

# Entertainment

AUGUST 2, 2008

THE OKANAGAN SATURDAY

## Through rose coloured glass

Or any other colour he happens to chose

By ANDREA ZOELLNER

Special to the Okanagan Saturday

Few can put into words the beauty of a stained glass window on a sunny day. Even more impressive, however, are the artists who create such masterpieces.

Kelowna resident Andreas Mladek is a talented glass artist with more than 35 years experience. His work is featured in churches, public places and homes around the world.

Born in East Germany, his initiation to stained and leaded glass was actually a coincidence. After a few years in the army, and a brief stint in university, Mladek was planning an escape to West Germany, during the time of Soviet control in the east.

He was looking for a job in any private company, to stay under the radar of the authorities and was hired as an apprentice in a stained glass workshop. "I love to be able to do something with your hands, coming out of your creative mind," he said about the medium he fell in love with.

"I very much enjoy the fact that I build stain glass windows. I like the idea that I'm leaving my trace that will stay long after I go."

Continuing on in the trade, he started his own company in Berlin in 1979, and immigrated to Canada nine years later. "I attended a slideshow presentation with pictures of Vancouver, and I thought it was a beautiful place," he said.

He had two jobs already lined up for him, and met his wife, Debra a few years later.

Having settled in North Vancouver, running his own company Creative Glass Art, he had many contracts within the northwestern pacific, the

most notable being heavy restoration and stained glass window installation in the Holy Rosary Church in Vancouver in 2000. He recently moved to Kelowna, for its beauty and climate. His workshop space has doubled, equipping him for any type of contract.

He masters techniques such as sandblasting, etching, glass carving, and leaded glass for a variety of creations.

Mladek caters to everyone with any project.

"I serve everybody in my community. Got a window two ft. by two? I'll do it. I never say no just because I want to do the big churches," he said.

The average process to get a work of art from Mladek starts with a meeting. Builders, contractors, designers, business owners, church representatives and individuals come in and discuss the job to be done. "I show them my portfolio, and then I provide sketches with different price points, so they can choose," he explained.

"My goal is not to make an artistic statement in a doorframe. I work with the client to make a piece that will fit in with the context of the room, and meet their needs."

Mladek works with his associate, artist Kathleen Williams when asked to create a window with colour and design, although he thinks this style in losing its appeal.

"Glass art in the 21st century is less ornate and overwhelming. The new style of clear glass and textures lends itself nicely to the contemporary statement." Even though he thoroughly enjoys making original pieces, there is a great need for restoration. According to Mladek, medieval cathedrals in Europe need work on the glass because of pollution and acid rain, but the lead grid is intact. In North America however, churches were built after the inven-



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Andreas Mladek puts the finishing touches on a stained glass panel.

tion of a purer lead, which also had a shorter lifespan. "Churches built in Canada from 1895 to 1910, even 1950, will need heavy reparation and replacement of the lead grids," he said.

"There will be a very big workload of about 50 to 75 churches to work on within 25 years, and there will be but a handful of qualified people to do them." Mladek continues to do his

duty in preserving what he thinks is an important part of Canadian art.

"Canada is a young country, and stain glass is tangible heritage, it's time that people acknowledged the problem coming."

Creative Glass Art is located at 1443 Wilmont Ave., and you can visit Andreas Mladek's website at [andreasmladek.com](http://andreasmladek.com).