

Beauty Is Translucent: Lyon Creative Works

BY ANDI DIEHN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON GILBERT FOX

When one of the glass panels in the front door of Anita Gonzalez's house in Enfield, N.H., broke while being pulled shut, Gonzalez was very tempted to replace the door with something a bit more airtight.

"You can stand in front of the doors and can feel cold air coming right through," she says. But the glass panels with intricate leafy vine designs held a lot of sentimental value for Gonzalez's mother, who lives with her and her family. "My mother wanted above and beyond anything else to keep those doors."

Gonzalez's father, now deceased, rescued the doors from storage back in the 1950s. Gonzalez believes the original windows date back to the late 1800s. While it may not have been the most economical decision, especially considering the price of heating fuel, Gonzalez honored her mother's wishes and had the glass repaired.

Dave Guay of Dave's Glass Barn in Enfield called on William Lyon of Lyon Creative Works in Canaan, N.H., to help out with the broken window. "I think he's the only one still around doing etching," he says. Lyon took on the job of creating a new piece of etched glass exactly like the old one.

"He came one day to take a bunch of measurements then two weeks later he came back with an exact duplicate of the broken glass," says Gonzalez.

Lyon may have made the glass repair look easy, but it took long hours in his workshop to get the design just right. "I had to trace the design by hand," he explains, showing his drawing in the Corel program on his computer. "It took a while."

Don't make any sweeping moves in Lyon's workshop. You may upset the dozens of goblets standing in rows waiting to have "Colby-Sawyer College Class of 2011"



William Lyon holds up a sample of his work.

etched into them. Or you might brush up against a mirror decorated with a picture of a loon on a lake. Or you could jostle an array of votive candleholders with an anniversary date etched on the side. Lyon works with delicate material.

"I can do almost anything people want," he says. "Within reason."

How does the drawing in the computer get on to the piece of glass? "Most of the time is spent getting the artwork ready," says Lyon, referring to the hours he spends in his desk chair leaning toward his computer screen making incremental adjustments to the drawing. "Once the artwork is done it doesn't take too long."

The design is transferred to a cutter plotter, a machine that acts just like a printer except it uses a very sharp knife instead of ink. The cutter plotter cuts the design out on a piece of heavy-duty contact paper. Lyon sticks the contact paper — the stencil — onto the piece of glass, which sounds easy, but it can be quite difficult getting all the edges lined up exactly where they're supposed to go. Then he puts the glass

into the sandblaster. Working behind a thick plastic window — and with the benefit of rubber gloves — he reaches into the sandblaster and operates the gun, spraying the piece of glass with thousands of pieces of sand traveling at a high velocity. The result is an elegant art form.

"Everywhere that's clear gets etched," he explains.

Lyon began dabbling in glass etching about eight years ago as he was about to retire from his engineering position with Channel 31. His first project was a window etched with the logo of his employer. "I started buying more and more equipment and reading books about it. People don't realize what goes into it," he says. Lyons is completely self taught; he's recently begun to explore the possibilities of 3-D glass etching and holds up a framed rose that seems to float off of the glass. He sells his artwork at craft fairs during the summer and is currently vice president of the Upper Valley Crafters.

A 35-year resident of the Upper Valley, Lyon is one of those people who doesn't retire in order to sit back and watch the world go by. He'd rather record it, make it more beautiful, and keep the light shining into our houses.

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