

Here creativity prevails

BY TRISHA JOHNSON, CORRESPONDENT

Some people think of stained glass as a sort of fragile jigsaw puzzle, with pieces cut out in simple shapes and soldered together with metal seams to create a picture. A round red ball for an apple; some purple marbles for grapes; triangles of gold and brown for a pineapple and there you have a still life in glass.

This simplistic notion of the art of stained glass does a grave injustice to true artists like Wayne Cain and Daniel White of Breomo Bluff. This father-and-stepson partnership creates one-of-a-kind translucent works of art using methods as disparate as hand-beveling, hand-painting and firing, and flame-working glass for three-dimensional creations.

Their work has graced not just the expected churches, but private homes, businesses such as the Cardiac Unit of the Winchester Medical Center and the Tobacco Company Restaurant in Richmond, and recently the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at Ohio State University. Two enormous stained glass pieces, arguably the jewels in Richmond's Renaissance crown, once hung in the catwalk bridging Broad Street Road at the Sixth Street Marketplace. When this revitalization attempt failed, the windows were removed to Richmond's Valentine Museum. Cain and White also

do restoration work, including a restoration at the French Ambassador's residence in Washington, D.C.

While earning his degree in sociology and forestry in the 1970s, Cain enjoyed "watching sunlight filtering through the forest." He explained, "The translucency of nature inspired me to search for a medium that embodied such beautiful light and color." He began making ornaments, then Tiffany-styled stained glass lamps. Cain has followed his creative instincts on a journey he could not have imagined when he was first learning to craft a stained glass lamp. "Flowers, apples, pears, cherries, and even an eggplant lamp were requested," Cain wrote of his early days as a stained glass artist. "Then my Wayne Cain turned to making windows." Walks through the historic Fan district in Richmond, studying the transoms and windows in houses built during a time when stained glass art was all the rage, nudged Cain towards creating stained glass windows of his own.

After having practiced his art for twelve years in a busy studio in downtown Richmond, Cain was "missing the creative time for thinking and experimenting," and moved to his current home. "Seven acres, a 1907 farm house and an old buggy barn for a studio...I dove into

the pleasures of creativity. Solitude and a frugal lifestyle freed me once again to follow my own direction," Cain explained on his website. For over 30 years now, Cain has called Breomo Bluff home.

Innovation seems a constant in his creative process. After discovering antique glass beveling machinery in an old Richmond glass shop, he taught himself the art of hand-beveling glass (there were no instruction manuals - and no literature, not even in the Library of Congress, that described the process) and suddenly sculptured metal branches in a transom took on the sheen of early morning ice as the beveled glass was put in place. More recently, Cain has been exploring the art of incorporating flame-worked, three-dimensional glass in his windows. Adding such things as hand-worked leaves and flowers to a traditional stained glass background has "freed us from encasing each piece of glass in lead or solder and allows us to work in a more realistic, natural way with nature," Cain said. "It also has brought my work the closest to my original fascination with the translucency of nature."

Cain is pleased with his partnership with stepson Daniel White. "Art is both an inward journey and collaboration," Cain said. "Most of the time one of us takes a lead role, usually because the commission lends itself to a strength one of us has. However, much discussion goes on when the need arises and time is a valuable asset in letting ideas evolve. If we find ourselves agreeing too often we become a little concerned," he added.

Cain and White work by commission, and each commissioned piece is designed specifically for the client. "We are

a studio that creates one of a kind, site-specific works of art in glass. It is what our studio is designed for with the many processes and resources we surround ourselves with. As we develop our new ideas it seems like each new commission in the most challenging one we have had. Presenting a new idea of how to use glass and then executing it is taking on a huge responsibility. We take each stage of the process very seriously, making studies and "living" with the project to achieve the best possible piece we are capable of," he explained. "The most challenging part of our work is working with the unknown every day. We have sold an idea that has never been executed in most cases, will be in an architectural setting and seen by many people for years to come. This is a huge responsibility that we take very seriously."

"The most surprising thing to most people is the preparation that goes into our projects," Cain stated. "Sharing ideas, designing, making full scale layouts, finding materials...often we are half way through a project before we cut the first piece of glass. Most people relate only to the actual building of a window, not its creation." The walls of Cain's studio are mostly windows with deep ledges, and often large sheets of glass are propped in these windows, the light streaming through, for the artists' consideration. Minute differences in color or texture, almost indiscernible to the untrained eye, are considered as they choose which piece of glass to use. The glass might be left in place for days so the artists can see the subtle changes of the light at dawn or midday or dusk; on a sunny day or an overcast one. Large tables are covered with works in progress; drawings almost like blueprints might be stacked on one; bits of vibrant glass arranged atop a pattern on another.

Words like "creativity" and "innovation" pepper Cain's speech, and he never loses his focus on those aspects of his work. "We work in a studio environment where creativity prevails. We create each window, one at a time by hand and eye and guarantee that it will never be duplicated...We

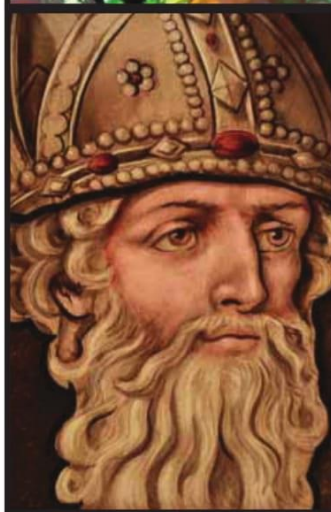


(Above) Wayne and Daniel have been working together since Daniel was 12, exploring their creativity expressed through their craft.

(Right) Wayne's focus over the last few years has been expressing his fascination with the translucency of nature by working glass over an open flame to sculpt three-dimensional blossoms and leaves

(Bottom Right) Daniel has been exploring painting on glass for the past few years. This is a study in the studio, a reproduction of a classic cathedral piece.

Photos courtesy of Cain Art Glass



do this because we believe that our work is a tangible expression of our development as artists. We are happiest when we are using our minds and hands to explore our imaginations, giving us a deep sense of fulfillment at the end of the day."

Cain appreciates what White brings to the partnership: "Starting out over 40 years ago, when an artist could make a living with a couple of number twos and a crate of glass, I would have missed a great deal working in this electronic age without Daniel as a partner. Like many places of endeavor, 'new blood' not only revives the established but secures the future. Not a day goes by that Daniel doesn't surprise or impress me in some way. Two self-directed fellows with so many resources, a willingness to take risk and backing each other up when needed has created a work place that is fun, productive, and fulfilling. These are the happiest days of my career."

Cain feels he found the right studio and the right home when he fled the busy-ness of Richmond all those years ago - and not only because the remote location and quiet setting enable him to concentrate on his creativity: "I've been in Breomo Bluff now for just over 30 years, living among the kindest, most generous people I have ever known. There is something very special about our little "village" along the James and I feel so fortunate to live here."

For more information about the work at Cain and White, visit their website at <http://www.waynecain.com/>

For more information about the installation at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at Ohio State University, watch this video: <http://bit.ly/MUJQoH>