

Seeing the Light

Focus on a New Career

by Donna Strong



Donna Strong
[click photo for author biography]

Editor's Intro:

How does [Artglassinfo.com](http://artglassinfo.com) find subjects for articles? A friend tells a friend and that friend tells one more and then I get an e-mail asking if I would be interested in a story about one thing or another. In most cases the answer is a resounding YES! Such is the case of Rick Streitfeld, a convert from glasses to art glass... but before I get you confused, let's let Donna Strong tell you all about it. Do you have a story to tell or that should be told? Let us know. Contact me at editor@artglassinfo.com !

At age forty-four, Rick Streitfeld found himself literally grinding away, making up to fifty pairs of eyeglasses daily. A highly skilled optician for nearly three decades, he had started handling glass around the age of sixteen, while working with his optometrist father. However, by now, the job had turned into a grind in itself and he was desperate for a way out. While Rick felt a poignant call to do something new, he didn't have a clear vision of what to try. Yet he was open to what might come.

A little background

Growing up in southern New Jersey, one of Rick's first memories of creative expression was the use of bold colors in kindergarten finger painting. Creative exploration continued to excite him into his adult life. Relocating to Southern California to pursue a music career in 1980, Rick's passion for

songwriting led to producing an album of original music. While he found enjoyment in creative activities, he was frustrated by being unable to support himself as an artist.

Hardly noticeable at first, six years ago a shift began when Rick decided to make changes inside his home, adding new window openings. He always liked making things himself, so he thought he would create stained glass windows for them. He purchased a pattern and supplies, and while cutting the first glass pieces he noticed he had gotten himself into quite a complicated project for which he had no training. Daunted, the stained glass project came to a halt when he decided, perhaps by discretion, that he liked the three interior windows without glass. More than a year later Rick again thought about learning stained glass.

A serious obsession

Rick began to spend time at a local glass wholesaler, asking questions. Then he found a stained



Rick Streitfeld at work in his studio



Rick applies some finishing touches to a commission

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"People are like stained glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within." – Elizabeth Kubler-Ross



Rick's support team... obviously taking a break from a marketing mission

glass professional to teach him the proper techniques. The new teacher used lead came. Rick saw how stained glass could be done more effectively, and was not as tedious or time consuming, as he felt the copper foil method was when he had used it in his initial attempts.

At this point, Rick didn't consider this a career move, but merely an opportunity to use his hands and be creative. "What a lot of work! I had so much to learn. I was trying to get out of the optical business, but it was scary to think about actually leaving my 'security'. Stepping into this business [glass], I didn't know how well I could do, or what was possible".

Rick sees the light

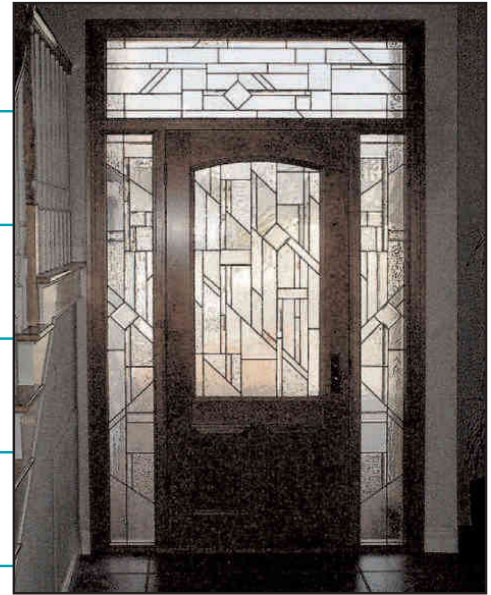
Though mired in the fog of uncertainty, he entered this new arena and soon began to understand how aspects of crafting stained glass actually worked. This time, it began to take hold in

him. "I'd always liked stained glass. I'm a visual person and love looking at the beautiful colors and textures in windows." He began to see possibilities. He saw that it was much more lucrative than he had first thought, and knew he could earn extra income.

"I began talking to people and showing pictures of my work. I made windows for friends and finally got my first order as a professional artist! One day I met someone who asked me what I did, and I told her I do stained glass windows. She lit up, and told me about the window they wanted done, and invited me to their house. It was a round window and the design they liked had many bevels. I didn't charge enough, but it was a great learning experience. When they asked me if I had experience doing round glass I said, yes, no problem, since I had been doing round eyeglass lenses for years! We all laughed at that. I also recalled the words I once heard in a personal growth workshop, 'Fake it 'til you make it.' That really helped me over the edge and helped land my first paying customer."

