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## Michael Curry

## Mosaic Insert



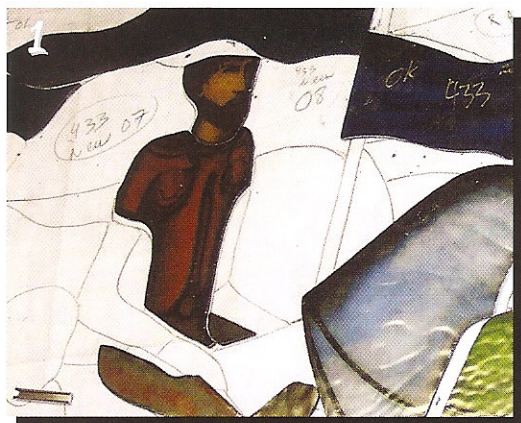
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# Where did that design come from?

*Learning to listen to the client, and those inner-voices as well!*



During assembly, I discovered a gap in the pattern around the shield in this window.



After some creative 'engineering', the piece was complete.



The piece, buffed and backlit, reveals a satisfactory solution.

by Rick Streitfeld

While sitting on the sun deck of this beautiful Idyllwild, California bed & breakfast retreat, I reach into my pocket to find a dime, so I can trace a nice circle to form the sun in a seascape window I'm sketching for a client. When the ideas are flowing, I'll do whatever it takes to get down some quick, rough designs, even while taking a weekend off in the mountains. Paul McCartney once said, about song writing, to write down everything that's coming to you, regardless of the rawness of form. You can always edit later, keeping the ideas that work, and 'trim the fat' off the newborn creation.

Like a soft breeze in the air, a feeling of wonderment rushed through my mind as I pondered momentarily about ideas and where they come from. Ideas that 'work' are generally coming from a very powerful and creative place within. We all have access to this place. The 'fat' is just extra stuff our egos throw in to make us think we are in control.

## With designs towards designing

When I began learning stained glass over 10 years ago, I didn't give too much thought to what I would be designing 10 years later, and how my own process would evolve. When beginning, we rely on stained glass pattern books and other resources to understand how designs are done, and to practice building 'our own' windows with those designs. I used to love paging through books while 'ooohing and aaahing' at the various unique ideas from other stained glass artists, as well as photos from archi-

tectural publications, etc. Soon I started drawing my own designs, and slowly developed my own unique sense of style. I have also learned to listen closely to the inner-voice calling for me to bring an idea into physical form.

## Taking care of business

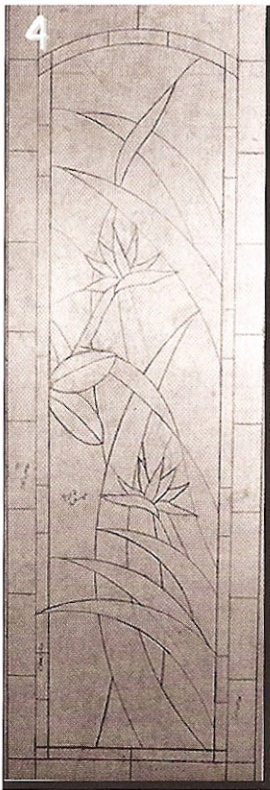
Now people contact me from all over the country asking about various windows from my website, and I immediately reply with, "How about I work off that idea, but create a new one that will be unique for you?" Of course, I'll reproduce certain designs, particularly if they are the more basic ones in my inventory and hard for anyone to call original or divinely inspired. I call them the 'bread and butter' of the business. You know what I mean, the simple clusters in cabinet doors, the standard fleur-de-lis or diamond look.

While developing any design idea for a client, I am sensitive to their needs. I will ask if they are willing to go with a bigger budget, explore new design concepts and possibly use higher end materials or do they just want me to give them the stock diamond bevels they love at a reasonable price? I enjoy working with either type of client, as both situations are valid. Bringing joy to clients at both ends of the spectrum gives me the same satisfaction, even though working with a higher budget gives me the opportunity to allow the creative process to unfold at a deeper level.

## Design - Imagination and Spirit

When I began building original windows, I discovered a lot about design through situations that would come up long after the initial design was complete and approved. When I





The client, after abandoning their initial 'pineapple' approach, chose this design.

One of the Bird of Paradise door panels under construction.



hit rough spots, I never failed to check it out within myself, to see if maybe I wasn't being signaled by the 'glass-gods' to make a change. For instance, I might add additional cut lines after getting new ideas while in the process of building the window! I've begun working on windows and, let's say, it turns out I don't have enough glass to complete the original plan of action. So, what do you ask yourself when that happens? I've

learned to ask, "Hmm, I wonder if something different is supposed to happen here? After all, if it was meant to be done this way, I would have enough glass!" At this point, in hopes of making lemonade from this sour-lemon-moment, I look at the pattern to see what the 'higher intelligence of the stained glass ethers' may be seeing that I don't yet see.

I'll give you an example of something that happened to me along this line. In 2004, I worked on a project with Linda Bernard, an amazing glass painter who lives on the east coast. Our first project was a dual-collaboration on a Don Quixote themed window. While laying out the painted pieces in preparation for assembly, I noticed that about a 3/8 inch section of the shield in Don's hand was either broken-off, or somehow wasn't there. I live in Huntington Beach, California and Linda lives in West Palm Beach, Florida. I really didn't want to re-cut the glass, ship it to her, have her try to match the paint, and then get it back 3 weeks later. Despite the fact that the word 'Beach' appeared in both locations, this is quite a distance! So, I asked, "What is my

When installed it would appear that the pineapple had made a comeback!



