

# The Glass Menagerie

DESIGNER OMER ARBEL DEVELOPS HIS LATEST WORKS INSIDE AN ECLECTIC VANCOUVER HOME FILLED WITH A TEEMING ASSORTMENT OF PETS AND PROTOTYPES.

As told to Olivia Martin  
Photos by José Mandojana



From the outside, an unassuming 1942 cottage overlooking Vancouver's harbor is an unexpected place to find Omer Arbel, a designer known for his experimental, amorphous creations for the Canadian furniture and design company Bocci. But inside the 2,600-square-foot home he shares with his girlfriend, musician Aileen Bryant, and a collection of exotic pets, Arbel's rich imagination and exuberant love of objects are on display. Here, he takes us on a personal tour. ▶▶

"I have a casual approach to prototyping that involves our day-to-day life. I am always tinkering, and I have lots of transformers to run electricity through things, but Aileen lives with me now, so I have to be respectful. Before she moved in it was like a total madhouse; now I can't pour concrete in the kitchen. It is a collaboration in a sentimental sense. This work is my life, and the objects are my objects, but how they are arranged and the flow of each room are something we've created together here." ▶▶

In the living room of their Vancouver home, Omer Arbel and Aileen Bryant sit on a Coronado sofa by Afra and Tobia Scarpa for B&B Italia. They are joined by their Weimaraner, Bowie, boa constrictor, Picasso, and milk snake, Legs.





"Many of my pieces are first-runs from Bocci, so I am the first to figure out if something is wrong [with the design]. In the bedroom [above], we have an early 28 chandelier; we used glass fading from white to clear for the first time, which gives it an eerie luminescence. Above the sink in the kitchen [above right] you can see one of Bocci's first 57 chandeliers. Across the room is the first 25 bench I ever made [right]; it was salvaged from a now-closed restaurant I codesigned, called Ping's Cafe, where Aileen and I met. Hanging over the bench is our first Bocci 14 light fixture. I feel like it would be bad luck not to have it in the house. Other pieces in the kitchen—like the wooden island Aileen found in an alleyway and the yellow ceramics by Knabstrup, a Danish company active in the 1960s—we've collected along the way." ▶▶





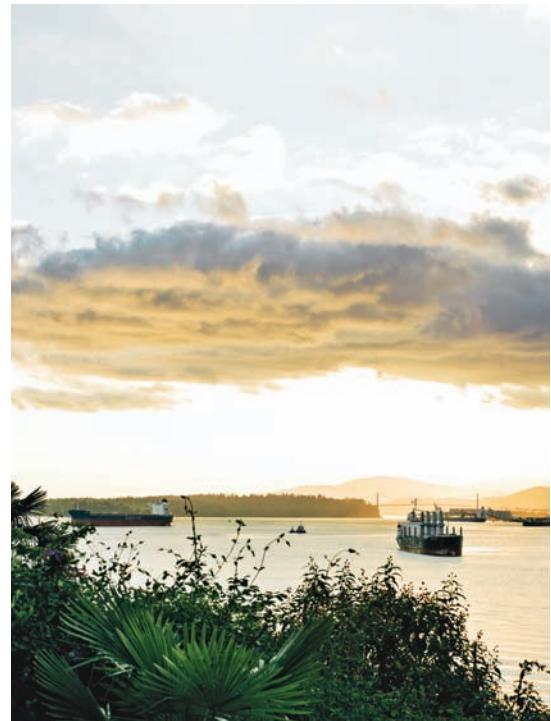
"I am obsessed with glassware. Whenever I go to antique stores, I always come home with suitcases full of glass. The pieces on the plate rail in the kitchen [this page] are Depression-era glass, and the green pieces are nuclear glass (a material now illegal due to its radioactive uranium content). They have an amazing iridescence, and it's fun to drink wine from them. We threw a dinner party using the whole set and serving green food. It was really beautiful." ▶



"In the dining nook adjacent to the kitchen, there is a Bocci 21 light and a vintage table [this page]. I love thinking about how these things will travel with us for many years, like companions. Aileen and I have a strong relationship to objects: They are a tactile diary of our lives. The interesting thing about our home is not the structure itself, but the way it has become an intimate part of us. The most sustainable thing we can do as architects and designers is to make spaces and objects worthy of a lifetime commitment. Then [the objects] can have five, six, ten lives instead of half a life." ▶▶

In the bedroom, a light by Bretford in Chicago is next to an Ikea Malm bed topped with Indian linens and folk weavings. The rug is from Paola Lenti. A Bocci 19 brass bowl sits near a hamper from Connected Fair Trade Goods (below).

A 28 prototype is stowed away with some books in the bedroom (right).



"The sunsets over the cliffs behind our backyard are beautiful, operatic events, even when the weather is bad. It's amazing that someone built such a nondescript house on this sublime site. Since the foundations are crumbling, we plan to demolish this home and rebuild one that fully takes advantage of the location. We converted the attic space into a bedroom [this page], and it's really incredible: The whole area is open and reflects the layout of the home below it." ▶



In the living room, angel wings taken from a circa-1890s Parisian statue were discovered at Scott Landon Antiques in Vancouver. The vintage Petal coffee table, by Richard Schultz for Knoll, is topped with various brass and copper bowls found at secondhand stores, displayed alongside Form bowls by Tom Dixon. ▶▶



"I can't believe a lot like ours exists, because it's so beautiful. Our back-yard ends on the edge of an 80-foot cliff, and the property line is such that we could conceivably cantilever the new house fifteen, maybe even twenty feet off the edge. The great potential for me architecturally is to be able to design a space that will bring a whole new level of dialogue between the interiors and my objects. We'll probably get more animals, too. It's going to be a total dream." ■■■

