

A DAY NOT WASTED

by Jim Piercey



If you're seeking to view great examples of contemporary German stained glass, Nurnberg (Nuremberg) is not one of the first cities you might consider. However, recently, I found myself there with pretty much a day to kill (which is altogether a rare and not that bad a situation in which to find yourself!). Through Stephan Lamberts and Manfred Mislik at Lamberts Glasshutte, Derix Studios had provided me with a short list of cities in which to find some of the glass that they had fabricated. Their only listing in Nurnberg was one of Herman Bessel's, whom they listed as the artist for an installation at the Klinikum Nurnberg Sud. I was interested in trying to see this piece, as I had heard of Herr Bessel, but was not familiar with his work.

View of one side as seen from corridor. Note the panels beside the door angle in. You can't see the light sources. The canopy, doors, information stand in front of doors and columns that support canopy are interesting architectural features.

So, being the adventurer that I am, I could not think of a more interesting way to spend the day than by trying to track down this installation in a city with which I was totally unfamiliar. After consulting a map located in my hotel (in the west part of the city), I determined that the hospital location was on Breslauer Strasse in the southeast portion of the city.

But knowing the location and getting there are two different things, especially if one *nicht spreche Deutsche!* Now I am not the American tourist who thinks that today all Europeans speak English, but I figure, "How difficult can navigating this city be?"

Nurnberg is typical of most European cities, exhibiting the dichotomy of the medieval and the very modern, creating an interesting juxtaposition of art, architecture and culture. Unlike many American cities, the transportation system is superb, including trains, subways, busses and Mercedes taxis. It's pretty cool to ride around in a Mercedes taxi and let someone else do the navigation, but hey, *where's the adventure in that?*

Plus, I was pretty much determined to attempt to manage my trip via public transportation. Being an advocate that this system be better utilized in the US, I want-

ed to see if it worked as well in Nurnberg as other cities that I have tried. Another good reason to use public transportation is that it is cheaper, and the dollar really stinks right now. So in the sense of good economic and environmental stewardship, public transportation was for me.

To begin with, I had to find the subway (“*Uterbahn*”) in the town where I was beginning my adventure, Furth (pronounced Firt). Furth is a suburb on the west side of Nurnberg. Certainly, it would be good if you knew how to say, “Where is the subway?” in German and also be able to ask it politely (nice gets you closer to where you want to be!). So you end up with something that sounds kind of like “*Bitte, vo ist die unterbahn*”?

The typical assumption of most Americans is that most Europeans speak English. This is not entirely correct. Other than knowing the names of certain types of Lamberts glass, my German is pretty much based on the “Hogan’s Heroes” curriculum and the “Katzenjammer Kids” (some of you may not be familiar with the latter – if not, it is worth a Google search; I think that they made up words that sound kind of German/Yiddish/English). I know I am straying from my describing my adventure right now, but German is a pretty cool language. I once heard that it was the root of more English words than the Romance languages, as one would initially think – maybe I will research this in greater depth later. But it is amazing how logical some of the terms are. I mean, everyone knows what the “*autobahn*” is, right? And “*unter*” sounds a lot like “under,” right? The problem with a lot of languages is that you learn the word once, then if you don’t use it quite a few times, you tend to forget it (especially if it is a lot different than the English equivalent). But German often is so logical that, once you learn a word, you can remember it more easily.

Walking from the hotel generally toward the center of Furth, I would ask most anyone I saw for directions, using

my best German *Bitte, Vo is die Uterbahn?* (I was having fun as I was using my best German accent, you know, kind of Colonel Klinkish!) Of course, the people I asked were trying to be very polite and helpful, so they at least acted as

Striations on antique can be enhanced with a painting technique called “wischen” in which a wash of paint is applied and lightly removed from the higher areas of the glass, but leaving it down in the striations; this adds greatly to the texture of the glass when seen in the finished window.

if they understood my question. It is a little frustrating when you speak to some of them; they look at you, smile, nod, yet have not one clue what you are saying. Now, I have found that even if you are carrying a great phrase book, it does very little good if the response to your question is *NOT EXACTLY* what is printed as the response in the phrase book! This also applies to any tapes that you may have used to learn another language!

So we find ourselves in a conundrum. Often it is an interesting exercise to put yourself in another’s shoes. Think of the situation in reverse – if a foreigner approaches you (which often happens if

you live in a tourist destination like Orlando). Say you are in the local Circle-K for a cup of coffee. Someone approaches you and attempts to ask in a strained and heavily accented English “How do I get to the Magic Kingdom?” Chances are pretty good that my response will not be the same as the man’s behind the counter, and we most likely are not going to use words that these visitors have studied in their phrase book! I mean phrase books do dialogues like “Good morning. How are you?” How many people are going to use the phrase book’s exact response of “Good morning. Very well, thank you”? I think the problem is that when visitors ask questions that they learned in their Berlitz travel guides, the natives just don’t understand that in all kindness, they should use the exact same response that is in the phrase book or on the tape that the visitor studied.