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design angel telling me here? I know I'm supposed to be building this window today!" I thought of my favorite rule: 'there are no rules'. I came up with an idea; if I used 1/2-inch H-lead around the shield, it would help it stand out as a shield and look more interesting, and it would just eat up that 3/8-inch hole in the window! With a little creative engineering on the 1/2-inch H-lead for filler and strength, it looked great! Problem solved, and a very nice design element was added to the window.

### No problem!

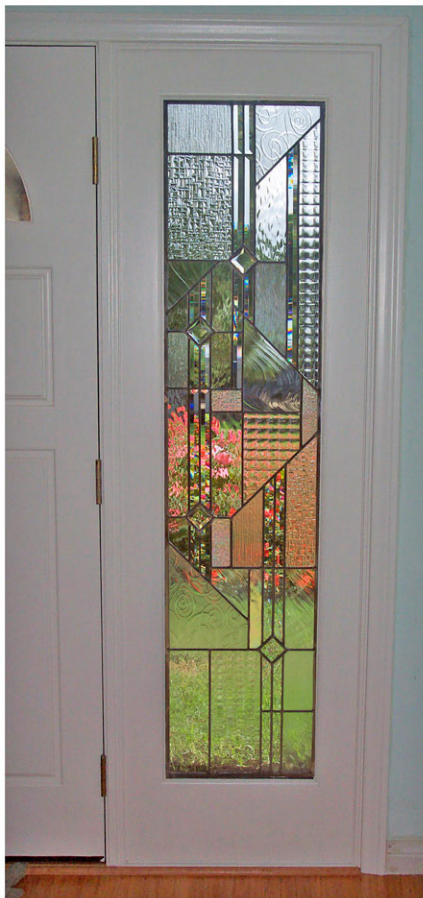
Remember, there are no problems, only solutions! I could've been all worked up for days about an issue like the one I just described, complete with fussing and screaming. Instead, after a few brief moments of annoyance (which we're all entitled to), I went into an uplifting feeling of elation at the new idea! Endorphins were flying all over the place, and I got five minutes of exercise from dancing around the studio after seeing the new approach take form!

I believe there's so much more happening in life beyond what we think is going on, and in the realm of creativity and design, this is especially true. The more you play with a concept, the more fun it becomes, and the less lonely it is in the old workshop! Here's another experience I often share. I was meeting with new clients in Corona del Mar, California and listening to ideas they had for their entry doors. "We were really thinking about a Hawaiian-type theme," they said. "We love pineapples, which are a welcome symbol in Hawaii." They talked about the pineapple, and showed me some they had collected in paintings and other things. After looking over photos and talking further, they decided that perhaps they would like more lush greens, leaves and a 'bird of paradise' design, and so they switched away from the pineapple idea. I liked the second idea as well, and by the end of the meeting, we decided to go with 'greenery'. Within a few weeks, I worked on some ideas and sent them my line drawing; very rough, but clear enough to show the concept. They agreed that would be lovely, and we talked about a flowing scene, or a mirror image in the doors. They decided to go with the symmetrical, mirror image look. When building the windows, I chose various shades of green on the first window, and just put the best color combination I could for the bird of paradise and other elements. The second window was a reverse of the first, so I used the same glass for each of the leaves, and varied the bird of paradise color a touch with a lot of beautiful Bullseye glass I had in the shop. It worked well, and I felt good about the glass I chose. The day of the panels' installation revealed a mystical coincidence. As the job was completed, I stood back and gazed at the two windows together; without having consciously designed it, a giant pineapple appeared within the total design! Wow! I love this stuff when it happens! The color selection, the mirror image and the way it was flowing made this illusion quite clear. The clients were very pleased and pleasantly surprised, as was I!

### 'Other' influences

I want to share this last story. I had spent about an hour





*This is the side-light that now shines a rainbow of color over the fabled piano.*

with a couple in Huntington Beach, fine-tuning ideas for their door panel project. Before leaving, I commented about their piano. As a piano player, I often get inquisitive when I see one. The wife told me, "That was my mother's piano and we are selling it. Since she passed away, no one ever plays it anymore."

Looking at this lonely piano, I mentioned that I played, and they invited me to do

something for them. Normally, when I sit down at a piano, my fingers automatically go into either a rendition of "Your Song" by Elton John or McCartney's "The Long and Winding Road". However, an impulse came over me to perform "Over the Rainbow". When I was finished, I looked over my shoulder and the wife had tears in her eyes, sobbing softly. She gathered herself together and said something like, "That was my mother's favorite song, and she loved to play it. I can never sell that piano." Eight weeks later, they had a beautiful new abstract window in their entryway, reflecting rainbows of light that reach out over her mom's old piano.

It's moments like these when I am convinced that, although it may appear as if I'm in charge of the process and making all the decisions, there are other influences and powers involved with my creative process. It's for this reason, that I urge you to allow your feelings to guide and influence you as well as your logic. You must remain flexible and willing to listen to what's inside you. The most amazing windows I've created came from taking risks with color, design, materials and making a request to the higher up's to guide me through this new creation; allowing what is best for my clients and my artistic goals to shine through. ❖

*After 30 years in the 'other' glasses business, namely opticals, and recognizing his true artistic nature, Rick Streitfeld opened Art Windows, in 1997. Originally from New Jersey, Rick now lives in Huntington Beach, California. His website: [www.artwindows.com](http://www.artwindows.com), displays hundreds of creations from over the years.*

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