

# THE ILLUMINATED VISION: TIFFANY LAMPS AND LIGHTING FROM THE MORSE COLLECTION

## FAMILY GUIDE

THE CHARLES HOSMER MORSE MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART



Electrolier, c. 1904. Black-eyed Susan design, Leaded glass, Laurelton Hall (1902-1905), Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, New York (67-018).

**L**ouis Comfort Tiffany was one of the most important and influential American artists of the late 1800s and early 1900s. He and his firm, Tiffany Studios, were famous throughout America and Europe for revolutionary creations in colored glass. But though it was Tiffany's stained-glass windows, mosaic works, and blown-glass vases that launched him on the world stage, it was his lamps more than anything else that expanded his popularity beyond wealthy society and into the American heartland. With his lamps, Tiffany made practical household objects beautiful. He was among the first artists to see the invention of electric light for its potential as an art form in the home.

**Illuminate:** To provide with light; to turn or focus light upon.

# About Louis Comfort Tiffany and his home, Laurelton Hall

Louis Comfort Tiffany was born in 1848 in New York City. He was the son of the famous jeweler, Charles Lewis Tiffany, who founded Tiffany & Co. of New York City, which is still in business today.



Louis Comfort Tiffany  
(1848-1933)

Louis Comfort Tiffany started his artistic career as a painter and then became an

interior designer. At 24, he began studying the chemistry and techniques of glassmaking. He eventually developed new types of glass of amazing color and texture. In doing so, he helped revive the art of stained glass in America. The glass he and others introduced was called opalescent glass and also, because of its origins in this country, American glass. The glass came in an unending variety of bold colors,

which were unique in the way they were streaked with all kinds of other colors.

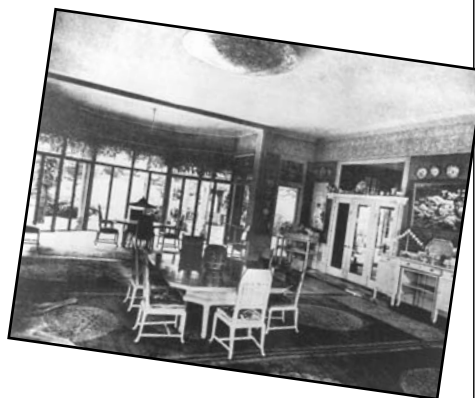
Tiffany introduced lamps with blown-glass shades in 1894 and leaded-glass shades in 1898. These lamps, however, were not Tiffany's first experiments with lights or lighting. The lamps that became so popular were in many ways a natural result of the artist's long fascination with color and light.

As an interior designer, Tiffany designed lighting for author Mark Twain's house in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1881 – 1882 and for President Chester Arthur's White House in 1882 – 1883. Tiffany, who loved to go to the theater, worked with inventor Thomas Edison on the lighting for the Lyceum Theater in New York in 1884-1885. The theater was said to have included the first-ever electric footlights.



**Left:** An exterior view of Laurelton Hall. **Right:** The dining room at Laurelton Hall. **Below:** The living room at Laurelton Hall.

In Gallery XII, the *Black-eyed Susan electrolier*, the three *Turtleback electroliers*, and the *Turtleback hanging lantern* all were in Laurelton Hall during Tiffany's lifetime. It is not known where the *Black-eyed Susan electrolier* was hung in the house, but all three *Turtleback electroliers* as well as the *Turtleback hanging lantern* hung over a reading table in the living/music room.



Tiffany constructed Laurelton Hall, an 84-room mansion on Oyster Bay, Long Island, from 1902 – 1905. He decorated the interior of the mansion with thousands of interesting objects he had collected from around the world. Inside the mansion, Tiffany also showcased his favorite works from the Studios (including windows, furniture, lighting, glass, pottery, and textiles), many of which he had designed. Louis Tiffany died in 1933 at the age of 85. A fire destroyed Laurelton Hall in 1957. After the fire, Hugh and Jeannette McKean, early admirers of Tiffany, visited the ruins and decided to preserve as much as they could for their collection at the Morse Museum in Winter Park, Florida.

## LAURELTON HALL LIGHTING ACTIVITY

1. Take a close look at the photograph of Tiffany's living room. What kind of lamps or lighting would you put in your living room?
2. Go to Gallery III, and find the exhibit of objects from the dining room at Laurelton Hall. The light fixture for the dining room is believed to be the largest lamp Tiffany made for a home; it is composed of more than 5,000 pieces of Favrite glass. Favrite was the name that Tiffany used for his glass, a name he took from an old English word meaning handmade.
3. Notice how Tiffany used similar shapes in the ceiling shade, the table, and the rug. In this way, he created "design unity." What shape did Tiffany use? What is your favorite shape, and why? What shape is most common in your bedroom? *Answer: Tiffany used an eight-sided shape called an octagon.*
4. Go to Gallery IV and study the pictures of Laurelton Hall and the interior of the chapel. How many lighting fixtures do you see pictured in the dining room, reception hall, and living room photographs?

