

Lifestyles

Middle Ages art thrives in Gridley

Stained glass artisans ply their centuries-old craft

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"If you want to assemble simple windows, first mark out the dimensions of their length and breadth in a wooden board. Then draw a scrollwork or anything else that pleases you and select the colors that are to be put in. Cut the glass and fit the pieces together." — Theophilus, circa 1100 A.D.

The art of working with stained glass is centuries old and two of the best practitioners in the Mid-Valley work their windows daily in their Gridley shop.

Suzy Pomeroy and Frankie Cartner, who opened the Stained Glass Junction last July on Highway 99, are skilled artisans who spend many long hours in their workshop, consult customers, teach courses at Butte College and still find time for family life.

"This whole thing (stained glass) started with me," said Cartner. "I was watching a friend doing some work and I then began taking classes. That was six years ago."

Cartner had done contract work for about six years, before she and Pomeroy opened their shop. Pomeroy, after taking classes at Butte College where Cartner was teaching, began working at her art last July.

"We specialize in lead," Cartner said. "We also teach using copper foil—the old way—but we're the only ones around here working in lead."

"We're doing the lead work the way it is done in the 12th and 13th centuries," Pomeroy said. "Very few people know much about stained glass," Cartner said. "Most customers think we color the glass some way. Actually, the colors are made by oxidizing during the glass-making process. All the glass we use is hand-rolled and that means it's uneven in thickness. That's what makes the different shades and feather patterns."

The two take care to choose the proper colors, shades and patterns for a particular project. The glass is cut to the pattern and placed together using lead pieces to hold the glass in place. The lead is then soldered together. One, which is better for Franzyne, is used around the perimeter to hold the entire project together.

"The glass, because it's hand-rolled, is known as antique glass and is purchased in large sheets from several different manufacturers. Included among the suppliers is Kokomo Glass, the oldest stained glass manufacturer in the U.S. Cartner and Pomeroy also use a mottled glass, the same type as used by Louis C. Tiffany, the maker of the famous Tiffany lamps.

Tiffany also developed a mottled glass and refused to reveal his secret when he died," Pomeroy said. "A glass-maker finally was able to duplicate it."

In developing a project, Pomeroy and Cartner spend sometimes as long as three weeks picking out the proper glass.

"All the glass must fit with the other pieces to form the overall pattern," Pomeroy said. "We try to choose pieces that flow together. The features and pattern in the glass must flow with the design."

"We try to be as accurate as we can as the colors," she went on. "All glasses, for example, are not right for a desk, nor would the coloring on a rose be one solid shade of bright red. And these colors will look different under different lighting conditions."

The two work on plywood tables, then stand off and look at the project held up against a window, with the natural light shining through.

"That's really the only way you can get a true look at the colors," Cartner said.

Cartner and Pomeroy work together

as well because they complement each other.

"Suzy is the best at choosing the colors and patterns," Cartner said. "She has a great art sense. My strong suit is cutting. I'll probably do most of the critical cuts. Before a critical cut, I get psyched up just like an athlete."

They follow commercial patterns, but prefer original patterns, working with Gridley artist Marilyn Christoffersen to develop their own.

The partnership seems to work for the two, who are also best friends off the job.

"It's really good," Pomeroy said. "That our husbands are also best friends. We'll sometimes go out to dinner and in spite of our best intentions, Franzyne and I will start talking shop 10 minutes after we sit down."

Pomeroy and her husband Jerry, a Gridley area farmer, have lived in the Butte County community most of their lives. She is a granddaughter of the late Estelle Urbahn, a nationally known author of children's books.

Cartner, a native of North Carolina, moved to Yuba City in 1951 and born there to Gridley. Her husband, Gabe, is the supervisor of the radiology department at the Maryville Medical Clinic.

The two, who work with contractors, developers, business and individual clients, draw customers from throughout Northern California.

"We have the largest collection of stained glass in Northern California, except for wholesalers," Pomeroy said. "What we don't have, we can get quickly. We receive shipments twice a week."

Their biggest project since the store opened was for the Sierra Central Credit Union branch in Paradise, where they did two windows, each 42 by 60 feet.

"The colors are so real, when you come into the place, it looks as if you could walk right into the scene," Cartner said.

One window depicts a Sierra mountain scene and the other depicts Orville's Table Mountain and other nearby scenes.

The increasing workload at the shop takes up a lot of time, but neither Cartner nor Pomeroy are complaining as they work to keep a commercial art alive.



Frankie Cartner (left) and Suzy Pomeroy work on a project at their Gridley shop.



The skilled hands of Frankie Cartner cut a piece of glass to fit a pattern.



A finished flower pattern.

U.S. photo by Steve Foxworth