

Stained Glass Artist Gayle Marquess

by Maia Penfold

Gayle Marquess was visiting in Boston when she first became intrigued by the process of making stained glass windows. Back in Eugene, she decided to look into it. The result: It took over her life. She spent the next four years in a 12'x20' cabin teaching herself how to do glass, learning by doing, by trial, error and disaster. All this surrounded by fir trees, 165 chickens, 2 peacocks, 1 duck, 2 geese, 1 dog and 2 cats! The first two of those years she continued working as a pre-school teacher; the final two years were devoted completely to mastering her craft.

The small cottage at the 11th and Lincoln corner is now her studio. You can see examples of her work in the windows: a landscape including a waterfall, a floral design with sinuous metal lines, a simple cala lily design, a work in clear bevelled glass. You've got to, though, walk up the stairs, open the door, and step inside. See those same pieces with the sun (even if there isn't much of it) flooding through the golden glass, the scarlet, the plummy colors, the vivid greens—you may catch yourself going oohhhh and aaahhh—it's such a sudden feast of light and color.

You'll see Gayle over her worktable, with carefully cut chunks of glass following the full scale drawing. Her manner is exuberant and friendly, her joy in what she does is evident. When I first walked into her studio I was amazed at the large and elaborate project she was working on. Each feather of the pheasant design was a separate piece of glass, 2000 pieces in all in this window, and each piece individually edged in copper foil.

Gayle works closely with her clients and that's the fun part for her. "That's what I really like." She tries to determine what they would enjoy, what would work best given the architectural features and setting. After the initial consultations, she will prepare a full scale drawing, meet with the client again, laying out all the glass she'll use. The price will depend on the size and intricacy of the design. Often though, she gets so into it, that she will go beyond what has been agreed upon—without making additional charges—simply because she wants to follow it through that way herself.

Stained glass is unique as an art form that is inside and outside at the same time. It's almost like being in two places at the same time. It changes with the quality of light, the time of day, and the season. The stained glass artist is working with light as much as with the glass itself. Curiously, in Gayle's hands even the metal support structure has a lightness of line.

"I don't think you can ever forget you're working with glass..." she says as she clips with special pliers at the edges of a piece of glass she's cut to shape. What she's doing is called grozing. She handles the glass deftly and



Floor-to-ceiling entry panel by Gayle Marquess.

quickly, with great ease. But yes, she admits, sharp edges do sometimes result in cuts. She holds out her hands. "Nothing now, but there's always a bloody paper towel around..."

"I don't think I would be so involved," Gayle says quietly, "if I could ever control it. You can never control it. It's just got a mind of its own. If you try to do battle with a piece of glass—it will win every time. It's... unpredictable."

She tells me how, sometimes at the glass dealer you'll see what are called "curious" sheets of glass in the trade—something has happened in the manufacturing that's produced an unusual result. "When you see something like that, you buy it because you'll never see it again."

"I can design a window around a piece of stained glass—I have pieces of glass just waiting that I've saved for years."

When asked if she's ever had an exhibition of her work, she answered, "No." Questioned about that, yes, she's sometimes thought she'd like to have a show but she's been too busy filling

orders to really do much about it. "And whenever things slow down a little, instead of getting an exhibition together, I find I'm thinking of taking off for the Caribbean again!" We were talking in the middle of the Willamette Valley winter. "That's what I'm going to be doing in a couple of weeks... get some sun and a warm beach."

"When I'm here," she tells me, "I work really hard—9 or 10 hours a day and I won't sit down all day."

The downturned Eugene economy has affected her business somewhat. "I find I'm doing more work for out-of-town than ever before which amazes me because I do no advertising whatever."

For 10 years she's been producing and selling stained glass designs—she's very "fluent" in her medium, you can see in looking at her work that she thinks in stained glass—she doesn't translate into stained glass from other art mediums. Her originality is not blatant, it doesn't jump out at you, it reveals itself slowly in subtle discoveries. "I always leave in each piece an area of just glass, where it can speak for itself..."

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