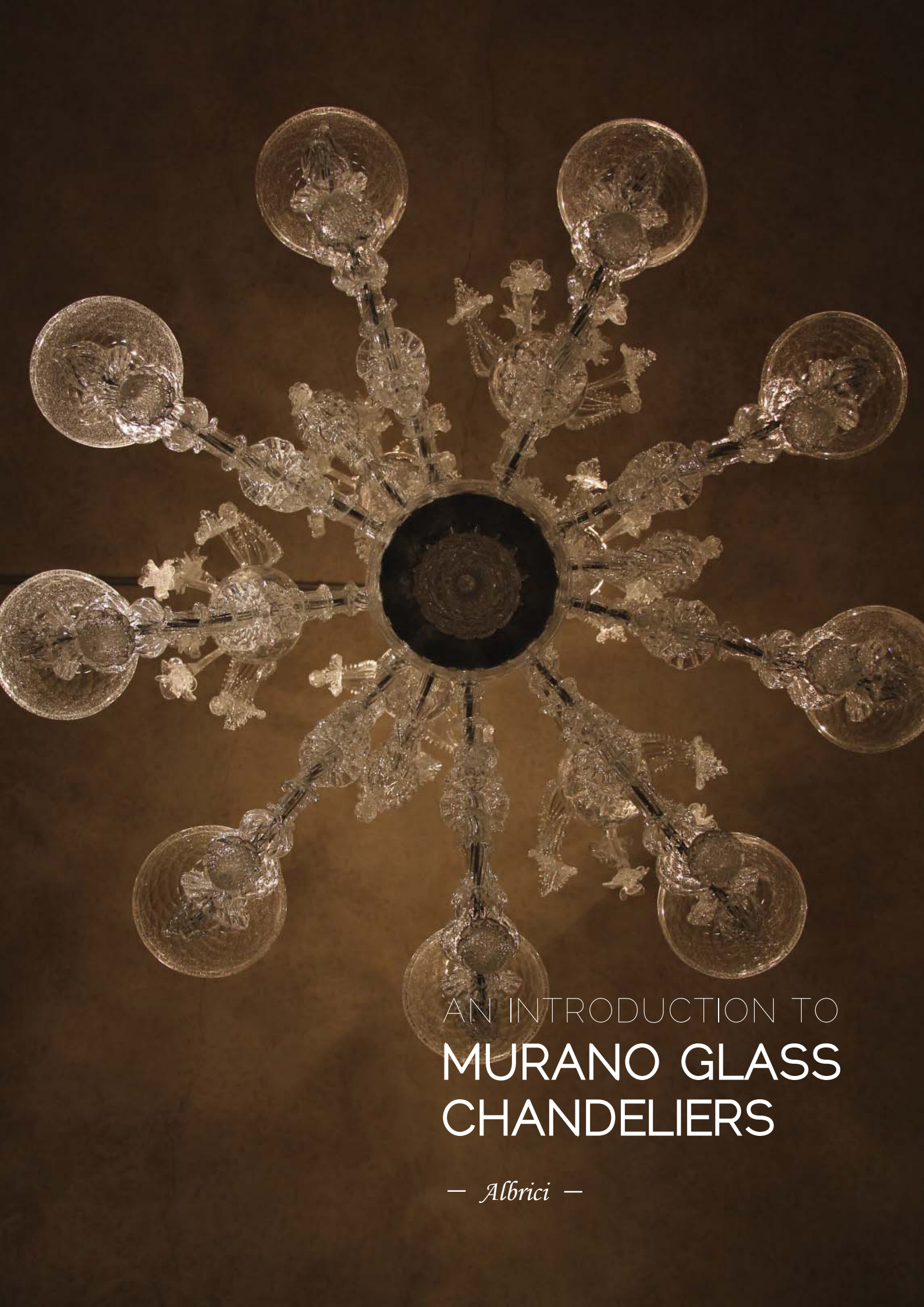

AN INTRODUCTION TO

MURANO GLASS CHANDELIERS

Albrici

MURANO

The first document to prove the existence of glass furnaces in Venice dates back to 982, more than **a thousand years ago**.
Subsequently every Venetian furnace was moved to the **Island of Murano** due to the high risk of fires that could have spread during the processing of glass.
In **1291** infact, Murano became the center for glassmaking when the Venetian Republic, fearing that fire could eventually destruct its mostly wooden building decided to move glassmakers foundries to the nearby island.
The glassmakers became soon the most prominent citizens of Murano and by the 14th century they were allowed to wear swords and enjoyed immunity from prosecution by the Venetian government.
However they were not allowed to leave the Venetian Republic, so as not to spread their art in other places.
They succesfully managed to hold a monopoly on quality glassmaking for centuries, innovating constantly through devolopment and refinement of technolgies such as crystalline glass, enamelled glass (smalto), glass with threads of gold (aventurine), multicolored glass (millefiori) and milk glass (lattimo).

