

Alexandrite

Alexandrite was one of the shaded glass-wares which became popular at the end of the 19th century, being a transparent glass shading, by re-heating, from yellow to rose-red and then to blue. Corning Glass Museum, New York has a specimen as well as the Glass Collection at Stourbridge.

Webb's Alexandrite is not to be confused with that of Stevens and Williams, Brierley Hill, the latter having a body of transparent yellow, cased with blue and rose-red, which was cut to various depths by the decorator. (*Art, Feat & Mystery – The Story of Thomas Webb & Sons, Glassmakers – H.W. Woodwad, P. 32*)

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Appearing about 1900, and primarily of English origin, Alexandrite is a single-layered glass of three blended colors. Starting with an amber colored glass, reheating is done to certain portions of a piece, creating Alexandrite a fuchsia shade. Limited parts of the fuchsia colored section are again reheated, with a blue color resulting. In the pieces of this three-colored ware the center is usually amber, shading to fuchsia and then to blue on the outer rim. Alexandrite glass is found in plain as well as patterned surfaces. While this ware, of only limited production, is thought to have come only from two firms, Thomas Webb & Sons and Stevens & Williams, both of England, there is certainly no reason to believe that any fine American company could not have experimented and produced similar colored ware. The quality of Alexandrite is usually determined by the deep richness and blending of the colors. (*Art Glass Nouveau, Ray & Lee Grover, pgs, 162, 180*)

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Alexandrite is a name with many meanings. It is a form of the mineral chrysoberyl that changes from green to red under artificial light. A man-made version of this mineral is sold in Mexico today. It changes from deep purple to aquamarine blue under artificial light. The Alexandrite listed here is glass made in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thomas Webb & Sons sold their transparent glass shaded from yellow to rose to blue under the name Alexandrite. Stevens and Williams had a cased Alexandrite of yellow, rose, and blue. A. Douglas Nash Corporation made an amethyst-colored Alexandrite. Several American glass companies of the 1920s made a glass that changed color under electric lights and this was also called Alexandrite. (*Kovels.com www.kovels.com/priceguide/kovels_alexandrite/*)

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Patented 1902, by Thomas Webb & Sons, multi colored transparent glass with graduated coloring from citron yellow to rose through to blue. The variations are produced by the glass being heated to different temperatures in different parts of the item. It has been suggested that all the surviving, known, antique Alexandrite glass was produced from a single batch. (*www.anticquecolouredglass.com Andrew Lineham Fine Glass, London*)

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At the beginning of the twentieth century, not later than 1902, Thos. Webb & Sons manufactured a parti-colored transparent ware of great beauty. The glass shaded from a pale citron-yellow color to rose and then to blue in the reheated portions of the article. It was produced from a homogeneous melt and unevenly turned to develop the rose and bluish tinges. Webb's sold their product under the name "Alexandrite." The small violet vase shown in our illustrations is a fine example of this beautiful glassware.

Stevens & Williams also produced an Alexandrite glassware by plating a body glass of transparent yellow with rose and blue glass. The outer casings of blue and rose were cut through to the yellow glass, producing an exceptionally beautiful effect. (*Nineteenth Century Glass – Its Genesis and Development*, Albert Christian Revi, pg. 29)

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Thomas Webb introduced a new shaded glass called 'Alexandrite' which needed to be reheated twice, firstly to obtain the red color change from the amber, and finally to reheat the very top of the glass to get a beautiful violet blue (Color Plate 38, front centre). (*British Glass – 1800-1914*, Charles R. Hajdamach, pg. 318)

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Thomas Webb & Sons "Alexandrite" plate that is shaded from straw opal in the centre through fuchsia pink to blue at the frilled rim, polished pontil mark underneath the base. Stourbridge, late 19th century Rim diameter 15.5 cm [6"]

Extremely rare type of heat sensitive glass that is basically straw-coloured but which can be reheated at the furnace mouth to produce a fuchsia pink and then further reheated to produce the blue. It has been estimated that all the known examples of this type of glass may have come from a single batch. *From Palace to Parlour – A Celebration of 19th-Century British Glass*, Newby, Martine S., The Glass Circle, 2003, exhibition item No. 190 (with good quality colour photograph, taken at an angle which clearly shows the deep chocolate brown rim)

This exhibition was held at The Wallace Collection, London. Simon Cottle, Head of Glass at Sotheby's, was then the Chairman of the Glass Circle, and contributed the detailed introduction and acknowledgements sections of the book, so must have been aware of the final sentence above.

I find the implications interesting. Are they suggesting that the Webb factory was unable to repeat this beautiful glass, perhaps because of an unknown contaminant, or a mistake in the weighing out of the raw materials?

BTW: the book is excellent. I have two copies, and would buy a third if I found a second-hand example at a reasonable price, as I wear out books. It may still be available new through membership of the Glass Circle, and possibly from Broadfield House Glass Museum, although I cannot find it on their website. (*Bernard C.*)