

Kay Bain Weiner Giving Back to Glass

by Shawn Waggoner

Kay Bain Weiner's moniker, the First Lady of Glass, is not only a term of endearment and respect but also a marker of chronology. When it comes to writing, producing, lecturing, teaching, or working the trade shows, Weiner most likely made her mark *first*. In her fifth decade as a glass businesswoman and artist, she is giving back to the industry that has been her passion since the late 1960s.

In June 2005, Weiner established the KBW Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization that seeks to realize its educational goals through scholarships, grants, school sponsorships, and book distribution to schools. In January 2010, the KBW Foundation sponsored its first glass art conference cruise, assembling 148 glass enthusiasts for workshops, lectures, and demonstrations devoted to the business and beauty of glass art. This workshop at sea raised over \$18,000 for the foundation's causes.

Always concerned with revitalizing the industry, Weiner has taught workshops throughout the United States and abroad, including Israel, Australia, Puerto Rico, and Canada. She won awards for excellence in instruction at both the 1994 and 1995 Art Glass Association (AGA) trade shows. "The glass workshop is Kay's province. Always has been," says author and publisher Joe Porcelli, "whether it is held in a physical place in time or held in your hands in the form of a book. Kay knows what her students want and need to know, regardless of the particular subject at hand, and how to best present it so that they not only learn the material or technique but also understand it."

In 2003, Weiner won Best New Product at AGA's trade show for her book, *Creative Designing*, and three years later the organization presented her with its Lifetime Achievement Award. "I love teaching and writing. I've been very lucky that I did all of the things in life that could make one feel fulfilled."

Combining business acumen with her love of glass, Weiner coordinated the Glasscraft Festivals in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Florida with Seymour Isenberg from 1989 to 1996. She was the president and owner of Eastman Corporation and Eastman Publishing Company from 1993 to 2007, where she developed and marketed Color Magic Stains and published her own books. Hexacon and Canfield Solder both employed her as a company consultant to demonstrate their products at trade shows and workshops.

Weiner is currently busy organizing and marketing the KBW Foundation's fifth annual cruise conference to be held in February 2014. The event has grown leaps and bounds in the last four years and is expected to earn close to \$100,000 for the foundation. "I always look at everything as a learning experience. I love doing things that are unusual because of everything you learn."



Kay married into a family that was in the glass business where she learned to do stained glass from Herb's dad. A passion for glass led Kay into various creative endeavors in the glass industry.

Living with Glass

One look at her home reveals that Weiner has a passion for glass—not just the industry, but the art. She and husband Herb left New Jersey in 1997 and settled in Carlsbad, California. Their contemporary 3,700-square-foot townhouse is comprised of six extremely large rooms with 22-foot ceilings.

Weiner created the focal point of their living room—a massive glass wall sculpture containing sculpted metal heads—that measures 12 feet wide by 16 feet high and has a waterfall below. Blue neon casts ambient light across the sculpture and leads the eye to the dining room and a sandblasted and carved dining table. Thermofomed sculptural panels divide the entry foyer and repeat the bubble motif of the waterfall. Weiner's kitchen displays a 14-foot expanse of leaded cabinet doors, making the space look vast and sophisticated. This residential homage to glass reveals that its owner knows her world. It projects everything that is beautiful, unique, and challenging about the medium of glass.

A Glass Star Is Born

Born and raised in Miami, Florida, Weiner was always interested in arts and crafts as a child. She attended the Crafts Students League in New York, where she learned glass enameling from famous enamelist, Maurice Heaton. "Glass was different than anything I had ever worked with. In the early 1960s, we were using ceramic kilns, and in Heaton's course we made our own kilns—a very basic, small kiln we used to fire at home. For me, that was very limited. I loved glass and wanted to expand on what we were doing. People were fusing, but working very small and assembling components."

She met Herb at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles during her freshman year. He was a senior, and she was 18 when they married. Her father-in-law was a glass businessman who created stained glass doors and windows for private homes. She was intrigued with stained glass and asked him to teach her the craft, to which he agreed. "I felt that knowing this additional technique would open up bigger horizons."



A dramatic 4' x 6' glass panel created by the heat vacuum process makes a colorful entrance divider in the Weiner home.