I digress, but the moral of this little aside is when we are traveling abroad, we should remember that things are going to be different. I mean, for most of us, that’s why we are there — to experience different cultures — right? Of course, language difficulties are part of the adventure. But seriously, if all you wanted to see was people wearing *lederhosen* and be able to drink German beer, but did not want any experience that would stretch you and cause you to grow, then you should just visit the German pavilion at Epcot!

The people I asked for directions all gave me what I am sure were very accurate directions, but the ongoing problem was that I could not understand their answers! Most often our conversation would end with a kind but a little frustrated look from them (which I totally deserved) and then their pointing off in some general direction. But pointing is good! Forgetting that I was in Germany, of course I was looking for the usual “M” sign signifying a station for the subway, Metro, etc. – but I could only find signs that had a “U.” Duh! It took me a while to I remember I was in Germany.



Detail of painting to extend leads and a good example of the “wischen” technique.

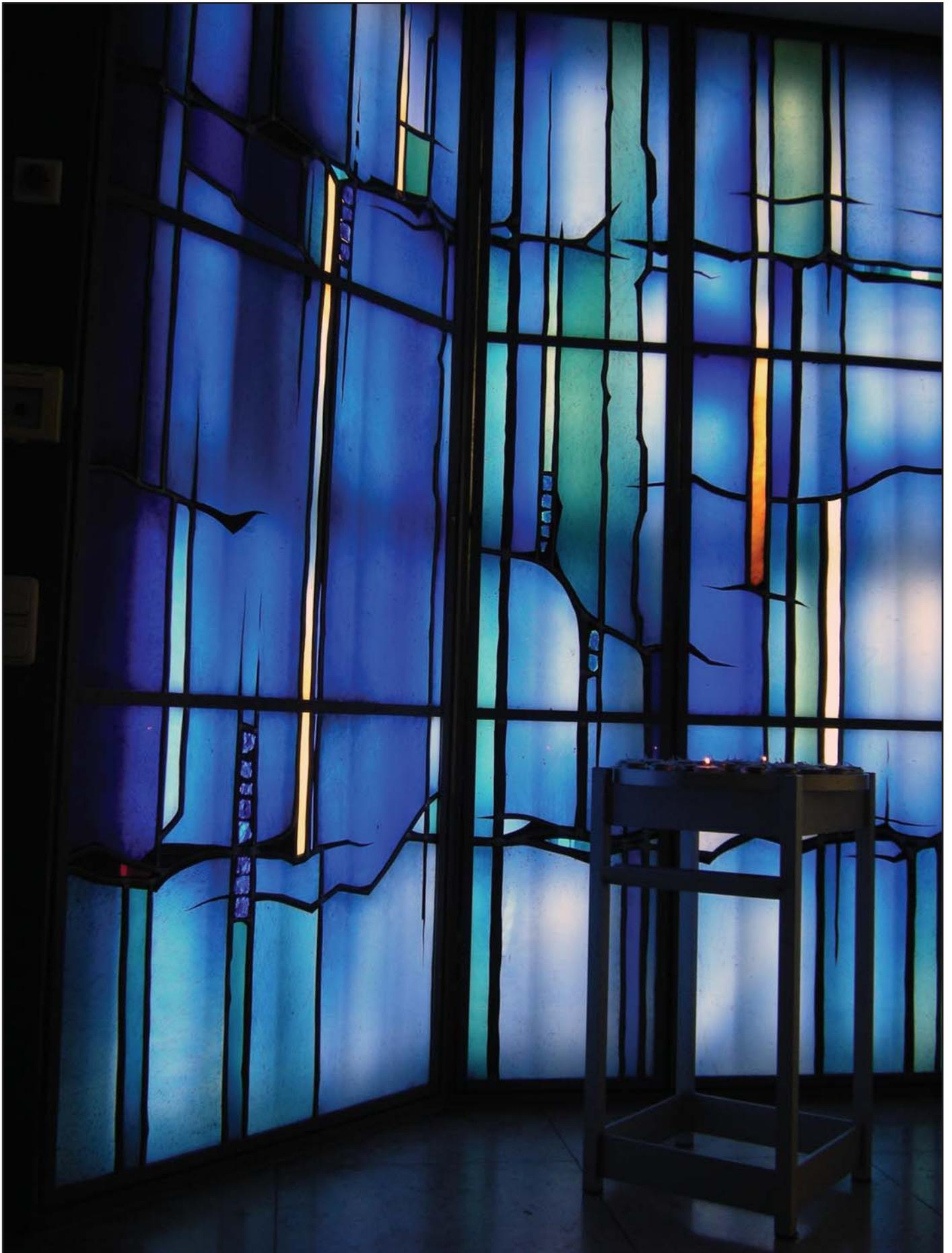


Detail of paint used as lead extensions; this installation utilizes many techniques, including slab, faceted, laminated, painted and other details.



Reflected light view. Note the painted areas that serve as the lead extensions as well as the “wischen” technique.