THE ORIGINS OF THE CHANDELIER

The word *chandelier* has its earlier origin in the latin word *candela* meaning candle. From this word took origin the 10th century french word *chandelabre* that in the spanish language later appeared as **chandelier** (in the 14th century).

The earliest examples of candle chandeliers were introduced during the **middle ages** and used predominantly in churches.
These chandeliers had the form of a wooden cross on which candles could be secured and they were hung to a suitable height with a rope or chain.
New forms of chandeliers were later developed in wood or metal, including the classical **column shape**, with a central support and long arms with pendants in the shape of drops and faceted spirals, the more complex **ring or crown designs** that became a popular decoration for the palaces of the nobles and the homes of the wealthiest. Their high cost of illumination transformed the chandelier in a **symbol of luxury** and status.
In Venice too these chandeliers were produced in wood or metal, since only starting from the 17th century glass started to be used for chandeliers due to its better refraction of light around it.

WORKING THE GLASS

Venetian glass had been produced since the early 13th century and was hailed as the most beautiful and purest glass in the world, thanks to glassmakers'skills at making wonderful and original works of art.
The mastery of Murano glassmakers have always been expressed through the use of a few simple iron tools but the most important ingredient of their success was glass itself.
Murano glass infact remained in workable condition for a long period of time before needing to be placed in the fire, so it allowed glassmakers complex manipulations and the creation of thin layers, both distinctive elements of the rich production of glass in Murano.
Murano chandeliers for instance were essentially different from those built with lead crystal such as bohemian chandeliers, since they're made of soda crystal, that gave the glass this unique asset: the ability for the glassmakers to execute the graceful shapes of flowers and leaves.

MURANO GLASS CHANDELIERS

The first Murano glass chandeliers to be produced by Venetian glassmakers date back around the year 1700.
Since the early 13th century venetian glass was widely appreciated as the most beautiful and purest glass existing and since that time glassmakers had always made beautiful works of art using their unique glass.
In the 18th century they finally used it to introduce new products such as glass mirrors and chandeliers.
In history these glass chandeliers became popular after the iron, wood and brass era of chandeliers, and they were such a success that instantly brought chandeliers to a new dimension.
Murano glass production in the 18th century found infact a new energy to contrast the emerging competing manufacturers that started to spread on the market such as crystal from Bohemia.
Bohemiens and Venetian glassmakers were both masters in the art of making chandeliers. Bohemian style was largely successfull across Europe and was popular in some parts of Italy too. Its biggest draw was the chance to obtain spectacular light refraction due to facets and bevels of crystal prisms.

As a reaction to these new taste Murano glass factories created new kinds of artistic light sources.
The earliest example of a Murano glass chandelier was produced specifically for Frederick IV of Denmark that still hangs in his palace today. The King travelled to Murano in 1709 to acquire the chandelier that appears in his inventory by 1718 along with other Venetian glass works.

Since Murano glass was not suitable for faceting, typical work realized at the time in other countries where crystal was used, venetian glassmakers relied upon the unique qualities of their glass.
Typical features of a Murano chandelier are the intricate arabeques of leaves, flowers and fruits that would be enriched by coloured glass, made possible by the specific type of glass used in Murano.
This glass they worked with was so unique, as it was soda glass (famed for its extraordinary lightness) and was a complete contrast to all different types of glass produced in the world at that time. An incredible amount of skill and time was required to precisely twist and shape a chandelier.

This new type of chandelier was called "ciocca" literally bouquet of flowers, for the characteristic decorations of glazed polychrome flowers.
The most sumptuous of them consisted of a metal frame covered with small elements in blown glass, transparent or colored, with decorations of flowers, fruits and leaves, while simpler model had arms made with a unique piece of glass.
Their shape was inspired by an original architectural concept: the space on the inside is left almost empty since decorations are spread all around the central support, distanced from it by the lenght of the arms.

