



Gil Reynolds

At the Forefront of Fusing

by Shawn Waggoner

It's difficult to pinpoint Gil Reynolds' most significant contribution to kiln formed glass. His studio, Fusion Glassworks, built its reputation as a leading innovator of glass fusing and kiln forming techniques, evidenced by cutting-edge commissions around the country. A pioneer and founding father of today's contemporary Kiln Formed Glass movement, Reynolds has educated others through his books *The Fused Glass Handbook* and *Kiln Crafting*, as well as innumerable articles for art glass magazines and journals. Since 1986, Reynolds' Fusion Headquarters, Inc. has supplied kiln working artists around the world with glass, tools, and supplies, some developed by Reynolds himself.

Innovating has always been Reynold's top priority, as witnessed in equipment development such as his Murphy Fire Bucket. He also has an inventive approach to technique, as seen in his Flow Bar process, an adaptation of an ancient Egyptian pattern bar procedure. Inspired by his explorations in pastels, Reynolds continues to develop products such as his Easy Fire enamels, which will expand art glass in a painterly direction. Even the Fusion Headquarters website has been recently redesigned to be mobile friendly and more responsive.

Known from the earliest days of his career for sharing any and all technical information that he accessed or developed, Reynolds lectured extensively around the United States as well as in Japan, China, The Netherlands, Canada, and Italy. In 1993, he founded Hot Glass Horizons (HGH), a seminar event for glass fusing and other hot glass techniques.



(Top) Gil Reynolds showing some of the many products he has developed. (Bottom) Letskie Star glass millefiori Persian rug design in reflected light.

Keeping up with the times, Reynolds now teaches online via his YouTube channel and *Glass Art* magazine's Glass Expert Webinars, which have included Fused Glass Breakthroughs, Advanced Flow Bars, and How to Change the Shape of Glass in a Kiln. His upcoming class on Mold Making Magic will be presented on April 3.

Since the 1970s, Reynolds has been designing, fabricating, and installing custom, site-specific kiln formed glass, sometimes incorporating cast, blown, and stained glass elements as well as metal, wood, stone, and mixed media. By studying lighting, architectural motifs, client concepts, existing colors and themes, end use, and the project's budget, Reynolds' one-of-a-kind commissions complement their environments. His artwork graces numerous private and public spaces including The Allison Hotel and Spa, Newberg, Oregon; Obayashi-Gumi, Ltd., Tokyo, Japan; A. Pfann, Hilversum, Holland; Del Webb at Mirehaven, Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Percent for Art commissions in Oregon and Washington State.



*Gil Reynolds, millefiori pattern
slices of a Persian rug design from a
Letskies Star pattern.*

The following year, another of Reynolds' passions came to the forefront when he decided to take a year off and tour with a traveling six-piece show band playing classic rock, disco, and '50s tunes around the country. Eventually his band started backing up Joey Dee and the Starlighters, who had a hit song with "The Peppermint Twist." But the transience of life on the road—the high highs and the low lows—wore him down. In May 1975 after a year on the road, Reynolds moved back to Monmouth, bought a house, and started doing stained glass full time.

In 1980, Reynolds' future wife, Carmen, moved in across the street from him. They became friends and eventually married in 1984. Though Carmen was a restaurant manager and bartender who had no interest in working with glass, she would eventually run the business side of Fusion Headquarters, assist with product development, and create her own series of fused art glass.

Reynolds recently completed a corporate commission for Anesthesia Associates Northwest in Portland, Oregon, where he created the company's logo from stainless steel and edge-lit dichroic. He also designed and fabricated a wall piece from cast and enameled float glass that references the molecular structure of Isoflurane, an anesthetic drug. The artist currently designs cast glass chair rails for a private client on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

The Lure of Transmitted Light

Reynolds moved to Oregon when he was 2 and grew up in Eugene and Salem. His dad was a local television personality in the 1950s as well as a painter, actor, and filmmaker. His mom ran an art supply store, so art was in his blood. "I was attracted to stained glass windows at a very early age and hung out with the windows while my mom would talk to all of her friends after church. I have always loved transmitted light."

An art and film major at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Reynolds dropped out in 1972 to take part in an apprenticeship at F&G Stained Glass Studio in Salem. There he designed and restored church windows under the direction of Ray Gunn. When the studio secured a large restoration of several painted windows with multiple broken pieces, Reynolds studied the historic work and, through trial and error, taught himself to paint on glass. Later when F&G secured new church window commissions, the artist took his first run at design work.

In 1973, a transfer to Western Oregon State College (WOSC) in Monmouth introduced Reynolds to a painting instructor who allowed him to demonstrate his capability on stained glass windows. Part of the artist's assignment was to prove that his series of 30 autonomous panels called *Intro-linear Mindscapes* was art and not craft. The young student was challenged to justify his imagery, which took the form of a landscape combined with geometric elements.