# About Tiffany Lamps

There were many different types of Tiffany lamps, including floor, desk, tabletop, hanging, and wall-mounted lamps. In addition, there were many styles. Some Tiffany lamps have blown-glass shades while others have leaded-glass shades. What most of these lamps had in common is they in some way showed nature, the source of Tiffany's greatest inspiration. In Tiffany's garden of glass delights, wisteria and tulips bloom, dragonflies alight on water, and spiders climb their webs.



Desk lamp, No. 349, after 1902. Pony wisteria design, Leaded glass and bronze; Mrs. Curtis Freschel, designer, Prize, 1902 Turin World Exposition, Italy (69-008).



Library lamp, c. 1902. Shade No. 1495-36, Dragonfly & Water design, amber, cone shape, Standard No. 360, Conventional design, cushion base, Leaded glass and gilt bronze; Clara Driscoll, designer (1881-1945), Prize, 1900 Exposition Universelle, Paris (66-005).

## FLOWERS AND CREATURES SEARCH

- See how many different kinds of flowers you can find represented in the Tiffany lamps in the galleries. How many have you seen growing where you live?
- The lamps and lighting decorations in Gallery XII depict these small creatures: a nautilus, a scarab, a spider, a dragonfly, a moth, and a butterfly. See if you can find them. Do they look real to you?

## DID YOU KNOW

Workers at Tiffany Studios cut glass for leaded-glass lamps, windows, and other objects with a hand-held diamond cutter. Today, craftsmen still use diamonds to cut glass, but more often, they use cutting tools made out of steel or a very hard material known as carbide.

1. Why would a diamond be a good cutting tool?

Answer: A diamond is considered to be the hardest surface.

2. Why do you think other materials are used to cut glass today?

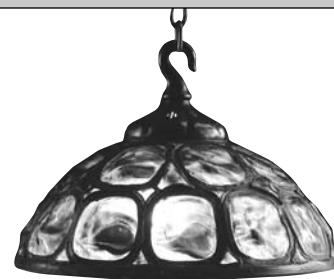
Answer: Diamonds are very expensive.

## TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Tiffany himself did not personally develop or create every lamp; instead, he employed hundreds of artists and craftspeople who carried out his designs or designed lamps under his guidelines. Tiffany approved everything himself. Tiffany did not write down the exact steps that he or his craftsmen used to make lampshades, but photographs and materials remaining from Tiffany's workshops show us that the making of a leaded-glass lampshade



Decorative lamp, ten lights, after 1902. No. 104, Drop cluster blossoms, Standard No. 381 Pond Lily design, Blown glass and bronze; Mrs. Curtis Freschel, designer, Top honors, 1902 Turin World Exposition, Italy, Gift of Mrs. George L. Cragg (74-003).

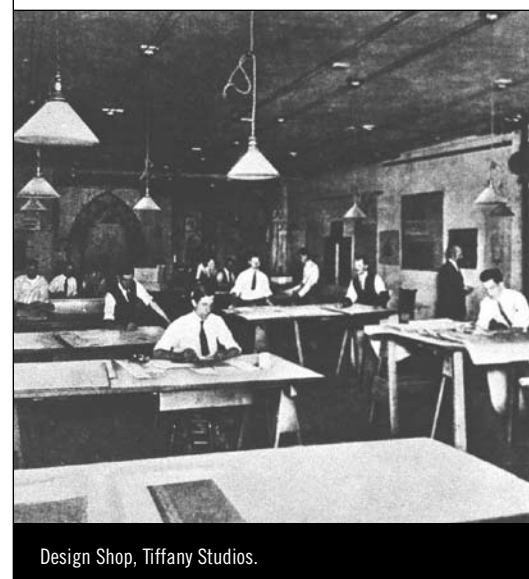


Electrolier, Turtleback design, c. 1905. Pressed turtleback glass and bronze, Living room, Laurelton Hall, Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, New York. (56-045:1).



Library lamp, c. 1902. Shade No. 1505, Peony design, Holden shape; Standard No. 367, O'Brien design, cushion base, large, Leaded glass and bronze (69-016).

was a process that included many steps. The first step in making a lamp was an artist's drawing or watercolor sketch.



