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Copy Editor ~ Darlene Welch
Accounting ~ Rhonda Sewell
Circulation Manager ~ Kathy Gentry
Advertising ~ Maureen James
Graphic Artists ~ Dave Burnett
Mark Waterbury
Contibuting Artists and Writers
Wayne Cain, Sara Sally LaGrand
Andrew Lang, Bob Leatherbarrow
Troy Moody, Pam Reekie
Vicki Schneider
Staff of The Corning Museum of Glass
Milon Townsend, Darlene Welch
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Don Friedlich,
Amphora Series Necklace.
Photo by Sanders Visual Images.
On the cover:
Crista Matteson, Forest Watcher.
Photo by Daniel Fox.

Editoral Calendar / Advertising Deadlines

May/June 2021		July/August 2021	
Editorial Due	February 20, 2021	Editorial Due	April 20, 2021
Ad Closing	March 20, 2021	Ad Closing	May 20, 2021
Ad Materials	March 30, 2021	Ad Materials	May 30, 2021
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Remembering the Past, Exploring the Future

Building an Artistic Career on Family Values

A flameworked and solder sculpted fall tree.

by Wayne Cain

My father had a rather unusual approach to child-rearing. When I was around 11, my parents moved my brother, sister, and me into a new home. It wasn't a newly built home, but it was in a more upscale neighborhood. That was basically my mother's idea. My father was quite content where we were.

My brother and I got the two upstairs rooms and our own bathroom. Both rooms were unfinished, just stud walls and insulation, but my father, a sheet metal mechanic by trade, was known as a man who could do almost anything. He would often take me to work with him on Saturdays, giving me tasks appropriate to my age and paying me 50 cents an hour out of his own pocket.

Soon after moving into our new home, my father informed my brother and me that if we wanted finished bedrooms, we would have to complete them ourselves. "I'll show you the first step, but you have to do the rest." I remember so well the emotional impact that had on me. I was quite upset that my father would not help beyond his initial instructions on how to hang Sheetrock, tape a joint, add joint compound, then cut and nail a piece of molding.

Up until that time, I had the impression that we all worked together to achieve our goals, but all of a sudden I'm faced with stud walls, some unfamiliar materials, and a few simple tools. Another part of me, however, saw the potential in my current situation. I was beginning to envision myself as an adult—someone who, in a few years, would be independent. I sensed that I was beginning to build a human being—myself—and that I could become the person I wanted to be.

Wayne Cain assembling leaves on a window in progress. Photo by Will White.

The years I spent finishing off my bedroom stand out to me because I was on my own, doing and thinking. It developed in me a deep sense of self-confidence, knowing that I was developing processes that would help me when faced with the unknown later in life.

My father died of a heart attack when he was 43 and I was 17. I was helping him install ductwork in a home during my summer vacation and held him in my arms during his final moments. This devastating and final chapter in our relationship signaled to me that I was truly on my own and responsible for my life.

New Beginnings

The following year I was accepted into college. My family did not have money for such excesses, so I took our ladders and a couple of paintbrushes and painted neighborhood houses, making enough money each summer to pay my way through. That was, in large part, a tribute to my parents for the self-sufficiency they instilled in me.

Sitting on the hillside between classes, I thought a lot about how I wanted to live my life. I knew that I would not fit into the corporate world, since I wanted to be compensated for the value of my development and not give it away to someone else. I also thought that people should work, make the money needed, and spend the remainder of their time enjoying the other things life has to offer. Most importantly, I wanted to self-actualize and apply my problem-solving skills to the real world.

Out of college and free from what everyone else wanted me to do, I was finally on my own. I thought about becoming a blacksmith, perhaps a coppersmith. I was also fascinated by how light filters through treetops, by the translucency of nature.

Wayne and his son Daniel White loading a window created for the Unitarian Univer, a building inspired by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Photo by Will White.

It was June of 1972 when I climbed into my 1964 VW bus and drove from Richmond, Virginia, to Rockland, Massachusetts, to the Whittemore-Durgin Glass Company. I remember sleeping in my bus to save every cent I could to buy the basic tools and materials I needed to begin my journey. Starting on the kitchen table, I made stained glass apples, pears, cherries, and chickens that stood on one leg, selling them at craft fairs and gift shops. From there, it was Tiffany-style lamp shades, windows—including learning how to repair both—as well as curved bent shades.

Flameworked White Lilies completed window and flower detail designed for a residence in Ohio.

The beginnings of Wayne's study on how different glass colors would affect the appearance of his beveled windows.

A local plate glass company called me one day and said that they would like to sell their 1915 Henry Lang beveling machines to make room in their shop for other things. At the time, I couldn't find any literature on how to bevel, so once again I relied on the trial-and-error process I learned while finishing my room.

Discovering New Techniques

Holding a piece of glass over rotating iron, stone, cork, and felt was not the most exciting adventure in my life. In order to hold my interest, I began grinding and polishing different thicknesses of glass at different angles. I beveled flash glass, colored glass, and textured glass and made a display case to carry around in the days before the Internet when artists walked around with large portfolios. I loved opening it up to clients, who instantly realized that I had something special to offer them.

One of the wonderful things about being self-taught is that I didn't know when to stop. I also developed beveled glass windows with thicker glass so that my windows would hold their own when surrounded with oversized wood molding. Then it was on to UV-gluing to add beautiful, deep, rich colors of antique glass behind my bevels, giving them a jewellike quality. That led to my contemporary beveling style. Carving, painting, and fusing soon followed. I loved the experimentation, being able to quickly test an idea by trial and error.

