

SHARDS OF WISDOM

“Heard it Through the Grapevine”



The \$8.5 Million Astolat Dollhouse Castle: World's Most Expensive Dollhouse

Appraised at \$8.5 million, the Astolat Dollhouse Castle costs more than a fully furnished condo in New York City. But then, this is no ordinary dollhouse. It's nine feet tall, has 29 rooms, weighs 800 pounds and is furnished with 10,000 miniature pieces including extravagant furnishings, working fireplaces, stained glass panels, oil paintings, mirrors, gold miniature jewelry, fine rugs and fabric, and even rare mini books more than 100 years old. All of these were meticulously handcrafted by artisans from all over the world.

The dollhouse was created primarily by Colorado-based miniaturist Elaine Diehl, after she got inspired by Alfred Tennyson's poetry about the *Lady of the Lake*. Over a thirteen year period, between 1974 and 1987, Elaine Diehl built the castle taking help of experts and miniature artists from around the world.

Consisting of seven levels, stairways, and hallways, Astolat Dollhouse Castle was created for 360 degree viewing. As with the Colleen Moore dollhouse, certain exterior walls are fixed to create a 3-D viewing experience. The basement level consists of the Knights of Columbus room, wine cellar, kitchens, and the armory. The main floor contains the entrance foyer, main stairway, and butler's closet. Next level up contains the formal living room, dining room, and music room and its audience balcony. The fourth level contains the private library containing dueling pistols, a library of miniature books, fireplace, miniature daguerreotypes, and the oil painting display area. Fifth level contains the sleeping quarters. Sixth floor contains the grand ballroom, musician's alcove, bar area and sitting rooms. Wizard's tower is on the top level and contains hand-painted zodiac signs, telescope, observatory and astronomical depictions.



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A young man's brain turned to glass during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius

Scientists say they have figured out how. Glass rarely forms naturally from organic materials. However, in 2020, researchers discovered a black, glassy substance inside the skull of a person killed during the eruption of Italy's Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. Now, the scientists say they have worked out the sequence of events that likely killed the victim and led to the formation of the unique and puzzling glass, thought essentially to constitute fossilized brain tissue.

Recovered from the coastal town of Herculaneum, which along with Pompeii was wiped out by the eruption, the remains belonged to an individual, thought to be a young man, who was found lying face down on a bed buried by volcanic ash. A new analysis of glass samples found inside the skull and spinal cord suggests that the person's body tissue must have been heated to above 510 degrees Celsius (950 degrees Fahrenheit) before cooling rapidly to allow the glass to form in a process known as vitrification. “The process of transformation of anything liquid into glass is the fast cooling, not the fast heating,” said Guido Giordano, a volcanologist at Roma Tre University in Rome and lead author of the study published recently in the journal *Scientific Reports*. “Obsidian glass, that is a volcanic glass, forms when lava is very quickly cooled, for example, where it enters into water,” Giordano added. However, the pyroclastic flows, composed of fast-moving volcanic material and toxic gas, that charged out of Vesuvius and buried Herculaneum could not have caused the brain tissues of this young man to turn into glass, he said. The study noted that the temperatures of these flows did not reach higher than 465 C (869 F). Plus, they would have cooled slowly.

Instead, based on observations of more recent eruptions, the study concluded that an extremely hot ash cloud that dissipated quickly could have created the conditions necessary for the vitrification of human brain tissue to occur. However, the specific set of circumstances needed to vitrify soft tissue has raised some skepticism in the scientific community. The young man's skull and spine likely protected the brain from “complete thermal breakdown,” allowing fragments of the unique organic glass to form.

Unlike pyroclastic flows, which hug the ground, an ash cloud is

airborne. However, the two are linked, Giordano said. “What is an ash cloud? It's a dilute part of the pyroclastic flow. It's usually formed at the edges, above and laterally, where most of the material is like an avalanche or landslide. Still, the peripheral part is of finer particle ash,” he explained. “These clouds can be hot enough to kill you.”

To reach the findings, Giordano and his colleagues systematically cooled and heated fragments of the glass sampled from inside the skull and spine to understand what degree of heat and subsequent cooling was necessary. They found that the brain tissue transformed into glass at a temperature of at least 510 C (950 F). “The ash cloud basically instantly killed the people because they were engulfed in a cloud that was probably about 510, maybe 600 degrees (Celsius),” he added. Giordano said that at the bottom of the layers of ash and rubble that buried Herculaneum is a layer of fine volcanic ash that the ash cloud may have deposited.

Sharing Some Bottle Photos

Hi Ferdinand: I'm a FOHBC member from Colorado and I always enjoy your articles and insights in the magazine and on your Peachtree Glass website. My wife (Therese) and I set up at the National Show in Reno in 2022 (and did well!) but unfortunately won't be able to make it this year. I'm attaching photos of a few bottles that I haven't seen elsewhere in my years of collecting—thought they might be of interest to you or other FOHBC members (they're not for sale but thought you might not have seen them before). The photos should provide the info you need. I've seen a couple unlabeled Dr. Burgoon's System Renovator bottles through the years but never one with a complete label and graphic original box. Likewise with the Dr. Beard's Bitters bottle—I've seen a few but not in the larger size with the portrait label (bottle is label only). Lastly, the Columbia Exterminator bottle is the only one I've seen and the fairly crude yet detailed Victorian household scene on the label is one of my favorites. Thanks for your time and interest! Best Regards, Jay Thompson, Lakewood, Colorado.



Editor: See *Lost and Found*, this issue for the other two bottle pictures.