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This entryway was entitled Abstract Line Dance, and was installed in a Huntington Beach residence

At this point things really started to change for Rick. As work came through referrals, he began to see himself as a stained glass artist. Some months he'd have two orders, and others, none. He would get up at six a.m. and work until he went to his optician day job, then come home and go back into his studio and work until late in the evening. The initial years involved much learning, refining and building knowledge. "I was trying to fine tune it into something that would be lucrative, while continuing to deepen my connection with this new art. Until then, my other artistic abilities were not paying off financially. With stained glass, I saw there was a market for unique, creative work."

Putting multiple skills to work

Throughout this growth period, Rick began to apply the mastery he had achieved making eyewear to cutting various shapes of colored glass and incorporating them into leaded glass designs. "I used to tell clients that I was the only person in the business who can put their eyeglass prescription into their leaded glass window. That

was always good for a laugh." Making the facets of beveled pieces was not new to Rick. While working as an optician in the 1980's when faceted lenses were popular, he used to bevel the lenses by hand while others were using beveling machinery. So a 'facet' of his former craft was turned to reveal a new surface, as he used his skill with making lenses to make art glass paintings of light and color.

Two years later Rick transitioned from making lenses a full-time career doing stained glass. He describes a pivotal time at the end of his first year: "It was January and I was caught up with all my orders. It felt like I would never get another order. I was trying to get past the fear of losing everything...my home and whatever savings I had. I prayed for support and that all would be ok. One night the phone rang at 11 o'clock with someone calling from my yellow pages ad. They weren't aware that I was using my home phone for a business line. Again, using humor to get through a touchy moment, I said 'yes, I'm open 24 hours a

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day! After getting that order, more orders began to come. I got more established in the community, and fortunately, I've remained busier than I ever dreamed possible."



A triptych window design called Peninsula Abstract Blue Waves

Exploration

In his new career Rick began to explore an entire new world that was more meaningful to him as a person and an artist, using glass working skills that were already well honed and learning new ones. As Rick became more confident, he allowed new ideas to flourish and became more daring with designs. "I found myself being looser with my designs, and allowed clients to see some of the more unusual ideas. Sometimes I was surprised at the positive responses and the chosen designs. The abstract stairwell with the dove over it and the skies in some of the seascapes with abstract glass have ended up being ones that I get the most comments on. When you're experimenting with glass, how it works and how colors and abstracts look, often times the most uncertain ones end up the real beauties."

From friends, professional referrals and by word of mouth, Rick has built Art Windows into a success-

ful business. One of the main tenets of Rick's business is, "to make sure that people are happy and have a good experience while getting what they want. Whenever possible, I e-mail them sequential images of their windows as I work. Clients really enjoy seeing photos of the building process." His website, www.artwindows.com, is a visual tour through his prolific portfolio. Now booked several months in advance, the calls keep on coming from around the country. The grinding of glass has gone from a gritty dilemma to a flourishing hum in Rick's busy studio.

Revealing the sparkle

Not only does Rick's art glass show its better qualities when properly lit, this painterly glass artist, too, lights up when he talks about his work. A favorite quote by famed psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, adopted in his marketing materials applies to the smiling radiance of Rick as well. *People are like stained glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in; their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.* For Rick, the darkness was in not having an artistic direction. Yet from childhood, Rick was involved in a creative process of exploration on many levels and this continuity allowed him to take the risk to become fully engaged in stained glass work. The 'light from within' guides each one of us to realize greater fulfillment, giving our special gift to the world. Rick is very thankful that his 'light' has focused on the colorful world of glass art. ● ● ●



Rick aptly named this The Lighthouse Arch Seascape



A residential door panel named Bringing in the Woods

BIO

Donna Strong has been enjoying an eclectic life in Los Angeles for nearly five years. She has been an admirer of glass art since seeing an exhibit of Dale Chihuly's work in 1986. A life-long student of the creative process, she is intrigued by what calls a person to be creative. Donna is currently finishing her book manuscript, *Coming Home to Calm*. Calm comes as we express ourselves authentically, and realize the peace of being true to our nature.