



## **Art You Use:**

*Architectural glass art combines beauty and utility*

By Mark Ray

*Welcome Home Kentuckiana*

October 2001

People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones—they should throw parties. Because the glass that decorates and enhances their homes must be seen to be believed and appreciated.

In the past 30 years, glass has gone far beyond its traditional roles of letting in light and decorating front doors. Through advancements in technology and technique, the uses of glass are expanding and shifting as rapidly as a white-hot vase on the end of a glassmaker's blowpipe. From walls to windows, ceilings to floors, light fixtures to furniture, artists are shattering people's traditional notions of what glass can do and are blurring the lines between art and architecture.

Ken vonRoenn, president of Louisville-based Architectural Glass Art, has played a significant role in the evolution of glass. A Yale-trained architect, vonRoenn brings to his work a special vision for the way his art can complement the architecture that surrounds it—and even the landscaping that lies beyond. In vonRoenn's work, the green hues of a garden become the foundation of a window's color palette, a glass wall illuminates a great room while offering a sense of privacy and a screen-printed shower enclosure echoes the patterns in a nearby marble wall.

For vonRoenn, a piece of art should complete the space it inhabits. "You have a responsibility to the environment," he said. "The piece should be more than decorative." So vonRoenn begins every commission by touring the space (or looking at house plans) and meeting with his clients. He studies the home's architecture, color schemes and furnishings and talks to the client about exactly how the space is used.

Next, he creates sketches—or even scale models—to help clients understand exactly what they’re buying.

It’s a process that puts clients at ease, said Roger Prizant, who first commissioned vonRoenn to create a room divider a decade ago. Initially, Prizant said, “I didn’t know him. He didn’t know me. He didn’t know what I wanted. I didn’t know what I wanted.” But over the course of a decade, the men have established a rapport, and Prizant has gone on to commission several additional vonRoenn pieces for his eastern Jefferson County home.

Like most people, Prizant didn’t realize at first the array of possibilities glass offers. “I was amazed at all the different kinds of glass there are; I was amazed by just the color choices he had. The average consumer is probably not even aware of the different types of glass and what glass can do for you,” Prizant said.

Prizant’s glass wall, for example, incorporates dichroic cast glass, which converts the light that hits it into a single wavelength. The beveled glass in his front door admits light while guaranteeing privacy. Sandblasted panels add visual interest to a banister that leads downstairs.

In the end, though, the value of works like those vonRoenn creates lie not in technology or technique but in their unique combination of beauty and utility. Architectural glass is truly art that you use.

### **Architectural Glass Art, Inc.**

Founded in 1875 and long owned by the family of renowned English glass artist Edwin Penna, Architectural Glass Art took on its current name and contemporary focus in 1991, when Ken vonRoenn purchased the company. Today, vonRoenn and his staff of about 25 artists and craftsmen handle projects for clients around the world. Major projects have included work in the Ronald Reagan National Airport, Mountain View (Calif.) City Hall and the headquarters of the International Monetary Fund. Last year, the firm created the largest architectural glass sculpture in the world, a 40-foot-tall glass crown for the First Union Building in Charlotte, N.C.

For more information on Architectural Glass Art, Inc., call 502-585-5421 or visit the company’s Web site at [www.againc.com](http://www.againc.com).

### **Glassworks**

The brainchild of glass artist Ken vonRoenn, architect Bill Weyland and real-estate appraiser Ed Allgeier, Glassworks is a \$12-million studio and residential complex now being developed at the corner of West Market and Ninth streets in downtown Louisville. In addition to being the new headquarters for Architectural Glass Art, Glassworks houses two galleries: the Marta Hewett Gallery, which features the works of national and international studio-glass artists, and the Glassworks Gallery, which offers an

extensive selection of more affordable glass objects, such as paperweights, jewelry and goblets. Three resident artists work in Glassworks' 3,000-square-foot studio, which is open to the public. The Glassworks Café is scheduled to open later this year.

Tours and glassblowing demonstrations are offered Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday noon to 5 p.m. (through November). Admission is \$6 for adults, \$2.50 for children 6-12 and \$5.00 for seniors; children 5 and under are free. For more information, call Glassworks at 502-584-4510 or visit the Glassworks Web site at [www.louisvilleglassworks.com](http://www.louisvilleglassworks.com).