For the Love of Glass

Rather than rehashing turn-of-the-century traditional stained glass imagery, Reynolds realized he had the opportunity to help develop a new modern aesthetic. He was drawn to the work of German modernists and in 1978 studied under Ludwig Schaffrath at Pilchuck, inspiring Reynolds to incorporate a more architectural approach to his work.

Throughout the 1980s, the artist completed many Percent for Art projects for the State of Oregon, including his 10-foot-high by 10-foot-wide Matisse inspired floor-to-ceiling windows on three different floors of the Federal Building in Eugene. He also created windows for the Bush Barn, the Salem Art Center, the Monmouth Public Library, and Battleground Middle School. By the 1981 *Northwest Street of Dreams* show, Reynolds' windows appeared in nine out of 12 homes.



Gil Reynolds, Untitled, 38" x 21", 1972. The second stained glass window built by the artist, it reflects the use of Art Nouveau styling to interpret landscape forms.

Introduction to Fusing

A declining stained glass market inspired Reynolds to investigate fusing. In 1981, in a Pilchuck glassblowing class with Dan Dailey, Reynolds met Boyce Lundstrom, then president of Bullseye Glass. "Lundstrom had a dream to create sheets of compatible glass. At that time it was unheard of to go out and buy different sheets of glass, fuse them together, and know that they wouldn't break apart. Lundstrom's goal was to create an entire line of fusing-compatible glass and a fusing movement."

After Pilchuck, Reynolds visited Bullseye Glass Co., where Lundstrom gave him some glass scraps for testing and experimentation. One of Reynolds' early discoveries was that the ceramic kilns he used for painting were not adequate for fusing glass. He installed an additional element in the lid of his kiln, which helped prevent thermal shock and provided more even firing. Reynolds eventually returned to Portland to share his test results with Lundstrom and Daniel Schwoerer.

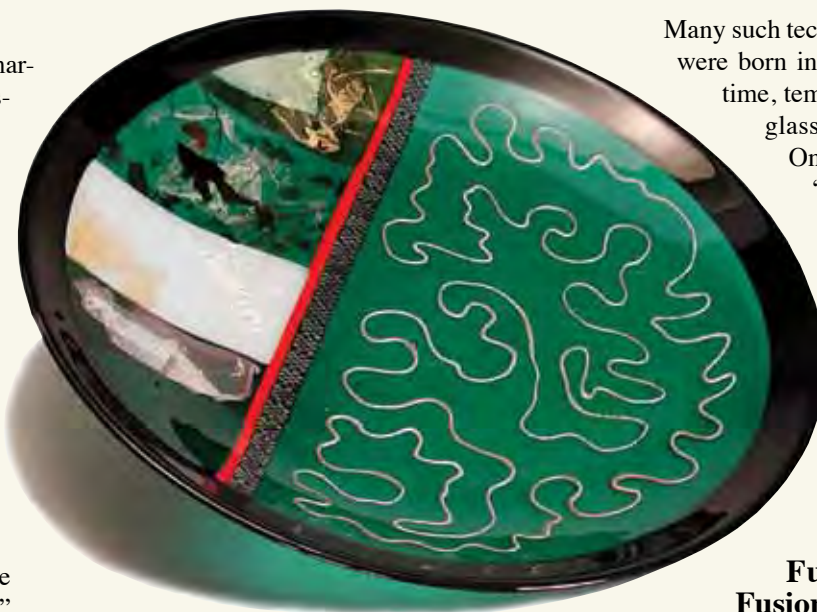
Teaching and Technical Advances

In late 1981, Reynolds began incorporating fused glass elements into his stained glass windows. Eventually his excitement about fusing took over and became his sole, and soul, focus. He realized the need for fusing classes and began teaching seminars on the techniques. In two years, Reynolds was teaching 25 fusing seminars a year throughout the United States at studios and retail shops.

"There was a simultaneous combustion, if you will, of interest in kiln forming glass. The fusing movement was based on a willingness to share information, so we didn't have to duplicate all of the research and development. It was during these travels that I truly realized the importance of building community. The healthier, stronger, and more advanced the entire community is, the better it is for all of the individual members. Our communal knowledge grew rapidly and gave us a really strong sense of connection that continues today."

Early on, Reynolds found a book on ancient Egyptian and Roman fused glass. He noticed the use of what he calls "multiple generation processes" to create imagery. Components were built and fused into one piece, then broken or cut into smaller pieces and re-fused. Those pieces were then cut up and added to other elements, which was very different than the cut-and-stack approach many people were using at the time.

