

Dinah Ihle Studio— Finding the Perfect Work Space

— by Colleen Bryan

Dinah Ihle recommends that glass artists might do well to find themselves a big old house to hold their experiments. “We bought a 100-year-old house in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the early 1990s. It fell out of escrow three times before we purchased it, which suggests the condition it was in. It is huge and has four floors, but they were in such disrepair that the sellers practically gave it to us. Everything needed attention, but we saw it as a treasure and have thoroughly enjoyed fixing it up.”

Much of the character that was built into the old Craftsman house was stripped out before the Ihles arrived. “We first walked into the lovely old home, fell in love with the unpainted woodwork and detail, and felt all but assaulted by the reworked South-west-style 1970s kitchen. The lights going down the stairs had been missing for years, and some of the old wires kept fixtures permanently lit, but it had a beautiful stained glass window that fed into my love for glass.” Dinah is uncertain how the new space contributed to her interest in glassworking, but she did start crafting shortly thereafter.

Bit by bit, the Ihles remodeled the house, and Dinah fused glass solutions to hide its blemishes and accentuate its beauty. For both of the Ihles, it has been an ongoing labor of love. “Dinahglass” pops up unexpectedly around corners—like the whimsical deep-sea scene fused of rippled Waterglass into a sconce on a narrow staircase.



Gracious Entertaining

Dinah thoroughly enjoys entertaining, having friends into her home and making the extra effort to treat them well. One such effort is the glass dinnerware that graces her table. Since glass is such an efficient insulator, Dinah fused glass platters for meat that are thick and heavy enough to accommodate a steak or roast directly from the oven. “The glass platters keep food nice and warm for a much longer time than standard dinnerware without letting the heat penetrate the tabletop.” She then fused a full set of half-inch dichroic, painted plates that she uses regularly and displays on the dining room table. For the butler’s pantry and wine bar built into a dining room nook, Dinah fashioned iridized glass tiles for the backsplash and woven glass panels that fit into the door channels to hide extra dishes and glassware.

Dinah’s artwork extends outside her house to beautify her deck and backyard as well. Since Dinah’s husband Bob has joint

problems, they wanted to install a hot tub, but the houses in the old neighborhood are built close together. The couple built a wooden screen and trellis for which Dinah designed six half-inch-thick fused glass medallions. The backlit screen provides both privacy and a lovely filtered ambience to evenings in the hot tub. “Many people think that glass can’t stand the extremes of winter freezes and desert heat, but I’ve found that when glass is thick enough it will withstand extremes of fluctuating temperature without breaking.”

To cover the porch light, which stays on all the time, Dinah melted together various frits, fabricating successive layers of melted glass—layering and cutting it apart, layering and fusing again—until she had a uniquely beautiful sconce. “I didn’t count on it being a trip-and-fall hazard, but it very nearly was the other night. A student of architecture stopped by the house. As he left, he was effusive about how much he liked our home and very nearly fell down the stairs while admiring the sconce.”



Eclectic Process and Product

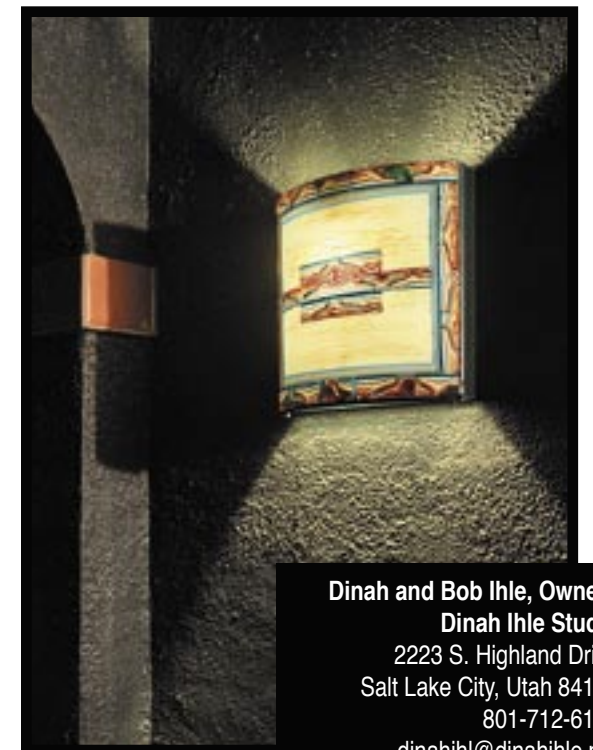
Dinah hesitates to characterize her creative process as being driven cognitively, viscerally through her hands, or stemming from inspiration. "The answer might be 'all of the above'. I can be very analytical in my creative method, but a lot of times things come from meeting a functional need, as with the sconces. Other times I just start out and keep experimenting until I reach some conclusion. I experiment a lot, and sooner or later something pleasing generally results. Thankfully I have a large house that can accommodate most of my experiments." Nonetheless, she confesses, "My husband is thinking he would like to play pool again someday. So that inevitably means collapsing the sprawl of glassmaking into more compact space. Thankfully, he is more organized than I and in a very nice way he periodically helps me get organized. He'll let me spread out so far and then he initiates a cleanup."

Much as Dinah enjoys the Craftsman period that her house represents, she does not design for any particular period or style or color scheme when making pieces for her home. "I experiment. I think good art stands on its own. It goes anywhere, anytime. Our new kitchen is very traditional with definite contemporary accents that stand easily inside the traditional house. When I'm creating, I don't think about how colors match or what period the design needs to fit into. I never ever think about how something will fit with the sofa. I'd rather buy a new sofa."

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Discover how Dinah Ihle's glass art has transformed through the years in the Spring 2010 issue of Profitable Glass Quarterly.

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