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The Art Of Success: Stained Glass

By MalaMaal.com

The Art Of Success: Stained Glass

"I really didn't know much about stained glass, only what I'd seen in gift shops," said Hal Williams, owner of Eagle Mountain Stained Glass Studio in Ridgecrest, California. So it was back in 1976, with "zero artistic background" that Williams and his wife Mary decided to take a class on stained glass at the community college. At that time they were both working as paramedics in Las Vegas, Nevada, and had extra time between shifts on the job.

Soon they became good friends with their instructor who owned a stained glass studio. By the end of the year, Williams was hired on at the studio as an apprentice. He stayed there for the next two years, learning most of what he would need to know to start his own business.

Then Williams moved to Houston, Texas, and started to work in his own studio part-time while holding a full-time job in the steel business. When Williams was laid off, however, he and his wife decided to move back to their hometown Ridgecrest, California – and start a stained glass business full-time. "Mary knew people here, but I didn't know a soul," says Williams. "But since I'd had some sales experience, I just started knocking on doors.

Williams started a large studio at his home and worked out of it for quite some time. He gained more experience and training by attending various seminars and workshops around the country.

STARTING OUT SMALL

"All I had was the bare necessities – my hand tools and a bench," says Williams. Eventually, for about \$100 Williams purchased a glass grinder used to grind glass down for precision fitting. Next, he bought a diamond band saw for about \$700. This he used for tricky cutting such as 90 degree angles and cutting that cannot be done by hand – it gives the glass worker a professional cut. To round out his studio, Williams bought a glass kiln for \$2,000. The kiln is used for glass painting and fusing. It is a necessity when one is restoring the windows of old churches, which Williams has done. "Most of these tools are not necessary when just starting out, but they do save a lot of time for the professional," says Williams.

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Initially, Williams made a large purchase of glass, lead, solder and other supplies because he felt it was necessary to keep these supplies on hand and ready. Since Williams was making so many time-consuming trips to Los Angeles for his materials, he decided to purchase a month's supply at a time. A month's worth of supplies costs him between \$1,000 and \$1,500.

Other essentials for Williams office include a work table (which he built himself for under \$100) and a bench equipped with a built-in light. He uses this bench to trace patterns onto the stained glass pieces.

WHAT IT COSTS TO START

"Taking everything into consideration, if you are really creative, you can start up for about \$2,000," says Williams. "That is if you start with a home studio." When you are building the stained glass

business from scratch, one of the first things you should do is check your competition. This will tell you exactly what supplies to carry. It is obvious that if you don't have a wide pallet of colored glass to choose from, you will lose your business to the guy that does.

If you do have competition, be sure there's enough consumer interest to justify your new business. To attract customers to your shop and widen your customer base, offer to teach what you know. Williams went to the local college to offer to teach his skills in stained glass, which they cordially accepted. He is licensed and now teaches twenty-five students a semester.

He also approached local housing contractors and explained that not only could he provide excellently crafted stained glass, but he could also install it and do any necessary repairs on the job. This appealed to them because it would save a considerable amount of money. Their first contract was for stained glass work on twenty-five new houses. Williams created stained glass for front doors and side-lights. Popular colors are various hues of blue, mauve, and desert shades for floral, animal, or desert scenes.

Williams has a regular business license to do stained glass work, but if you also do the installation, work yourself you must have a contractors license.

GETTING THE JOB

"Proper bidding, I think is very important in stained glass," said Williams. "If you underbid, you are going to eat it, and if you overbid you are going to lose the job." Williams started out bidding very low so he could get the jobs and prove himself. As time went on he raised his prices, but he is still lower than his competitors. Now he is well known in his area, and gets a lot of good jobs.

Williams makes approximately \$3,000 a month on custom work and the sales of supplies, a figure which does not include his contract work and teaching. Williams also has a gift shop in his downtown studio. "To make a decent wage you have to charge a decent price," says Williams.

SPREADING THE WORD

Although he gets excellent exposure at his street–front location.. Williams still advertises. He has tried radio and newspapers, but finds that he gets the best results from the local swap sheet. He also carries a large ad in the Yellow Pages. Word of mouth has also been a very important advertising factor.

"We listen to what the customer wants, show him what we can do, and do the job right," says Williams. The Williams may expand even further someday, if they ever get the time, but right now their prosperous stained glass studio is keeping them very busy.

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How To Use Stained Glass As A Decoration

By Gray Rollins

Stained glass has been used to decorate and enhance buildings for centuries. The breathtaking stained glass windows in cathedrals attract thousands of tourists each year. With the popularity of stained glass windows, it is no surprise that people began to create other things from stained glass. Today, you can find many products made with stained glass, from lamps to mirrors. However, how can you decorate with stained glass? There are several things you can do to fit stained glass into your home.

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First, you may want to consider putting stained glass in your windows. After all, the sunlight shining through a window is the reason that stained glass looks so beautiful. If you don't have room for a stained glass window in your budget, look for a sun catcher or a faux window that is designed to hang in front of your real window.

Of course, if you don't have natural light, you can still enjoy the beauty of stained glass with an accent lamp that has a stained glass shade. When the lamp is on, the light bulb will shine through the shade, creating an effect almost as beautiful as natural light shining through a stained glass window. Accent lamps work best as secondary lighting, since they usually require low wattage bulbs. Tuck a lamp into a dark corner to provide a bit of color and enough lighting for someone to sit and read. You can also use these lamps on sofa tables, night stands, or desks.

Chandeliers are another great way to enjoy stained glass in the home. You can place a chandelier in the traditional spot over the center of the dining room table, but why not have a little fun with your decorating? Try placing a stained glass chandelier in your hallway to give your entryway more impact or in your sunroom to add a touch of whimsy.

Next, you may want to add a stained glass mirror to your bathroom. You can find mirrors with a traditional stained glass design around the edges or mirrors with fun themes, such as beach scenes or wild animals.

Finally, you can create your own faux stained glass on any glass or mirrored surface. You can really dress up your glass fronted cabinets, the panes of glass in your front door, or the top of your glass coffee table with stained glass paint. Simply trace the pattern you want with black piping and then fill in with these colorful, see through paints.

Gray Rollins is a featured writer for BlueStainedGlass. To learn more about stained glass, visit us at

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