

Prism of the Soul

By Dale Mary Grenfell ♦ Photos by Jill Bailey

Deb Kessler radiates a kind of joy that one sees in the face of a mother seeing her newborn or in the face of a photographer when he captures the perfect sunset. If the eyes are the pathway to the soul, then it only takes a second to notice that Deb's soul is etched into all of the exquisite glass pieces around her.

As a child growing up in Estes Park, glass of any kind held deep fascination. She remembers how dazzled she was with prisms, mesmerized by the brilliant rainbows and ever-changing dance of color that would delight her senses. Sitting in church, Deb ignored whatever was being said from the pulpit and gazed intently at the stained-glass windows. And she used to steal away to a place not far from her home where kids would break glass. Someone's junk became her treasure. The artist in her at a very early age saw beauty and possibilities everywhere and she would pick up random pieces and glue them to poster board.

Had it been left entirely up to Deb, she would have filled her bedroom with original glass creations. Her mother, however, predictably concerned with safety issues regarding jagged-edged glass



Deb Kessler, who owns Dimensions in Art Glass in Loveland, loves creating art glass to enhance people's homes, including her own in the hills north of Masonville.

pieces, won out on decorating options (though Deb still managed to hide cherished pieces under her bed). When she was 12, her father (a man she describes as a "Jack of all trades") showed her how glass could be cut. Deb was hooked! She took every art class available at school, though glass remained her passion.

As she began to plan her future, the young artist was persuaded by her parents to pursue a career that was more practical and that would assure her a steady income. Deb chose pharmacology and remains a licensed pharmacist to this day. Never traveling very far from her passion, however, Deb smiles broadly and says, "During those 25 years as a pharmacist, I sold drugs to support my glass habit!"

As most artists will tell you, the soul will usually get its way. Deb could no longer deny what she loved most. Pharmaceuticals was not creative, nor satisfying. The exquisite variety of glasswork both in her home and in her Fort Collins studio is testament to the fact that she made the right decision. Attending a class in Boulder in 1978 got her going. Years later she went to work for a studio in Fort Collins and in 2001 opened Dimensions in Art Glass in Loveland.

In 1985, she and her husband designed and built their home in the hills north of Masonville. They knew ahead of time that there had to be spaces for glass and one glance around their cozy retreat reveals those spaces filled with elegant perfection.

Inspiration for the art nouveau front door came from a circa-1920 poster by Czech painter and decorative artist Alphonse Mucha. Moving around the warm rooms, one's eyes are treated to transoms, a Tiffany-style lamp, fused-glass pendant lights, and a flawless three-panel glass screen in wetlands motif. Motivation for a door to the sunroom came from a wallpaper border and just about every window frames some piece of Deb's art. You'd never guess that when the home was



The sandblasted and air brushed mirror Deb made for her bathroom has an Asian flair.

completed, they were not on the grid and that for eight years electricity was only available from solar panels and a generator. Deb recalls many cold hours spent in the garage creating her glass designs. When sandblasting she used a gasoline-powered compressor.

“So many ideas are running through my head all of the time and there just isn't enough time in the day to explore all of them.” She is already thinking about redoing some of the glasswork in her home and wants to experiment using fused glass for pendant lights and currently is making fused-glass jewelry. Deb combines fused glass, leaded glass and sandblasted glass – producing a stunning 3-dimensional effect that

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draws the eye into an almost mesmerizing depth of the piece crafted. She just completed an aspen-leaf motif donor wall made in sandblasted glass for a new theater in Grand Lake (four panels – each 48-by-72) with the names of 300 people who donated money to the project.

Deb is not afraid of experimenting and takes time to explore the unknown. “Your tastes change as you



Clear leaded-glass doors are the perfect portal into Deb’s sunroom (left). Deb made many of the lamps in her home, including the one hanging above her dining table (above).

move along in years and there is always something more to be learned,” she says.

In earlier years, she took a more traditional approach to the design element in her pieces, but has since moved into abstract and contemporary. She does all of her own patterns and says she loves pursuing the “unusual, something off the beaten path.”

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Vaulted ceilings, with lots of windows and light, allow for a number of Deb's stained-glass pieces to be mounted in frames above doorways.

She finds her personal tastes drawn to the clear line influence of Japanese art. She has traveled across the country to learn different techniques and tries to squeeze in at least one big conference each year. One day she wants to journey to Italy. "Oh, the treasures there!"

Last summer, Deb attended the Retail Art Glass Suppliers Conference in Omaha and, once again, she fell in love with more glass magic. After learning how to sand paint with ground glass, she is ready to push the envelope once more using the technique on everything from windows to jewelry.

In addition to the work she does for herself and for clients, Deb still finds time to teach classes in traditional leaded glasswork and in the art of fusing glass in a kiln. Despite the hours, she never describes any of it as "work." In fact, she actually loses track of time and there are days when her husband phones just to remind her of the time.

What is it that continues to hold fascination for this woman in her world of glass? "It's a need to create things. You see through the glass and the possibilities are endless. In this hurry-up society, so many things are mass-produced. Glass work takes time, patience and



The entryway into Deb's home was inspired by a 1920 poster by art nouveau artist Alphonse Mucha.

thought. You put your soul into it. There is so much meaning there.”

Deb shares a story of a woman she met at a fitness center who bought several of her glass gingerbread Christmas ornaments to give to her niece who was battling cancer. Deb learned later the young woman took the ornaments with her to chemo treatments – and is now doing fine.

Deb's inspiration largely comes from nature and before I left, she showed me a door featuring a stained-glass collage of water, earth and sky, in tones of blue, gold, green, gray and pink. When sunlight floods the room, all of the colors literally danced and changed before my eyes. Golds became pinks. Blues became golds. It wasn't just glass. It's living, breathing and noble.

It's often said that art is a reflection of the soul – and Deb's is etched into every piece she creates. She boldly reveals a profound peace, energy and vision in her work. She understands the transparency of the prism – and the soul.

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