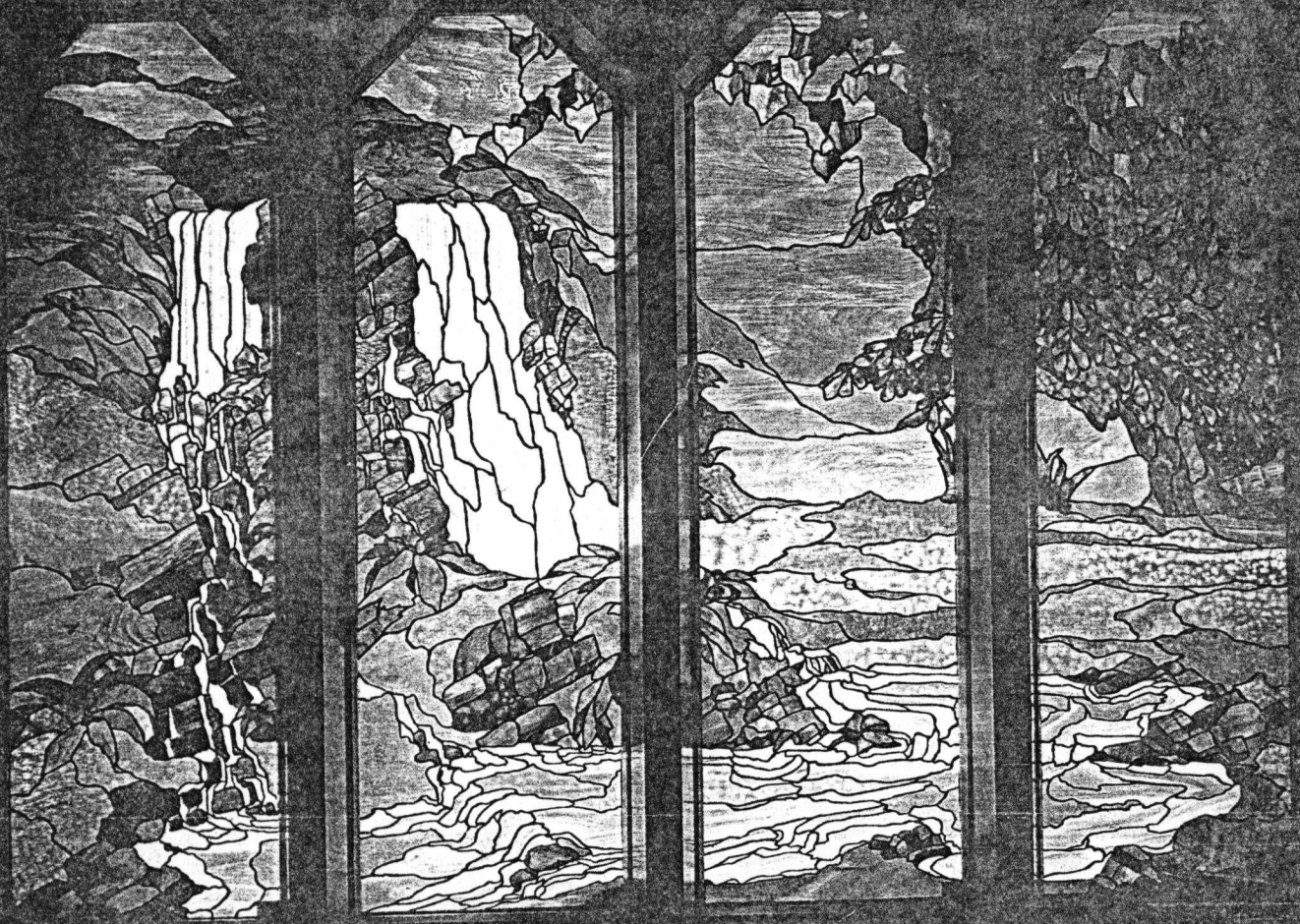


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*art and the artist*

BY DAVID FUESS



Designed by Eileen Hayes; color by John Forbes

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*The Artisans of Bonny Doon*

Painting With Glass

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The artisans of the 12th and 13th centuries knew that stained glass had the ability to uplift the spirit and calm the soul. Their great cooperative efforts in the classic cathedrals of Chartres, Strasbourg and Notre Dame showed that light, movement, depth, color and radiance could be captured and transformed by a static window.

Bonny Doon Art Glass, located in the rustic Santa Cruz mountains, has continued that tradition and expanded on it in new and exciting ways. Theirs, too, is a cooperative effort. John Forbes seems to be the reluctant leader, Dave MacDonald is the "cutter," Jeanne Rosen is the colorist, Mike Wood and Duffie Herr "modify the insane formalism," and Mike Leeds is the design genius as well as the fluctuating catalyst.

