



## Joy of decorative glass

Field among the fastest growing in the industry

By BJ Katz

It's easy to see why people are drawn to decorative glass installations. Kiln-cast glass refracts light and reflects color. It changes with ambient light levels, surrounding colors and movement. Installing decorative glass is like putting architectural scale jewels into your projects. This glass is both durable and gorgeous. Long after resin, flooring, wall coverings and other building products have been replaced, decorative glass will remain. It stands the test of time. Historically, art glass has been highly prized for its beauty, strength and permanence. People will always be drawn to its visual appeal. The use of art in commercial, hospitality and residential markets will ensure the look never goes out of style.

### What's new and cool?

My company, Meltdown Glass, Chandler, Ariz., is experiencing a surge in popularity of water walls featuring cast glass. A variety of methods are used to create drama and beauty; some water walls and indoor and outdoor bars are edge-lit with dramatic light-emitting diode lighting. Cast glass in water textures and colors are sometimes substituted for actual water walls in installations where either the health or maintenance issues of water are a concern. Healthcare design is one segment of the architecture and design profession that uses water-themed art glass without water, creating "virtual aquariums."

Paints to enhance art glass also have become popular. Meltdown has been using transparent and opaque paints, both cold-applied and fused-in, for years. The range of colors, opalescent, color-shifting and metallic paints and shimmers, allows art glass to dazzle. Permanent enamel paints can be fired into the surface of art glass for high-use areas including lobbies, hotels, restaurants and other public places. Depending on the customer's desire, these pieces can be painted in single or multiple colors. The aesthetic quality and durability of the cold-applied glass paints has improved dramatically in the last few years. Meltdown Glass recently created custom windows for a tropical themed hotel restaurant with a brightly painted bird of paradise and banana leaves on cast glass.

Fun effects in cast glass, like bubble glass and color shifting dichroic coatings, and creative effects like metal leaf fused between layers of glass, are used to create artistic installations.

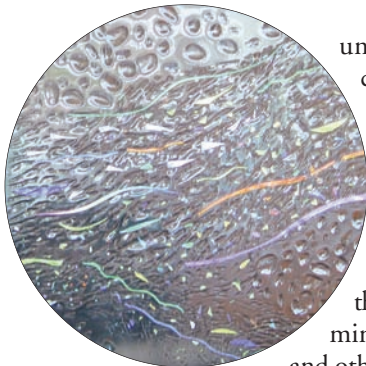
Large decals of digital images in a small number of colors can be fused permanently into plate glass. Scott Surma of DecoTherm, Amherst N.Y., describes the company's technology as digital, ceramic frit decoration for glass.

Any color imaginable and any photographic image can be applied to plate glass. Alexandra Guinan, principal of GlassKote USA, Bridgeport, Conn., that manufactures a durable color coating product for glass, says that their color system offers an



This wall at the American College Testing facility in Iowa City, Iowa, features 22 panels that are 11 feet high.

Dichroic-fused elements on cast glass form a “river” across the wall.



unlimited palette of colors and can match virtually all of the architectural color decks used by design professionals in North America. Besides colors, they have finishes that mimic metals, granite and other building materials, and have created variations that don't naturally occur. They also can take any digital image and transfer it permanently onto glass in full photographic color and quality. “It's an exciting time for decorative glass, and it's great to be at the forefront,” Guinan says.

### Versatile art glass

Interior and exterior decorative glass curtain walls are popular. Cast glass curtain walls allow the transmittance of light throughout a space while preserving privacy. Interior installations include office wall

systems and conference room walls. Cast glass can be placed in insulating glazing units and installed like plate glass in curtain walls. Meltdown Glass is getting more and more calls for the use of bent cast glass walls.

Design professionals also are making full use of art glass for doors, entrance ways, double front doors, privacy windows and walls. They're using cast glass for residential projects: sidelite and transom windows, spa privacy windows and shower enclosures. Thick cast glass countertops are considered hot, as is the

use of logos cast into glass, customized signs and representational cast glass artwork installed in homes.


Greg Thompson of GRT Glass Design, Indianapolis, says decorative glass stair treads and guard rails are popular. He uses dichroic glass—a color-shifting glass that is reflective, refractive, and shimmering—in stair treads. Decorative glass is laminated to a non-slip glass.

UltraGlas Inc., Chatsworth, Calif., has been instrumental in establishing the decorative glass industry. Jane Skeeter, founder and chief executive officer, says her company is selling a lot of cast glass flooring. Glass flooring is more durable and versatile than other flooring products, she says. Kiln-formed glass flooring has the advantage of wearing only on the texture, always preserving the gloss and shine on the remainder of the glass. It can be installed directly on a substrate, or be elevated and cantilevered. Glass flooring can be back-lit with transparent fused-in pigments or used as a tile with opaque-fused pigments. UltraGlas has used glass flooring in exterior as well as interior applications, proving that it can be used anywhere that stone or concrete flooring can be used.

Fire-rated glass formerly lacked decorative qualities. Meltdown Glass in partnership with SafiFirst, San Francisco, offers most of its decorative glass in 30-, 60-, 90- and 120-minute fire-ratings. Panels can be up to 32 square feet in area.

Cost-wise, decorative glass products run the gamut from machine-textured glass, sandblasted glass, glue-chipped and laminated shattered glass up to handmade custom designs and refined artistry in unique works of art.

I hope this issue will pique your interest to learn more about the exciting field of decorative glass and what it can do for your projects.

The ingenuity, technical developments, and artistry of many talented individuals and companies rapidly create newer techniques and combinations of design techniques. Uses for decorative glass are expanding. Call a glass artist; call several. The kaleidoscope of design possibilities is sure to amaze you. Ride the crest of the wave. 



This Egyptian texture is one of 32 textures used by Meltdown Glass.