

## Marking time with colourful suncatchers

*"When I judge art, I take my painting and put it next to a God made object like a tree or flower. If it clashes, it is not art."* – Marc Chagall, Russian/French painter and stained glass artist, 1887-1985.

There is little of manmade contrivance to compare with the carefully conceptualised and skillfully crafted design of a stained glass window or lamp. Carefully echoing the hues and tones of nature in its brilliant tones, it both permits the passage of filtered light and omits intrusive eyes.

It is sad therefore that of late we have rejected this form of architectural decoration almost completely. The fashion of stained glass windows was largely inspired by Tiffany. According to Alastair Duncan in the beautifully illustrated book *Tiffany Windows*, To comprehend fully Tiffany's revolutionary contribution to, and eventual monolithic influence on, the stained glass of the period one must go back 500 years to the craft's forgotten highpoint. The windows of the 14<sup>th</sup> century were comprised of mosaics of broken colour.

"Later, this concept was almost completely abandoned. Stained glass artists introduced large pieces of glass into their windows on which they painted their saint lore, brushing on liberal amounts of stain and enamel to provide the detail. The effect was weak and dull, resembling a picture on glass instead of canvas. The colour was no longer in the glass, but now on it in the form of opaque paints, which interfered with the material's translucency."

Duncan said that the advent of the First World War, plus the public's increasing disinterest in Tiffany as a 'new' phenomenon accelerated the disinterest in stained glass as an art and architectural form. Other factors aiding in the demise of the art form included the increasing disuse of rural churches due to a mass exodus of people to cities in search of employment. The wrecker's ball and bulldozers ploughed their merry way through many a work of art. As a method of destruction though, fire came out tops as a multitude of churches were razed in the frenzy to rebuild on hallowed ground.

Although it cannot be said that stained glass as an architectural or interior design feature has made a rousing return, the art form has gained some popularity over the past decade and beautiful examples of the form grace a number of private residences as well as restaurants, upmarket hotels and offices.

Now, instead of just using colour to convey the art form, artists make use of varying textures of glass, creating shape and form in striated, bumpy and convoluted planes.

## **TYPES OF GLASS**

Produced by machine, Cathedral glass is consistent in colour and thickness. A translucent glass, it comes in a variety of textures and cuts well.

Opalescent glass is generally an opaque glass although it will transmit some light. It can be solid coloured or multicoloured with the colour variation of each piece of glass being totally unique. The colour patterns will even vary from one side to the other. The glass can be smooth on one side and textured on the other.

## **TEXTURES AND FINISHES**

Smooth glass is usually machine rolled to create a flat surface on both sides. Some manufacturers produce a smooth glass that has a slight texture to it.

The following types of textured glass are usually textured on one side with the other side smooth. The textures serve to diffuse light.

- Granite glass has a raised and lowered bumpy surface somewhat like snakeskin or a relief map. Available in cathedral and opalescent glass.
- Hammered glass consists of a fairly uniform texture of bumps pressed onto the surface, which act to disperse light evenly in all directions. Available in cathedral.
- Seedy – this cathedral glass is smooth on both sides and has a quantity of small bubbles appearing like seeds. Occasional the seeds bubble on the surface, which may cause some difficulties in cutting. An even scoring pressure will relieve the problem. This glass is useful for large background areas.
- Iridescent glass is opalescent or cathedral glass, which when looked through is typically opalescent. However, when light is reflected on the surface of the glass it appears rainbow iridescent on the surface.
- Opalescent confetti glass mimics a scattered handful of coloured confetti.
- Reamy glass has heavy cords and mottled areas of extra material and deformations of the surface that give it a very old, primitive, handmade look.

- Ring mottled glass is a type of opalescent with patches or mottled areas of another colour or shade. The patches have diffused edges.