Leaded glass kitchen cabinet doors enhance the Weiner kitchen.



The Glass Art Conference Cruise is a fundraiser for the nonprofit KBW Glass Art Educational Foundation. The funds go toward scholarships, grants, glass art supplies, and books for public schools and colleges.

Always involved in the art world, Weiner was a successful painter when in 1979 a couple of women asked her if she'd like to co-own Artist & Craftsman Guild, Gallery, and Arts Center in Cranford, New Jersey. The business provided a venue for Weiner to teach and sell supplies, along with a gallery space. "We attracted people from the tri-state area, because there was nothing like it around. Our gallery represented about 100 different artists and craftspeople, and we employed 25 teachers who worked night and day." The *New York Times* even published an article about the arts center. "It was a fabulous learning experience. But I didn't have a lot of time to produce my own work, because I was busy teaching and running the arts center with my partners."

Expanding Her Horizons

In the early 1980s, Weiner was asked to create craft kits for the market by the owner of Bond Adhesive Company. The first kits featured macramé, which was very popular at the time. Based on that success, they moved on to develop stained glass kits under the name Kay-T-Did and sold them through Ben Franklin stores. The kits included glass, lead, solder, and a pattern for birds, sailboats, and other easy projects. Thus began her long friendship with Canfield Solder, for whom she demonstrated at trade shows for 20 years.

The success of her stained glass kits led to Weiner's early experimentation with copper foil. "I knew Tiffany used nonadhesive-backed copper foil to make his lamps. It was the only way you could create three-dimensional items in stained glass without going insane. 3M was making adhesive-backed copper foil and asked if we would experiment with this new product line. It opened up a whole new 3-D world for stained glass artists. We thought it was revolutionary!" Before long, Kay-T-Did began to manufacture 3-D stained glass kits with copper foil. These were sold in JCPenney and Sears stores, as there were no stained glass retailers at that time.

Weiner's stained glass kits were selling like hotcakes, but some craftspeople thought the use of the new copper foil meant that the stained glass wasn't authentic. She wrote a brochure included in each kit that explained the new product and defended its validity. This writing prompted others to seek Weiner out as a contributing author. She was approached by *Creative Crafts* magazine and Chilton Book Publishing, which published her *Stained Glass Magic* book in 1978. Eventually Weiner began to write for magazines such as *Glass Art*, *Glass Patterns Quarterly*, and *Glass Craftsman*. Through her business, Eastman Publishing Company, she self-published her titles from 1989 to 2004. In total, she has penned 14 books, though not all remain in print, and sold half a million books.

Inventor of Techniques and Products

Difficulty obtaining metal parts caused Sears to cancel its order of the Kay-T-Did kits, which led to the company's demise. Then Weiner started working for both Canfield Solder and Gemstone Saws, demonstrating their products at trade shows.

One day she was demonstrating Canfield's instant freeze solder. "I always had a panel in progress to attract people to the booth. I brought a big piece of tin with me so I wouldn't ruin the table I was demonstrating on. As I was working, the solder was dropping onto the tin, making interesting designs. I started making butterflies and flowers freehand with the soldering iron. People came from all over the trade show floor to see the solder and what I was doing. It had such possibility!"

The random discovery inspired a series of articles, new products, workshops, and books such as *Decorative Soldering*, still in demand today. "Kay's boundless energy is paralleled only by her seemingly limitless creative vision," says author and artist, Gil Reynolds. "She is continually pioneering new inventions in whatever process she embraces."

In 1993, Weiner was looking for a way to apply colored patina onto metal. After a year, she found a manufacturer to develop a line of opaque and transparent stains, and her company, Eastman Corporation, was established. Business flourished as artists began using the stains on glass, particularly sandblasted glass. The company, which the Weiners sold eight years ago, also distributed copper foil, embossing tools, airbrushes, and other products.

