



Arts & Entertainment



Creative Reflections From Robbinston

by Ruth Leubecker
 Patterns of vivid color and whorls of dramatic shapes punctuate the stained glass creations of Mark Wren.
 His Wrenovations shop in Robbinston is an eclectic study of the multi-faceted wonder

of doing business with glass. "I've been in stained glass about 25 years," says the Downeast craftsman, "even though Wrenovations started out as custom carpentry and graduated into other crafts. In 2000 stained glass became my full-time busi-



Mark Wren shows his newest stained glass window creation, soon to be installed in an area church. Ruth Leubecker photo

ness. I don't make the money that I did before, but it's a lot more fun."

His clientele is all over the world and his custom work grows each year, creatively challenging and always rewarding. "We've shipped windows to England, Europe, Boston, New York and Indiana," he says, referring to his wife, Arlene, as the second half of the team. "Arlene has her own studio upstairs where she makes rugs and does other crafts. But she also does a lot of the drawing for Wrenovations. And she's the business end of the business. Everyone wants to e-mail, and we have a web site and a lot of messages every day."

Officially open from May through the Christmas season, Wren's prices range from \$10-\$12 dollars for some jewelry pieces to hundreds of dollars for custom work. Throughout Washington County his stained glass creations grace notable places. Behind the pulpit in the Down East Community Hospital chapel his stained glass window honors longtime hospital employee Cliff Pennell. Two seven-foot commemorative windows in the Congregational church in Grand Lake Stream tell another story about another place. His four-foot round window lends character to Grace Chapel in Pembroke.

However, Wren is quick to point out that the biggest job of his career, commission-wise and because of the challenge of placement, was at the Heritage Museum in Calais. Two half-round windows, each 4x8 feet, were pulled and placed on the third story.

"That was the most challenging job I've ever done," he says in reflection. "Each is in a solid mahogany frame, one on the St. Croix-Canada side and the other on the Main Street-Calais side. Each frame alone was \$2,000."

Seven steps are involved in fashioning each piece of glass-work. "It starts with a rough drawing. The cartoon is next and the sections are numbered and labeled for the color of the glass," he explains. "Then a second cartoon is cut out, which becomes a puzzle and a guide. In the next step the glass is ground and fitted and each piece individually wrapped in copper foil. I have different patinas of four different colors which neutralize the surface of the lead."

Originally from the Adirondacks in New York, the Wrens have been together since 1977, beginning their life in Maine in Cutler. "Arlene has her masters in accounting, so she's always been in finance, financial management. She worked with Bud Kneeland to get Maine Wild going, and we both worked at Georgia Pacific," says Wren, "but Cutler got to be too much of a commute, so we bought this farm and 200-plus acres and eventually relocated to Robbinston. Now we've been here almost 30 years."

In the 1980s Wrenovations Carpentry was the name of the business. "I did a lot of carpentry work, but there was a lady here in Robbinston who was Continued on Page 21.


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my mentor in crafts and stained glass," he says. "I bought her glass business in 1985 after she had a terrible accident. Then I lost my job at the mill and built this first home. People began to notice my stained glass, and I started doing custom work."

For three years, by invitation only (about 80) the Wrens opened up their studios and home for an open house, one around Mothers' Day and another the week before Christmas. Wrenovations, first catering to fads and trends, eventually settled into a business regimen all its own.

"We did Tiffany lamps for awhile, but the Chinese have killed me because they can do those lamps in great numbers so cheaply," says Wren. "And we went through a Victorian phase. Now we love to travel around picking out stones and shells. All my pieces are one of a kind."

An integral part of the community, Wren has hosted classes from Woodland, Perry and Robbinston schools, and also the Calais Nursing Home. "They've all come here for a one-hour demonstration," says Wren, "and I love doing that and showing them about stained glass."

He's very much into the people who appreciate the fine points of stained glass. "I get satisfaction from meeting these people, like the Cliff Pennell family," he says. "I designed that pattern with the arched ceiling in mind, but the actual drawing came from a very small engineer's print."

Blues and purple-white combinations are presently in vogue, says Wren, who's also seeing a resurgence in Canadian business. "Nature scenes, still sun-catchers, but made to hang in a double-hung window, are the most popular," says Wren, who claims there's no limit to the requests of his customers. usiness-wise, Wrenovations is set on a definitive course for the future. "I've never seen myself going L.L. Bean, or even Knock on Wood," he says. "I really like custom work and doing designs for customers who want special pieces made."

Visit Wrenovations, Stained Glass Creations, 454-2832, at or reach them at www.wrenovations.com or wrenovations@midmaine.com.