



The world's leading designers, artists, and architects rely on Bernard Pictet to realize their concepts in glass.



The French Connection

BY
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FILLET

OPPOSITE Pictet fabricated 48 glass cubes for an installation by Italian artist Giulio Paolini at the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille in northern France in 1998-99.

PHOTO: H. ABBAGIS

ABOVE For a new luxury office building in Frankfurt, Germany, with interiors by Alberto Pinto, Pictet fabricated sandblasted glass walls that line the 20-foot-high entrance hall.



ABOVE A Pictet-fabricated balustrade from the Palais de Congrès.

RIGHT Sandblasted panels for the new Philippe-Starck-designed Taschen bookstore in Los Angeles were inspired by a bas relief by 18th-century architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux.

BELOW Pictet created this console, which incorporates an oil lamp, for interior designer and architect Mohamed Yahiaoui (known as Yamo), a frequent collaborator.



Sparkling, buoyant, joyful, bubbling with ideas, Bernard Pictet is larger than life. He understands the exhilarating beauty in this world, and expresses it through his beloved medium, glass. Always on the lookout for new techniques, Pictet is an innovator whose work is considered the "haute couture" of the international glass world. Since 1982, he and his atelier of nine assistants have collaborated with many of the world's finest architects, interior designers, furniture designers, set and exhibition designers, and artists to realize their visions in glass.

One of Pictet's most recent achievements is an elegant 1.5 meter (five foot)-high glass silhouette, designed to display a pearl necklace in the premier window of Mikimoto's flagship store in Tokyo. The project, a collaboration with French architect Roland Deleu, is one of Pictet's favorites. "It is lit by fiber optics from below," says Pictet. "I like the shape a lot because it is somehow the perfect balance between abstraction and the human form. I wouldn't know of any better way to present a necklace." Pictet is now duplicating the form for Mikimoto's many international stores. The Mikimoto sculpture was achieved through a method called lamination bonding, in which invisible ultraviolet glue is used to adhere several slabs of white glass. "This way you can have any thickness you want," Pictet comments. "UV glue leaves no mark whatsoever and is incredibly strong. Then you use sandblasting to sculpt your piece into any shape."

Pictet is thrilled with this coldworking process, "which we were the first to use in our field," he says. "Previously, large, thick pieces had to be made in hot glass through molding or casting, but this is now virtually impossible because it is hugely expensive. Also, the time it takes to anneal such thick pieces is enormous. Nobody wants to use this production method these days." He also employed lamination bonding to create a fantastical glass table made for a palace in Saudi Arabia, with legs 40 centimeters (16 inches) thick. The table itself was a remarkable technical achievement, weighing 3.5 tons and measuring 7.5 meters by 1.5 meters (25 by 5 feet).

The atelier also used the technique for another high-profile project: several etched and sandblasted stalactite panels for the new Philippe Starck-designed Taschen bookstore in Los Angeles. These amazing curtains of stalactite drops were inspired by a bas relief for the base of a building by French 18th-century neo-classical architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. Pictet developed special surface treatments to sculpt stalactites onto the 68 millimeter-thick (about 2.7 inches) panels, which serve as partitions as well as a balustrade. "The mezzanine is designed to give light to the whole store," he says. "Actually, the idea is to have a walk-in

chandelier in the form of a large cube, which is also an exhibition space. It all hangs three meters (about 10 feet) above ground."

In a 1993 screen made for a residential design for French architects Christian Ghion and Patrick Nadeau, lamination was also used to produce a beautiful glass tulip 20 centimeters (about eight inches) in diameter, itself an integral part of a two-meter (6.5 foot)-high glass slab.

Early in his career Pictet found that designers were often intimidated by glass. As an example, he cites an innovative 1990 project with interior designer and architect Mohamed Yahiaoui, known as Yamo, which involved tying pieces of glass together with flexible cords. Pictet explains, "To make ligatured glass, you just have to know how to make holes and basta. Making holes in glass has been done for centuries. I had never seen it before, but in fact it is very simple. I like it a lot because it is basic yet sophisticated at the same time." The sculpture, *Imzad*, has been Pictet's daily sight for many years at his Paris workshop, "and I never tire of it."

Since 1982, Pictet has worked from his atelier in the heart of the 11th arrondissement in Paris, a busy, cosmopolitan area next to the historic Marais quarter. He says his career is due to "pure chance." In 1976, when he was just 21, Pictet, then a law student, was introduced by a decorator friend to Jean-Gabriel Druet, an elderly man who was attempting to sell his glass atelier. As soon as he walked in, Pictet knew that a glorious avenue of life had just opened.

Struck by a vision of the infinite possibilities of the medium, Pictet's imagination had suddenly found what it needed most: essential nourishment from the beauty of glass. Druet stayed on for two years, during which time Bernard learned numerous different techniques.

