



The Magic of Glass

WRITTEN BY SHANNA DIPAOLLO PHOTOGRAPHED BY FORREST MACDONALD

Tucked away on Locust Street in the shadow of *The Kansas City Star* building stands a quaint studio nestled behind a wrought-iron grid. Visitors to 1605 Locust St. might find dried leaves and flowers, books about wildlife and nature, and sketches of animals and forests—the stuff of fairytales. Large panes of stained glass hang near the front windows, and smaller etched-glass items are everywhere. The effect is magical, but the detailed pieces weren't created with a wand, they were made with a sandblaster. And they aren't the work of a magician, they were made by Kathy Barnard, a Kansas City glass artist.

Glass is a common substance; we encounter it multiple times daily. The glasswork that comes from Barnard's studio, on the other hand, is uncommon. She elevates glass from the ordinary into something otherworldly that catches the light and casts a spell.

Barnard got her start at Hallmark after graduating from Kansas University with a degree in illustration and graphic design. While at Hallmark, she started experimenting with a sandblaster that one of her colleagues left in the creative workshop. She began making designs on wood, but her interests quickly turned to glass.

"I took a trip to Los Angeles, where I visited the Queen Mary, an ocean liner that featured carved glasswork," she says. "I was intrigued and wondered, 'Could I do that?'"

She returned home and started experimenting with techniques using a sandblaster, grit, and air pressure to make delicate, intricate designs on clear glass. She also learned how to create unique, detailed stained-glass windows. It wasn't long before she was commissioned to design windows and doors for Hyde Park homes that were being restored to their original splendor. Working with architects, builders, and homeowners on those early projects taught her to appreciate the creative synergy that happens when a group of people collaborate to reach a goal.

"Because of the interaction between the client, architect, and myself, I end up creating something that fulfills everyone's need," Barnard says. "It becomes more than me in my studio working my idea. I thrive on it. I know that's not how many artists like to work, but for me it's part of the evolution."

When working on a project, Barnard has learned to spend time carefully researching the subject matter and the time period during which the building was constructed. She takes into consideration the desires of

her client while remaining committed to delivering an accurate and well-researched piece. Her finished works are wonderfully detailed masterpieces that pay testament to her curious mind and artistic integrity.

"I first consider color, placement, and light. Then research shapes the piece," she says. "If someone asks me to depict an oak tree, I might research oak trees and find out that a certain kind of bush always grows under oaks. Maybe there's a specific bird that nests in oak trees and that bird eats a particular type of berry. Now the window is going to have not just an oak tree, but also a bush underneath it and a bird eating a berry. It's more detailed. I would never know those things if I hadn't done research."

A few years ago, Barnard was commissioned to design an art-glass installation for the Stillwater National Bank in Tulsa, Okla. The installation was the centerpiece for the new bank, a 40-foot-tall and 35-foot-wide window spanning three stories. The carved and etched glass is a forest and waterfall scene portraying herons, fawns, turtles, dragonflies, and many varieties of birds. Barnard researched the idea for six months before she started carving, and it took her two years to complete. The finished window is not only breathtaking, but it is also infused with Barnard's soul.

"I created the piece for the bank, and then I didn't see it again until a year and a half later. When I finally saw it, there were parts I had forgotten," she says. "I wondered, 'Who was I while I was making this?'"

Barnard's work can be seen all around Kansas City. She designed the large glass window that is the highlight of the Midland Theatre façade, towering over Main Street downtown. Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church and the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City, both in Overland Park, Kan., feature her windows and etchings. Private residences around the city, including Barnard's own home, also boast original creations.

The magical quality of Barnard's work communicates the passion and heart of someone completely dedicated to her craft. By carefully researching and patiently designing each of her pieces, Barnard is able to design works of art that are emotional, evocative, and very personal. "By the time I get done working on a piece, I feel like I'm installing one of my children into someone's building or home," she says. "I feel like I become a part of their family." 

For more information, visit www.kathybarnardstudio.com.