

Bringing the Tiffany Tradition into the 21st Century

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Who says old can't be new? In today's hot markets, transforming old houses into new abodes is a big market, as seen on HGTV. It's not just about the sleek and modern. It's also about the warm and comfortable.

Stained glass can speak not only to this economic dynamic, but also to the intense variation in cultural and aesthetic tastes that our country hosts. Whether it be from India or China, France, ancient Egypt, or the sands of Cocoa Beach, Florida, Preston Studios has created works that fit within these cultural sensibilities.

Having an awareness of these flavors in design doesn't just come from a lifetime of travel and exploration. It also comes from library books, videos, and Google. Today the world is at your fingertips, and images can be brought up of virtually anything around the world on a computer screen or phone in seconds.

Lighting

Approach to design can vary dramatically, whether in lighting or in windows. In Cocoa Beach, there is a very big surf culture that actually started back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This is a virtually untapped market for stained glass design in various applications, especially in lighting. Preston Studios' *Totally Tubular* new LED night-lights work to address this omission. The studio has also produced a whole series of Tiffany-style lamps based on the studio's trip to China in 2011—what they call feng shui in style. These night-lights ideally project with light energy the sentiments of Long Life, Double Happiness, Good Luck, and Good Fortune into a room.

The effort of Preston Studios from the day it started in 1976 was to present an entirely new vocabulary in lighting that includes works with birds or butterflies, sea turtles, or flowers neglected a century earlier such as calla lilies, iris, or daylilies. Each is a unique work of art. Collectors like Betty Brake of Cocoa Beach ended up with nine lamps in the 1980s by Preston Studios. Then there's Bruce Ingram, who by 2015 had 19 lamps in his Sears catalogue cottage in Melbourne Beach, Florida. The Hearst Castle Preservation Foundation in California has auctioned off four lamps over the past five years to collectors that include Anne Hearst.

Windows and Doors

Patrons of Preston Studios have often commissioned works specific to cultural identity. From the Hindu *Ganesh* commissioned for a residential dining room in 1997 on Merritt Island to the Chinese feng shui symbols of good luck for a dining room in Indialantic, Florida, in 2017, each satisfies a desire to remain true to sentiments that say "home" to a patron.



Preston Studios, Ganesh, created for the dining room of a private residence on Merritt Island, Florida, in the 1990s.

Frequently, travels to Europe can inspire design requests, which can result in commissions calling for French design, whether it be high empire or classic baroque. At times the studio has been challenged to produce a coat of arms suitable for a European palace. Such was the case for Ledreborg in Denmark. Although a small commission, it hangs with high baroque artworks in the stairwell leading up to the grand ballroom/reception hall, where the Queen of Denmark has dined. The entrance to Castle Foulis in Scotland also boasts such a work by Preston Studios. These designs are quite specific in nature, with the painting and firing done by Stanley Klopfenstine.

In Nova Scotia, a patron had built a home that could easily fit into the English countryside or the Austrian Alps, perhaps. The home faces west on a beautiful lake, but in the afternoon the sun could be blinding. The desire was to create something quite site specific, yet architecturally appropriate for the period look of the residence. A highly ornate border system including super thick Action Bevels was employed, with a very traditional rectangular overall design. The middle doors are punctuated with flowers native to the area—the mayflower and various hybrid lupines.

The work in Nova Scotia and the subsequent commission in Orlando for the same patron were featured in the article "Why Copper Foil?" in the September/October 2014 issue of *Glass Art*. Both are also featured in the new 2016 e-Book, *Windows for the 21st Century* by Wardell Publications released in December 2016, which features embedded videos showing the process of creating these works. Many of the details were hand painted and kiln fired by Klopfenstine.

Creating works that evoke a period sentiment can be an essential part of repertoire for anyone who intends to make a living in stained glass. Especially if the intent is to receive commissioned works, the ideal is to not only establish a reputation for quality in design, but also to establish a reputation for making patrons happy. This means addressing their desire to establish a lifestyle with art glass elements that directly contribute to how they live. Clearly, as Preston Studios has illustrated over the past 40-plus years, this can be done both in residential windows and in lighting.

Promotion Marketing

Often, getting started can be a difficult process. Within two years Preston Studios realized that it would not be possible to have enough cash flow to continue forward just producing new and original lamps after the manner of Tiffany. From 1976 to 1978, the very first question almost always asked was “Is this a Tiffany?” In this case, they thought it was an antique, so the studio switched direction and added the production of wood framed autonomous panels, which they named as the series *Birds of the World*.

To get started, sidewalk art shows and other venues are often essential to getting the word out, but this can grow in other directions if the work shown is of such quality that it attracts the attention of builders, architects, and interior designers. Belonging to the Home Builders Association can be a major step in helping to enter the residential market in a more direct way. It can take a lot of education to show builders exactly how stained or beveled glass can enhance their product and improve their chances of selling a home by helping to differentiate it from their competitors. Being able to offer custom designs, especially in the upper ends of home construction, can be an advantage. Starting off in this direction can mean at first producing works of a neutral nature, but still offering something that adds a touch of “bling” that remains not only noticeable but memorable. Once a relationship has been established—a model home that is featured in a “Parade of Homes” perhaps or some other event—the way forward becomes easier.

Here, once again, it is all about making the interior designer, builder, and architect look good. The glass needs to be an integrated feature that suits the decor, whether it is traditional, transitional, or modern. This approach to making a living in stained glass is not about expressing your own artistic voice. It is about creating glass art that expresses the design preferences of others in ways they wouldn't have even thought possible. **GA**



Preston Studios, six door panels featuring native flora created for a private residence in Nova Scotia, Canada, in 2012.

For more than 40 years, Jerry Preston and John C. Emery, Sr have operated Preston Studios, creating one-of-a-kind collectible stained glass art. Their work continues the uniquely American tradition of placing art glass in the home as a lifestyle element as they fashion many beautiful commissions, including designs for bathrooms and privacy screens, entryways, lamp shades, accent panels for cabinet doors, and pieces with religious themes.

Preston and Emery have written two eBooks produced by Wardell Publications. Lamps for the 21st Century, an eBook in interactive PDF form, features 14 embedded videos showing Preston and Emery at work creating their lamps. Their most recent eBook Windows for the 21st Century includes the studio's 2016 exhibit at the Foosner Art Museum and can be purchased at www.wardellpublications.com. Visit www.prestonstudios.com to learn more about the artists and their work.

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