Reynolds eventually built a small glory hole, which enabled him to pull pattern bars to slice up and fuse in his work. Inspired by Richard La Londe's "coffee can" glory hole, he later developed the Murphy Fire Bucket so others could make their own hot parts. Reynolds also started combing glass in a hot kiln. "I had seen glassblowers comb or feather a pattern on a vessel attached to a blowpipe, so I thought why not comb in a kiln?"



Many such technical and artistic innovations were born in the early 1980s. Controlling time, temperature, and the behavior of glass was crucial to the process. Once artists moved beyond the "whatever happens, happens" phase, they began focusing on how to achieve desired effects. Firing cycles, annealing, compatibility, inclusions, enamels, molds and casting—all were investigated, and great strides were made in obtaining and dispersing information.

Fusion Glassworks and Fusion Headquarters, Inc.

In 1982, Reynolds established his studio Fusion Glassworks, which focused on commission work and education. When he would teach, he saw a need for compiling all of the fusing knowledge at his disposal into a book and in 1986 published the *Fused Glass Handbook*. This comprehensive how-to book was intended to advance artists beyond the fundamentals of the kiln firing process. Now in its sixth printing, the *Handbook* goes through the fusing process step by step and offers projects that teach a different aspect of glass behavior.

Reynolds also discovered that students did not have access to the unique supplies needed for fusing. They were traveling long distances and going to many different stores to purchase tools and equipment, most of which were too expensive. In 1986, Reynolds founded Fusion Headquarters Inc., and now the company supplies kiln working artists around the world with close to 1,000 glass products. Currently, Fusing Solution, Flexi-Glass, Liquid Stringer Medium, Fuse Master Enamels, and the Fusion Sink Mold are best sellers. There are also the bread-and-butter products such as Super Spray and Clear Coat, industry standards for overglazes developed by Reynolds. Co-workers Jim Begolly and Ronnie Kay help pack and ship all of the orders.



(Top) Gil Reynolds, Green Plate, 20" diameter, 2006. The plate is decorated with gold and silver leaf inclusions and a gold and silver mica piping line made with Liquid Stringer.

(Bottom) Glass wall at Del Webb at Mirehaven, Albuquerque, New Mexico.



Gil Reynolds, Timeless Flight, fused glass, metal, and wood wall sculpture at the Allison Inn and Spa, 20' span, 2009.



Gil Reynolds, lighting fixture for the Noodle Heads Restaurant, 1990.



Gil Reynolds, lighting fixture for the Heathman Hotel, sandblasted and bent float glass, 1990.

Hot Glass Horizons

By 1993, though Reynolds had become the father of two, he was still teaching multitudes of seminars around the country. He found the time away from home challenging at best. While camping with some buddies at the beach, and maybe even after a beer or two, Reynolds was struck by the idea that it would make more sense to have his students come to him. He decided to set up a working, hands-on glass studio in a local hotel and invite students to come for a three-day conference.

The first Hot Glass Horizons (HGH) was held in Orlando, Florida, before an Art Glass Suppliers Association show. Five instructors taught 85 students. The following year, Reynolds decided to simplify the process even more by holding the conference locally in Portland. In 1996, HGH expanded and was held in Corning, New York, for the first time. HGH alternated between the two cities until 2008.

A Sense of Beauty

In 1997, Reynolds moved his home and studio to Newberg, Oregon, and added another 1,500-square-foot warehouse to the property. "Country lifestyle was very appealing. There's plenty of room, plenty of power, and it became a great laboratory for me to keep developing new products."

Over the years, Reynolds has continued his other passion, music. A member of Tommy G and the G Strings, a band of glass artist musicians who entertained Art Glass Suppliers Association conference goers beginning in 1994, Reynolds used to rent musical instruments for glass artists and business professionals to play at hotel lobby jam sessions. More recently his band, The Gil Reynolds Trio, played at venues in and around the Portland area.

Reynolds continues to take on exciting commissions in glass, including lighting fixtures for the Heathman Hotel and the Broadway Building, both in Portland. Though he also makes personal art outside of commissions, the gallery scene has never appealed to him. "I always wanted to be able to afford to collect my own work. I used the business to pay the bills and did the artwork for myself and friends. I'm dedicated to keeping my personal expression alive. I got into this because I love glass, and I have to make time to finish my own work—art that speaks to whatever I'm going through at any given time and shares my sense of beauty."

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Gil Reynolds was recently a guest on Glass Art magazine's Talking Out Your Glass podcast. Subscribe on iTunes or Stitcher to hear this and many more fascinating interviews with glass artists by visiting the "Talking Out Your Glass Podcast" link under "What's New" at www.glassartmagazine.com.



Gil Reynolds teaching middle school students for Arts in Education, 1974.



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Gil Reynolds, Angel Scape, hand forged metal elements, blue cast glass textured with native stone, and five medallions made from glass, metal, and wood. Commissioned for a custom prairie-style home in Central Oregon.