One of the common use of the huge Murano Chandeliers was the interior lighting of theatres and rooms in important palaces.

Giuseppe Briati was the most famous producer of these chandeliers.

GIUSEPPE BRIATI AND THE REZZONICO CHANDELIER.

Giuseppe Briati was a famous Venetian glassmaker who focused his work on the creation of what are now recognised as the typical Murano chandeliers with multiple arms decorated with garlands, flowers and leaves. called "ciocche".
Born on the island of Murano in 1686 from a family of glassmakers he apparently had the chance to work in a Bohemian glass factory, where he learned the secrets of working the crystal, that at the time was taking over venetian glass leadership on the european market.
Briati contributed significantly to improve the fortunes of the Venetian glass, which after having experienced a period of success, was heavily decayed.
His furnace became famous for the production of Bohemian inspired glass with a twist of eccentricity, that through colors and decorations gave them the look of triumph of polychrome flowers.
Despite stiff opposition from his fellow citizen, Briati also introduced a glass production with a chemical composition similar to that of Bohemia in the attempt to fight the competition, without diminishing his works to mere imitation.
Giuseppe Briati created what it's now called Rezzonico Chandelier, whose name derive from the first chandelier of its kind, that represents the classic Murano chandelier. It was designed by Briati for the noble venetian family Rezzonico and hung in their palace along the Grand Canal, now famed venetian museum under the name "Ca' Rezzonico".
This kind of chandelier, completely realized by hand, required a particular working by the glassmakers due to the arms being formed by many small pieces of glass. Every shape of glass had to be masterly executed because any outsize piece wouldn't fit to be mounted between the others.
Rezzonico chandelier is an example of the ability of the italian craftmanship to adapt to changes and to offer new and innovative solutions to the mutation of architectural needs.

ILLUMINATING CHANDELIERS

Chandeliers were illuminated for centuries by the lights of candles that required a difficult maintenance and due to the risk of fire were also relatively dangerous.
From 19th century gas light became a source of ilumination eventually taking the place of candles.
Gas illuminated chandeliers appeared in the middle of the century and many previously built chandeliers were later converted to gas.
By the 1890s electricity became available for illumination and since its distribution became wider its use in chandeliers became standard.
Antique chandeliers may not have transitioned to a modern illumination and are now mainly used as decorative focal point in a room without being an actual source of light.
Chandeliers were always mainly decorative rather than purely functional. Before illuminating a room they had the purpose of showing wealth for the upper class.

MURANO GLASS CHANDELIERS NOW

After their widespread success in the XVIII century, in 1797 the production of glass in Murano fell abruptly as the Venetian Republic was occupied by the armies of Napoleon.
Many of the glass furnaces closed and the production of Murano glass chandelier came to halt.
It wasn't until the mid 19th century that production of glass in Murano was revived and the products of its art, chandeliers included, became popular again.

Murano glass chandeliers have a unique history and continue to be produced in Venice today, thanks to the success that makes them one of Venetian glass best-known and most appreciated products.
These pretty and joyful glass chandeliers that became popular after the iron, wood and brass era of chandeliers, instantly brings a new dimension of fun and fashion to the idea of chandelier.
Today they are widely appreciated as one of the most beautiful and decorative types of chandelier.

GLOSSARY

Arms

The arms are the part of a chandelier that stretches the widest from the central support and are the main light-bearing part of the chandelier since candles or bulbs are located at their extremity. They can be composed by multiple shapes of glass held together or by a single simpler piece of glass.

Arm Plate

The plates are the metal or wooden blocks located on the central support, into which the arms slot.

Bobeche

it's a glass dish positioned just below the candles at the end of the arms, originally designed to prevent drips of wax to fall from the chandelier.

Finial

finials are decorated shapes of glass hung at the very bottom of the central support. Many chandeliers also have finials hanging from glass rings on the arms.

Soda glass

Typical type of glass used in the venetian chandeliers. It was renowed because of its ability to be worked longer when heated and be therefore shaped into curving leaves and flowers. Soda glass, also famed for its lightness, contained a small quality of lime, giving it clarity and making it completely different from all other types of glass produced at the time.

– Albrici –

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