Pictet's first job was a commission in 1976 for a Paris pharmacy window. "It was in the early days of phytotherapy. We made enormous plants in sandblasted glass. The whole thing spread over three meters. It was quite an extraordinary thing to do in those days." The window was awarded first prize in that year's Grand Prix des Vitaines de Paris.

Many of Pictet's projects are technical challenges, yet the results always appear simple.



ABOVE This glass vitrine was created for fashion designer Christian Lacroix's boutique in collaboration with the architecture firm Caps.

PHOTO: S. LEVY/ART



ABOVE For London's Millennium Dome's Faith Zone in 1999, Pictet created 15-foot-high glass displays with architect Eva Jiricna.

LEFT Pictet employed lamination bonding to create these elegant five-foot-high glass silhouettes, designed by architect Roland Deleu to display pearl necklaces in Mikimoto's Tokyo flagship store.

RIGHT Pictet's glass display cushions for Boucheron, designed in collaboration with Roland Deleu, grace the windows of their Paris boutique.

PHOTO: M. PIGNATA MONTE



In the mid-1980s, Bernard started to work with unconventional designers such as Pascal Mourgue, Sylvain Dubuisson, and Yamo. "Thanks to them, I awoke to contemporary art and design. I fell in love with their work." Pictet also developed what he calls "borrowed techniques"—applying techniques traditionally used for wood, metal, marble, or textiles to glass. In 1990, he produced a *semainier* (a chest of seven drawers) for Studio Naço in Paris. "Today it is usual to find boxes or cubes made out of glass," he says. "But in those days, it was a première."

Pictet calls glass "capricious." It is "the most flexible of materials because it can take on all shapes, appearances, or functions." It can make objects "appear, disappear, brighten them, split images, distort shapes, color its environment." It can also bear heavy weights and serve as a receptacle for liquids. Yamo's menorah chandelier, fabricated by Pictet in 1990, it is in fact an oil lamp. Another "oil lamp" by Yamo, a console with three wicks on a flat glass plate, was recently exhibited at the Paris-based VIA (Valorization of Innovation in Furnishing) design center, which promotes French creation in contemporary furnishing in France and abroad.

Glass can also be a conduit, carrying water, electricity, light. In Pictet's telephone booths made recently for UNESCO, in a commission from French architect Odile Decq, the glass beams supporting the booths carry the phone cables. For a new luxury office building in Frankfurt, Germany, developed by HRO group, with interiors by Alberto Pinto, Pictet fabricated glass walls that illuminate a six-meter-high (nearly 20 feet) entrance hall. The walls were sandblasted to give the surface a rough, granite look.

Pictet has also found a new dimension for structural glass: to support an object's structure. "In my opinion, structural glass really took off at a major decorative arts exhibition we did at the Grand Palais in Paris with Yamo and French architect Christophe Cedrin in 1989," Pictet says. "We showed a glass plate of four by two meters (13 by 6.5 feet) weighing 330 kilos (727 pounds). It was suspended by cables made of kevlar, a high tech material as strong as steel."

"The purity of glass demands perfection," Pictet says.

The entrance hall of the Louis Vuitton headquarters in Paris, made for architects Jean-Jacques Ory and Didier Gomez in 1997–98, "contains a lot of innovations." Seven convex beams more than 11 meters (36 feet) long are each lit by a net of optical fibres. Internal metallic hangers conduct electricity to removable dichroic spots. "This was a real technical challenge in structural glass," says Pictet, who created the sophisticated details that enhance the architects' general intention. "Metallic supports for the beams, which usually would be outside the glass structure, are literally buried inside the glass. The glass mass, achieved through lamination, was expressly shaped to house the metal supports. This was a real novelty. Also, it was the first time that glass beams were made this way, in an arch. The end result is the feeling of being surrounded by a halo."

For the Millennium Dome's Faith Zone in Greenwich, London, in 1999, Pictet worked with Eva Jiricna, a Czech-born architect based in London. The Faith Zone was one of 11 zones located in the central arena of the Dome, comprising an exhibition relating the story of the Christian faith to other religions within the U.K. "This was an exploit in bonding to reach a height of 4.60 meters (15 feet), allowing the light to go through freely without internal metallic structure.

Recently, Pictet worked with American architect Peter Marino to create a mural and tabletops for Chanel in the Rue Cambon in Paris, all treated in gold leaf with striking shattered effects, as well as a large mural for Christian Dior's main boutique in Beverly Hills.

Pictet also works with artists. These are moments which he views as "very refreshing; it's like playtime for me." As part of an installation for the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille in northern France in 1998–99, Pictet produced 48 glass cubes for Italian artist Giulio Paolini. At the Léonard de Vinci University near Paris, he fabricated a 300-square-meter (3,230-square-foot) stunning fresco for French artist Jean-Charles Blais in 1996–97.

In all he does and makes, Pictet aims for the best. His projects are highly sophisticated and highly complicated. Many are technical challenges, yet the results always appear simple. "The purity of glass demands perfection," he says, beaming.

Claude Fillet is a freelance writer and artist who lives and works in Paris. She is the France correspondent for GLASS.