

Beyond The Glass Ceiling

Artisan studio creates stained glass masterpieces

By Tom Walker

The next time you go on a cruise, look up: That gloriously colored stained glass dome over the ship's grand staircase might well be the work of Atlanta artist Angelique Jackson. She practices an art form that goes back to the stained glass windows of Europe's great 12th- and 13th-century Gothic cathedrals, for which she has a special affection.

"I think everyone is attracted to stained glass," she says. "There is an emotional appeal to color mixed with light. That is the major reason why churches and cathedrals used it in the past. They developed an environment where people could feel emotionally uplifted. Colored light was definitely a factor."

For the past 30 years, Angelique Jackson has been designing stained glass as design partner of Jancik Arts International, an Atlanta-headquartered company that produces stained glass interior panels, doors and, most importantly, glass domed ceilings for residences and businesses.

Her longtime friend and business partner, JoAnn Jancik, takes Jackson's designs and crafts them into finished products

art at their studio in Ocala, Fla.

Needless to say, stained glass is no ordinary art form, especially when you consider that the glass has to be carefully selected, cut to order, inserted into a metal frame and installed safely where the client wants it.

Depending on the design, a panel or dome may be intricate. Jackson cites one peacock panel that was only 2 feet by 4 feet but contained more than 15,000 pieces of glass.

And it's expensive. Prices start at \$30,000 for smaller commissions, with larger commissions beginning at about \$150,000. A major ceiling dome installation may require the effort of half a dozen workers.

In effect, however, the upscale nature of their market shields the business from the worst part of a business cycle downturn, such as the one that is apparently going on now.

"Some art work may slump in a recession, but the market for our product is old money and the wealthy," explains Jackson. "Except for one period in the late '70s, we have not been affected [by recessions]."



that may be installed on a Royal Caribbean Cruise liner, a Catholic church or the trading floor of a stock exchange.

Since they established Jancik Arts in 1978, they have converted the original two-woman studio into what another author and glass industry expert Kay Bain Weiner called a "grand-scale global business."

Jancik Arts "is one of the few remaining artisan studios in the world skilled in the design and fabrication of overhead art-glass domed ceilings," Weiner, recipient of a lifetime achievement award in 2006 in the glass art industry, wrote in *Glass Craftsman* magazine.

"These elaborate creations require an artistic mastery far beyond the norm, and demand specialized technical expertise to ensure structural soundness — especially on a cruise ship, for example, where vibrations can shake and loosen glass."

Their clients have included Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, Princess Cruises, Epcot theme park at Walt Disney World, a Mormon temple in Santo Domingo, and countless residences and businesses in the United States and Europe.

Jackson, 51, says her job "is to produce a design in a small scale and make a color rendition to show the client. Once the drawing is accomplished, I hand it to JoAnn." Jancik supervises the actual construction of stained glass panels and ceiling

As for stained glass, Jackson would be the first to disagree with some scholars' contention that the art peaked in the Middle Ages. But she admits that it does get more attention in Europe than in America.

"We just haven't developed the same level of appreciation in this country," she says, citing the "walls of glass" that can be found in some European subway stations.

Jackson grew up as a military brat, born in Pensacola, Fla., where her father was a Marine pilot. "We moved around quite a bit," she says. Her parents divorced, but after her mother remarried, her stepfather moved the family to Atlanta to stay.

"I learned to drive in Atlanta, so I consider it home," she says. She has an office in Atlanta, but does design work from her Clayton, Ga. studio.

Jackson attended the University of Georgia on a basketball scholarship, but that part of her education was cut short by the death of her younger brother. Employed as a draftsman for an engineering firm, she enrolled in what is now Georgia Perimeter College. That's where she met JoAnn Jancik, an assistant professor who was skilled at metal fabrication.

What eventually became Jancik Arts International started in 1978 from a partnership that was successful because their separate skills worked well together.

Angelique Jackson,
Design Partner of
Jancik Arts International

As usual with a start-up business, the early going was slow and frustrating. They mostly produced panel glass for doors and other in-home decorations and did their own marketing, most of it word-of-mouth.

The turning point came when a business client asked if they could create a stained glass dome over a stairwell. It was a challenge, with no established model to follow, but Jackson says they solved the puzzles and worked it out. Now, of course, domes are a major company focus.

Domes are especially difficult because of the complex curvature, she explains. They tend to be circular at the base, and the dome itself is curved, sort of like slicing through a large sphere.

“In the first decade, 90 percent of our work was residential,” says Jackson. “Now about 80 percent is commercial.”

According to Jackson, “stained glass” is something of a misnomer. That’s what the artisans of the Middle Ages produced by painting on glass. Today, the glass is already colored.

Jackson says the company is not wedded to any particular design style.

“What we do is satisfy the needs and wants of the client in terms of design directive. We do a lot of work for Princess Cruises, and they may want different designs in different parts of the same ship,” she says.

Much research goes into the design for a stained glass dome or panel, Jackson explains. The client may begin with only “a vague idea,” which is up to the artist to put into a final pattern.

Clearly, the design possibilities are infinite despite the variety of commissions the team has undertaken over the years.

Of all the stained glass she has designed, does she have a favorite? Indeed, it’s a ceiling dome aboard a Princess Cruises ship — a 30-foot-diameter depiction of crashing waves.

That one was especially meaningful, says Jackson, because it was installed in Italy over a Thanksgiving holiday. The installers and crew of the ship treated her to their own version of a Thanksgiving dinner, complete with carved-ice turkey.

Looking ahead, Jackson notes that JAI has done little work in the hospitality industry, which is why she sees it as a growth opportunity because of the new hotels being built around the world.

“We are looking at a trade show in Dubai to let them know about our glasswork,” she says. ♀



Photography by Sean Collier