tulman. “Plus — I live in **Beacon Hill**, which is an old section of Boston, and our place was built in the 1850s — to be able to put this in my place, it would both be traditional and contemporary — I want it myself!” The knobs come with a \$1k price tag.

After his acquisition of Pairpoint and his education on the process of glassblowing, Tulman’s initial gut feeling — that this investment showed great promise — has also deepened to a strong respect for the product. “What we ended up learning is, one, how much goes into it and, two, how noticeable the difference is when you’re surrounded by quality all the time,” he said. “It’s unreal to be able to make these patterns inside glass, to know the history of what these controlled bubble balls are, to understand the quality and craftsmanship that goes into making it — all of a sudden you realize why

it's a luxury product.”

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