John Forbes readily acknowledges his predecessors. "Gothic European glass remained relatively unchanged for five or six hundred years," he says. He credits John La Farge and Louis Tiffany with the introduction of what is known as "opalescent" or American Art Glass in the 1870s. "Gothic

Photo by David Fuess



*Members of Bonny Doon Art Glass (left to right) Jeanne Rosen, John Forbes, Mike Wood, and Dave MacDonald.*

European was painting 'in' the glass; the American is painting 'with' the glass. There is a chemical opacifier put in the glass, usually fluorine. It clouds up the glass. This type of glass is unique to America."

John is obviously excited about the possibilities inherent in glass. Each piece is meticulously chosen. "There is a point where the transparency and the opacity integrate. It has a lot of depth in the glass and the color is vibrant. You pick out areas as if they were brush strokes," he says.

Extraordinary color is achieved by adding dyes (metallic oxides) to the sand or silica which make up the glass. Cobalt can produce a royal blue, iron oxide an eerie green, manganese oxide a pale violet, and copper a red hue. Real gold is even used. "There is a greater range of colors now than ever before," John affirms. "The chemistry has developed extensively even in the last two years." These new colors

have allowed an entirely new range of emotions and nuance to come forth in modern glass.

John says, "Glass is basically a liquid—a super-cool liquid in a solid state."

Dave MacDonald has to cut this not-so-liquid solid. He says the glass has different properties. "It can be hard, soft, brittle. There is a tension inside the sheets of glass. Some are basically explosive and you have to approach them with great care."

John adds, "You learn real respect for the glass. You get used to cuts, the only concern is whether they're deep or not. We go through bandaids as though we owned stock in Johnson and Johnson."

Bonny Doon does most of its intricate cutting by hand, but they have allowed for a diamond saw for the more intricate pieces, despite the fact that "there was almost a revolt" when the newfangled machine was brought into the shop.

The artisans at Bonny Doon don't see their glass work in isolation. They consider the entire environment. Their work is "architecturally scaled" so that size, location, color, angle to the sun, are considered in the whole. They specialize in working hand-in-hand with architects who are often not very well-versed in glass.

Patience and perfectionism is obvious in many of the extraordinary windows executed by the Bonny Doon group. Sometimes the gap between the bid price and the reality is punishing, but such is the price of fame or foolishness. David explains, "Most of us aren't profit motivated. You get carried away with what you put into it. Try this and try that. We redo it if it doesn't feel right. Sometimes it's a hassle and a struggle. It goes in waves."

In putting a window together from scratch, John explains, "You make a sketch with a feeling for space, shapes, forms. Then go to a line drawing so there can be cuttable pieces—simplicity. It's hard to make it real simple and have integrity. After that the glass is cut, composed and glued up on a glass easel. The only way you know if it's going together is when you put it together with the light."

Inevitably the lines of lead which hold the pieces of glass can create visual problems. Easy transitions can become difficult. The lead becomes part of the design. Sometimes it is so skillfully used that it is overlooked, and sometimes it is used to accentuate the form. Bonny Doon succeeds in taking the windows beyond a mere translation from a sketch.

A wonderful sense of color is evident in the windows. There is no fear in celebrating color, but within that celebration is an idea

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riddled with nuance.

By using the swirling, marbled effect of the glass, the artisans can achieve remarkable feelings of depth and movement. As to the design, "It's obviously pictorial," John says. "There is a really strong leaning toward making the image realistic."

Jeanne adds, "You've almost gone too far and it doesn't look like glass anymore."

Bonny Doon has done a remarkable series about magicians in windows at Merlin McFly's in Santa Monica. The most famous acts of Blackstone, Houdini and others are dramatically captured. By using a technique similar to cameo cutting, the surface of the glass is etched away and remarkable "painterly" detail is achieved. One or two of the windows are almost overwhelmingly complex. This rococo effect confuses the eye as pattern and design become one. As John says, "You have to look at it for awhile to absorb it."

Bonny Doon has taken the art of beveling to exciting levels. John says, "It reminds people of cut crystal, it has class. In a sense it has vicariously uplifted their existence." The beveling also transmits dancing rainbows about the room as it breaks up and refracts the light.

The Bonny Doon windows should be seen live, not in photos. As you move about a room, the whole scene takes on life and movement and sparkles with incandescence, as in the 1929 Bentley 4.5 Litre Supercharged at Sly McFly's on Cannery Row in Monterey, or as in a number of works at the Cooper House in Santa Cruz.

Dave says of the Bentley, "You have to be really fussy to put a window like that together." This is an understatement.

The Bentley is essentially a window within a window. The car virtually leaps out of the glass. The spring green is as refreshing as lime in a South Sea cooler. Art Nouveau swirls in the corner set the image off and make it precious. The chrome glistens with vitality. If you catch the light just right, the road dissolves into a brilliant copper gold. The jeweled pieces become diamonds of light. The entire window floats lightly in its own dream world.

The last ten years of Bonny Doon Art Glass will be recorded in a book to be published this summer by Hidden House in Palo Alto. But no one in the group is living in the past. "Sometimes," says John, "we get criticized by some of the contemporary glass people for being too traditional. To take our materials beyond, we have to know about the past; we have to know our scales, as in music. I don't feel stuck in the past, but it's a real strong basis to go into the future with." 