

IF YOU BREAK IT, YOU BUY IT

By SARAH B. HOOD

If you don't know Dale Chihuly, the boat of contemporary art has sailed without you. The 66-year-old Tacoma, Wash., native is generally credited as the person who turned the craft of glass-blowing into a medium of high-art expression. Not convinced? Know that a Chihuly "Macchia" bowl was displayed in the Seattle apartment of television's cultured Frasier Crane.

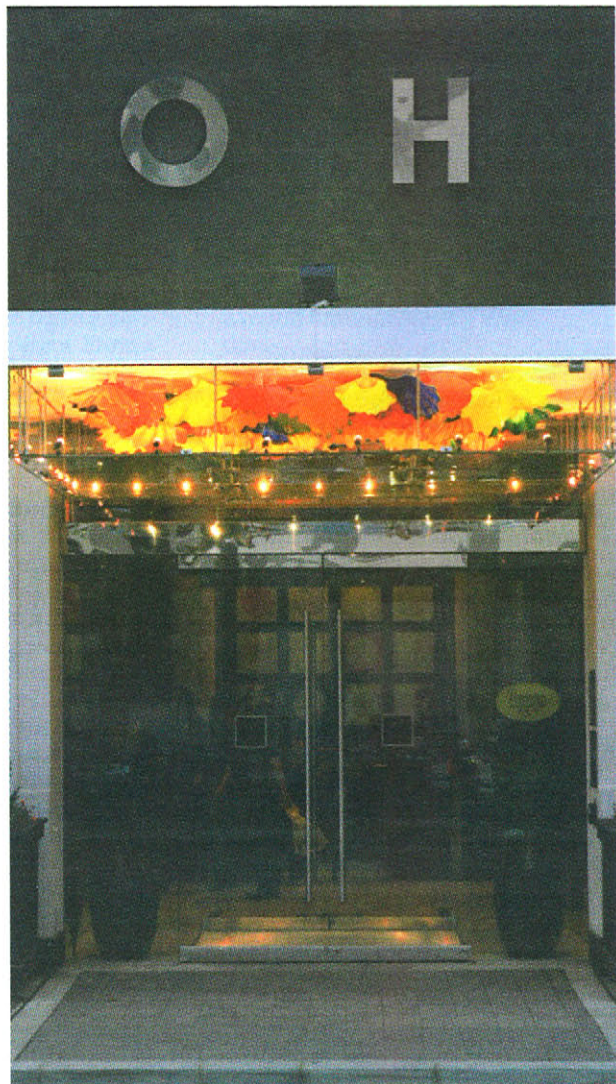
Inspired by natural forms such as sea creatures and flowers, Chihuly's work is brilliantly coloured and highly accessible, if a little alarming (it is made of glass, after all). London's Victoria and Albert Museum permanently exhibits an enormous chandelier that explodes with Chihuly's characteristic multicoloured, sperm-like curlicues. The work is particularly in demand at high-end hotels and casinos, where its opulence and exuberance fittingly complements lavish interiors. The Bellagio in Las Vegas has an impressive Chihuly ceiling; the Atlantis Resort Hotel on Paradise Island in the Bahamas boasts four of his large-scale sculptures.

Torontonians anxious to own an original Chihuly piece are fortunate: The Sandra Ainsley Gallery at the Distillery District is one of only two Canadian galleries that carry his work (sculpture images can be viewed at sandraainsleygallery.com). If you have to ask how much, you probably can't afford it.

In which case, you can console yourself with a trip to the SoHo Metropolitan Hotel. When it opened, co-owner Bruce Greenberg commissioned an original Chihuly glass canopy for the entranceway at 318 Wellington St. W. The untitled piece, valued at around \$500,000 and unveiled in November, 2003, consists of 80 gorgeously vivid hand-blown flower shapes. Each one was shipped in a separate box (with lots of Styrofoam padding) and carefully assembled in place. It's illuminated every night and looking's free.

■ Sarah B. Hood is the co-author of *Toronto, The Unknown City*, published by Arsenal Pulp Press; she continues her urban explorations at unknowntoronto.blogspot.com.

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KAZ EHARA FOR NATIONAL POST

Above and below, the SoHo Metropolitan Hotel's entranceway features a sculpture by Dale Chihuly, who has revolutionized the art of glass-blowing.