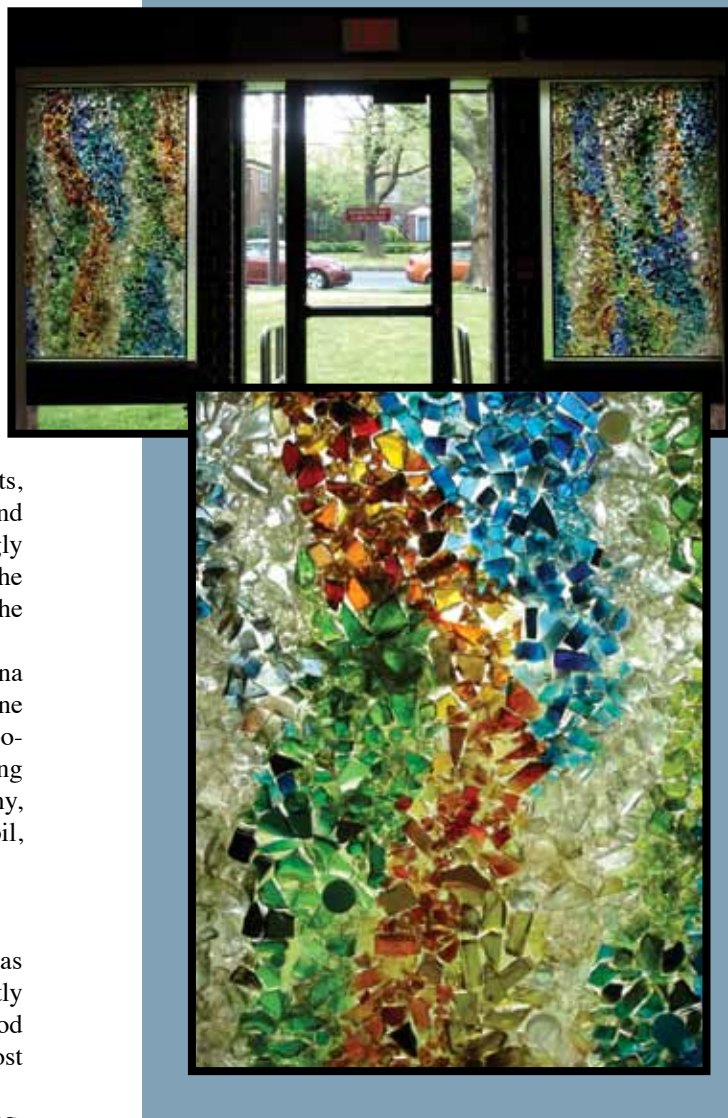
A Living Legacy

Weiner says she learned as much from teaching students as they learned from her. "Teaching made me feel I was doing exactly what I was supposed to be doing. I am a very organized and good teacher with a lot of good information to share. It has been the most rewarding aspect of my career."

While Weiner was teaching others, starting companies, painting, writing books, producing videos, and developing product lines, she was also making her own glass art. Some of her favorite commissions include a 16-foot-wide divider wall for a Springfield Library in Springfield, New Jersey; entrance walls for Temple Emanu-El, Westfield, New Jersey; and memorial windows for Temple Shaary Tefiloh, Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

"Thirty years ago, I created a metal and glass replica of a temple that had burned down using the glass taken from the burned out building. A few months ago I got a call from Tommy G, who told me a woman came in with the piece to have it refurbished and wanted to know if it was valuable. When he looked and saw my name on it, he told her, 'Yes, it is very valuable.' She has it prominently displayed now in her house. Things like this that seem coincidental make me shake my head. That's what life is all about."

When not spending time with her family, daughters Debbie and Laura, son Brad, and their families, Weiner works tirelessly for the KBW Foundation. "I have 20 angels who adopt a school and donate money for supplies so they can continue with glass classes. We also award grants to public schools and colleges so they can purchase supplies from their local retailers. KBW Foundation board member, Jacqui Bush, goes to teachers' associations and teaches classes to teachers. And we continue to distribute 75,000 out of print glass art books to schools and colleges."



Kay Bain Weiner, a 16-foot dalle de verre divider wall created for the Springfield, New Jersey, library in 1979.

As our industry crawls out from under an economic landslide, Weiner feels we can return to prosperity by embracing simpler times and basic glass instruction. "Glass art provides a wonderful opportunity for people to be creative. I'm hoping we will experience a revival of the art, even if we have to start with the basics. Beginners need new options for working in glass that are affordable and don't necessarily require a kiln. I hope some of the artists who have had to close their doors will continue to teach, because teaching is the best hope for a revitalized glass industry."

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