Design Shop, Tiffany Studios.

## GLASS TYPES

Here are some of the types of glass in Tiffany lamps:

**Leaded glass** – Many small pieces of glass are held together with copper foil and lead solder. The many pieces of glass in a leaded-glass work are usually arranged in a particular pattern or design. Tiffany's *Peony library lamp* is an example of leaded glass.

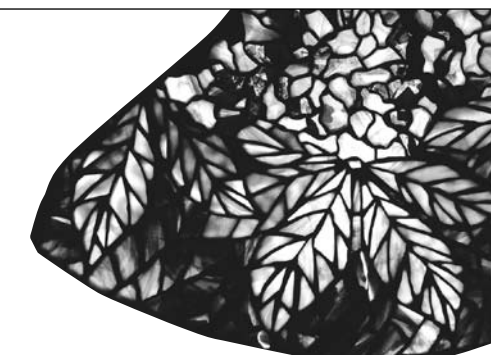
**Blown glass** – Glass that is formed with the use of a blowpipe. Molten glass is gathered at the end of the long pipe and is blown like a bubble into a particular shape. Tiffany's *Ten-light Lily lamp* has 10 individual, blown-glass pieces.

**Molded glass** – Glass that is poured into a mold in a liquid melted state. When the glass cools and hardens, the resulting piece of glass is in the shape of the mold. An example of molded glass can be seen in Tiffany's *Turtleback electroliers*. This molded glass resembles the shell of a turtle, and that is how it received its name.

## SALES AND SELECTION

Customers could purchase a Tiffany lamp in many ways. They could:

- Buy one from Tiffany Studios (it was at Tiffany Studios that customers could pick the type of lampshade they wanted from sample panels that were on display).
- Buy one at a department store or art gallery.
- Order one through a catalog. Tiffany Studios' designers were always adding to lamp-



Chestnut lampshade sample panel, after 1900. Leaded glass (64-033).

shade and lamp base designs. Customers had more than 400 choices each for Tiffany shades and bases. The shades and bases had numbers, and buyers could put them together just the way they liked.

## AWARDS

In the days before television and the Internet, a world's fair was an important way for manufacturers to promote what they made to the world's consumers. Held as often as once a year in major cities, these large shows for art and science attracted millions of people. Artists and inventors displayed their works to the public, often for the first time. Sometimes, awards like medals or certificates were given.

Tiffany won 54 awards at

Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company pavilion in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago.



the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, including one for a hanging lamp and several for his chapel. Tiffany also displayed his lamps at the Exposition Universelle (a world's fair) in Paris, 1900. Once again, he was awarded many medals. One medal was given for the design of the *Dragonfly & Water lamp*.

## TIFFANY LAMP ACTIVITIES

- In Gallery XII, find the matching lampshade sample pattern and lamp. (Hint: You'll also find a photograph from Tiffany Studios of this lamp.)
- Study the bronze lamp bases. Can you see how they were also inspired by nature?
- Can you find the same base coupled with different lampshades? There are two with the No. 363 mushroom design base and two with the No. 360 cushion base. (Hint: Look in both Gallery XII and X.)
- Find the three *Dragonfly & Water lamps* exhibited in the show. Artist Clara Driscoll created at least 10 lampshade designs for Tiffany Studios, including this one. Earning more than \$10,000 a year, she was one of the highest-paid women in America.
- Enter the chapel, and look for the cross-shaped chandelier that was shown at the 1893 world's fair. Tiffany called this hanging lamp an "electrolier." It houses more than 200 light bulbs.
- Find some of Tiffany's actual awards in Gallery I.

# Lighting Timeline

**3000 B.C.** – First use of candles in Crete and Egypt. Tiffany made candlesticks as well as lamps. Find the Tiffany candlesticks in Gallery XII.



Two candle lamps, c. 1905. Blown glass, Elizabeth Morse Genius wedding gift, (93-007, 93-008).

**1450 –1200 B.C.** – First use of oil lamps. Some of Tiffany's lamps that are now electric were originally oil lamps. Find Tiffany's *Cobweb Library Lamp* in Gallery X. This lamp used to be an oil lamp; the oil

reservoir was hidden in the lovely mosaic-covered base.

**1855** – Invention of the Bunsen Burner for laboratories that led to the mass use of gas lighting.

**1879** – Thomas Edison patented the incandescent light bulb.



Cobweb library lamp, No. L146, c. 1900. Leaded glass, mosaic, and bronze, Special order (62-020).



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