

# THE HOUSE OF PERONNI

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# PAOLA PETROBELLI

THE DESIGNER TAKING THE CRAFT OF GLASSBLOWING  
INTO RADICAL NEW DIMENSIONS

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BY DAISY WOODWARD



There are not many molecular biologists that shift their career-path into style-conscious glass design, but for cutting-edge glass designer Paola Petrobelli, the transition was surprisingly organic. It has a lot to do with the close proximity of her native city of Padua to Venice and the tiny island of Murano, lauded globally for its age-old tradition of glassblowing. "I always knew I wanted to make things," explains Petrobelli of what inspired the change in direction. "Before I started a PhD, I took the opportunity of taking a six-month gap in my science career to move to Venice and consider the possibility of working in glass – I realised there was so much more to

glass than heavily decorated shapeless round things; there are colours that are unique to glassblowing in Venice." Instantly inspired to move into an arena in which she could experiment with colour, form and light, she hasn't once looked back, going on to gain international recognition for her directional, smooth-edged creations, which has led to collaborations with the illustrious likes of Damien Hirst.

Functionality and simplicity are the key pillars of Petrobelli's vision, which looks to strip glass – particularly Venetian glass – of its relegation to a category of decorative craft. As a trained scientist, Petrobelli both understands

and exploits the infinite nuances of her chosen material, in terms of the beautiful colours it can produce, the possibility for play on its transparency, and the wonderfully sensuous shapes exclusive to the discipline of glassblowing. Indeed, the skill of the Murano glassblowers who realise her vision is integral to her practice. However, while she cites the glasswork of 20th century Italian architects, such as Scarpa and Sottsass as influences, her chief inspiration comes from the Italian desire for perfection: "What I find generally inspiring in Italy is that people care hugely about what they do – people there put real skill and passion into what they produce."