

Jim & Joe's Trip To Sydenstricker Glass

A Lesson in Fused Glass

This past September Joe and I had the pleasure of visiting the Sydenstricker Glass Gallery at 490 Main Street on Route 6A in Brewster, Massachusetts on Cape Cod. The gallery specializes in a technique called "fused glass" which builds glass objects by using colored glass powders or glass pieces sandwiched between 2 pieces of clear glass. After the object is constructed it is then fired in a kiln and all parts become "fused" together thus the name. During firing different shaped molds are used, when the glass heats up, it then "slumps" into the mold and the object achieves its final shape.

The gallery was opened in the 1960's by founder Bill Sydenstricker. He developed his technique during his education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Mr. Sydenstricker started by using dollies and other lacy objects to form intricate Victorian designs. He wanted his gallery to be the, "K-Mart of the artist world" and wanted his glass to be affordable and for everyone to be able to have a piece. Unfortunately Mr. Sydenstricker passed away in 1994. I know I would have greatly enjoyed meeting him! Fortunately though his gallery was passed on to his four apprentices and they have carried on his work. There are 3 owners now: Tom Mullin, Angelo Giacalone and current president Anthony Gerardi.

Brewster, Massachusetts is their only gallery and is the only physical location where their work can be seen and purchased. If you are lucky you can sometimes find their work on the secondary market. Their items are well made and durable contributing to the glass's longevity. Interestingly they did have a gallery nearby us in Lake Worth, Florida but that location closed in 2005. Perhaps that is why we are able to find a fair amount of their work here in southern Florida.

Their current designs include many of the original designs of Mr. Sydenstricker plus many different beautiful and colorful floral and seashore inspired designs and patterns. The shapes are mostly very functional plates, platters, bowls and trays plus fun items like sun catchers, jewelry, lamps, clocks, vases and Christmas and other holiday plates. They also have a small selection of "one of a kind" items.

If you would like to see and read more about this fascinating glass visit the Sydenstricker Gallery website at: <http://www.sydenstricker.com/>

Only a small amount of the items made are shown on the website so be sure to call and ask for what else they have available. Pieces can be purchased online and shipped.

Here are some photos Joe took during our visit:



Photo #1 – Artist Tom Mullin is shown behind his pexiglass booth starting work on one of the gallery's holiday plates. He is applying powdered glass on top of a stencil placed on the plate.

Photo #2 - Stiff paper stencil placed over first layer of glass. Weights hold stencil in place and powdered colored glass sifted over the stencil. Some of the designs use several different colors and require a variety of stencils. The weights are made of coins glued together! Notice the small plastic tubs of different colored and powdered glass. The booth is enclosed with pexiglass and has an air filter system that sucks air down, out and away from the artist. You wouldn't want to breath in the powdered glass.

Photo #3 – The image on this pate has been completed. This holiday plate was designed in 1968. See the date?



Photo #4 – The application of colored powders has been completed and the final glass plate is applied on top to complete the sandwich. This actually becomes the bottom of the plate as it will be flipped before being placed in the kiln. Firing is the next step. As you can see the process is very labor intensive and time consuming.

Photo #5 – The colored powders are made in the studio. They are purchased as colored glass rods seen in Tom's left hand. The rods are then ground into a powder and stored in plastic pots until needed.



Photo #6 – Plate molds lined up in the kiln.

Photo #7 – Finished product at the gallery. Various pieces decorated with pumpkins!



Photo #8 – Tom shows us a variety of molds in storage.



Photo #9 – Here Tom shows us a 2 part mold.



Photo #10 – Chili peppers – my favorite! This line was started as a promotion for a chili pepper company and proved to be so popular they decided to produce it. It is now one of the gallery's most popular lines!



Photo #11 – Here's a Christmas plate. Can you guess what year this plate was designed?



Photo #10 – Another view of the beautiful gallery!



Photo #11 – The gallery is always busy and, if you are ever in the area, it is well worth a visit!