When I look over my life's work, the one thing that really stands out to me is the diversity of styles and techniques. I attribute that, in part, to how comfortable I am dealing with the unknown and working with a variety of clients who have led me in different directions.

Capturing the Translucency of Nature with Flameworking

Around 10 years ago, I began to renew my interest in the translucency of nature. I was also tired of wrapping each piece of glass in lead and foil, further restricting the light. I started by introducing flameworking into my windows. The most important advance I wanted to make was to work in a painterly way, placing the flameworked pieces onto the background glass to see how each piece of glass looked before permanently attaching the leaves and petals.

Flameworking was a slow, painful process to learn. If I counted the time invested working over a flame squeezing, mashing, and pulling a melting strip of glass, it was also a very expensive process to add to my skills. I know it took years of working in my spare time before I had the various shapes and colors and a reasonable production time to begin seeking commissions. I remember showing a tour of 12-year-old students the baskets full of my flameworking rejects during a demonstration in my studio. For a second, I thought their eyeballs were going to fall into my collection.

(Top to bottom) A perfect example of the evolution of the studio's flameworking techniques; Flameworked Wisteria Window *in transmitted lighting. The whiplash design was created for interest and the background glass was chosen for privacy.*

With the ability to form delicate shapes and colors and to work in three dimensions, I was finally able to work in a way that I had envisioned 47 years ago. Our latest innovation is creating branches with wire and solder and attaching them to the branches in our window design, adding even more depth to our windows. Suspending leaves and petals out on the branches gave us a realism that exceeded all of our first expectations.

Additional Aspects of Becoming an Artist

It is very difficult making a living as an independent artist/craftsperson. Some days, I feel like a corporation reduced down to one individual. It's not only the expertise that must be constantly developed to practice art, but also all of the peripheral skills like marketing, selling, website development, purchasing materials, making presentations, paying taxes and insurance, social media, communication, organizational skills, and working with the people who help us produce our art.

When I started 47 years ago, people were very secretive about their work. "Don't take photographs of my work." "You stole that idea from me." Now for the most part, we live in a world where people freely share their ideas. Maybe not their closest-held secrets or their client list, but there is an enormous amount of material available to everyone at their fingertips. I am especially fond of YouTube and specialized social media groups where we can share an experience, and people from all over the world respond.

The Internet has made it possible for people to commission us from all over America. Working with photographs, email, postal service, and freight companies, we rarely have to leave our studios. This is a far cry from the days when we lugged around large portfolios and glass samples only to meet with people who didn't understand why a commissioned window cost more than forty-nine dollars.

The Importance of Sharing Ideas

In my shop, everyone has the power of influence. If someone has an idea, a quick study is made and we all share our thoughts. It is the very same process I learned when finishing my bedroom—thinking and doing, trial and error. Every line, every color is carefully considered. We take risks—a lot of risks—always hoping to discover something new.

We never use the word *mistake*. Our brains move so rapidly, we just know it's not right and don't feel the need to label it. Actually, we use very little terminology, if any—certainly no theories—and we cringe at the thought of color charts.

In my studio, we all work intuitively. There are billions of neurons in the three-pound organ between our ears, moving in the speed of milliseconds processing information. It is the "control tower" of our being, providing split-second insight that we often call creativity. We harness this gift, this resource, by giving it the time and space needed to function with the least amount of interference. Insights that take flight into the conscious are quickly written down and later transferred to a large sheet of pattern paper. From there, they find their place in the many categories and flowcharts we use to organize our work.

(Left to right) A fanciful residential bathroom privacy window featuring a woodpecker and a sculpted solder tree and branches. A flameworked and sculpted solder window featuring dogwood blossoms for a residence in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

A skylight created for an historical home in Richmond, Virginia.

All of us in the studio work the same way. I may be the only one taking notes, but I am constantly listening and encouraging the free flow of ideas that provides the base of our creativity. It is also the reason I believe everyone here deserves the right to sign each of our creations. This is the same "control tower," the same processes, that 59 years ago helped me to figure out how to drive a Sheetrock nail, apply joint compound, and sink a finishing nail just below the surface.

Our working relationship has also given us a new language—a language that is often unspoken, where thoughts are quickly communicated in many different ways. I often think of it as communicating in a negative space, like the negative space in a work of art that is powerful once discovered. It also reminds me of my father and his mule, developing their own language as they cultivated long rows of corn together.

I believe that working in this way is very human. That is the way we have evolved over thousands of years to adapt to a complicated, ever-changing world. It also accounts for our needs for diversity, community, and good communication skills.

The Value of Perseverance

The other trait that I believe is necessary to succeed as an artist/craftsperson is perseverance. There are certainly easier ways to make a living, and we are all too often seduced by easier jobs, higher pay, and benefits. But there is nothing as fulfilling as assuming responsibility for your own development, then making a living based on what makes you unique.

Being an artist provides us with the lifestyle we need to sharpen our creative skills. Creativity is no longer a sideline. It is, instead, necessary for our survival and freedom. It allows us to express who we truly are and provides us with a deep sense of having lived a life true to ourselves. No longer do we feel the need to find our value in material goods, status, or medals and ribbons. We are content with the people we have become. **GA**

The preceding profile is an excerpt from the Summer 2020 issue of Stained Glass Quarterly *published with permission by the Stained Glass Association of America.*

A solder sculpted and beveled residential window installation.

Photo by Will White.

Wayne Cain
Architectural Art Glass
765 Bremo Bluff Road
Bremo Bluff, Virginia 23022
(434) 842-3984
wayne@waynecain.com
www.waynecain.com

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