Opposite page: Interior view as a backdrop for the votive candle stand. Note the use of paint to extend the lead lines, the complementary colors and the use of slab glass that has been faceted, then laminated, to a base glass before glazing into the panel. Note the great use of the peaceful blue opaks contrasted by the more active orange and limes. The slab glass chunks are faceted, then laminated, to a base glass, then leaded into the panel. They provide a very interesting detail feature.



So getting around in Germany is pretty easy if you speak German and not really too bad even if you don't. If you can read a subway chart, map, etc., then you're a little okay. But if you are geographically challenged, like a particular SGAA friend of ours is, you may have problems. One spring when she accompanied my wife and me on a trip to Italy, she asked me how to pack. I asked her that since it was late spring here what season did she think it would be over there and she very confidently said "Oh, yeah. It's on the other side of the Atlantic, so it must be fall!" But I digress into another adventure.

Interestingly, there is also another side story that should accompany this article, since the article is basically about using a great deal of public transportation to see a little glass art — it deals with observing some of our Board Members at this Winter Conference in Oakland and watching them try to purchase a BART ticket. That was hilarious, and the machine was even giving instructions in English! Alas, that is another story and is much better told than written about!

Back to Bavaria — finally I find the *Uterbahn*. Most train stations have ticket kiosks that have touch-sensitive screens for buying your tickets. On the screens, there is even a British flag providing for selections to be executed in English, so I'm thinking that this is going to be "not so bad!" But would you believe it? Almost nothing in Germany is ever broken, except a touch screen when you want it to work in English! Words like *ansfart* (departure) make me laugh a little each time I see them. When you travel, you see this term a lot; but, again, if you think about it, it sounds kind of like its English equivalent. But sometimes words like that are a little hard to extrapolate.

For a few minutes, I stood in front of the kiosk with a bewildered look on my face (you know... my default expression). The machine would not talk to me in English, and the directions are way too

complicated for my "Hogan's Heroes" German. Fortunately, as I mentioned, I had the day to kill so I could take my time to attempt to derive a solution for the immediate problem. (You know, life is a series of problems for which we seek solutions). I soon gave up!

Then I spied this little "*frau*" lady coming to the kiosk — it was a good thing that she was short because I was able to stare over her shoulder to watch what she was doing — it was not good because she did her transaction so quickly (you know, like when you ask a computer wizard to fix something on your computer, and he does it so fast you have no idea what he did!) I do think that she was also getting a little paranoid with me looking over her shoulder so closely.

From the map in the kiosk, I had determined that I could take the subway to a location near my destination, the Klinikum, and then maybe walk the rest of the way. After all, I wanted to see some of the town, and I knew generally where I wanted to go.

The short lady got her ticket and left but then another lady approached the kiosk. She looked friendly, so I asked if she spoke English, she said yes (but then I really didn't understand a single thing she said afterwards, so back to the Katzaenjammer Kid talk along with many hand gestures). She agreed to buy my ticket for me to the *Hauptbahnhof* (the main train station) in Nurnberg. So I gave her a 10E note (which was equal to about \$15-16) and she grabbed it out of my hand and took off running, and, before I could react she had already lost herself in the crowd!

Just kidding. I had planned on really beginning my journey from the Hbf (you see this a lot if you travel by train in Germany), from where I planned on taking the bus to the Klinikum. But again, this lady also made the computer transaction so quickly I didn't have time to stop her from buying an all-day subway pass—something I figured I didn't need. She

thought it was a good deal because I go to Nurnberg, back to Furth, then back, etc. So, I thanked her (*danke, danke, danke*) and now, at least I had a ticket so my adventure could continue. (I got some change back, maybe \$5.)

While waiting for the train, I saw on the subway route diagram that the train I was going to take from Furth (on the west side of Nurnberg) also continued to the southeast part of town, very close to the Klinikum, my eventual destination. I was thinking that this was *una buona fortuna* because on the map, it did not look like a long walk from the station to the clinic. It was a beautiful but very, very cold day. But I'm reasoning that, since I had been cooped up in planes, trains, automobiles, I should try a bus, and then walk a lot.

So, another lesson for travelers: be sure to know the scale of the map you are using. It turns out that it would have been a "leettle longer walk" than I anticipated. I asked a lady at the bus station how far away the Klinikum was (luckily she spoke excellent English). She seemed to think that might be a little far to walk, and suggested that I could take a bus — "...maybe bus #56?"

Since the trains, subways and busses all support each other, the main terminals have stations for all three (as well as stands for the ubiquitous Mercedes taxis). This complex was connected to a really nice shopping center (interestingly, this whole complex was in a semi-residential area and, from the exterior, was visually so low-key; it was not obtrusive at all).

Again I was lucky. I looked up and there, sitting in the bay was bus #56. But now I had to negotiate buying a bus ticket. While pondering this predicament (and really things were going so well that by now I was trying to think and reason in German!), I remembered the all-day subway ticket — maybe it was good for busses also? So I got on the bus, showed the driver my ticket and that was it! (This reminds me of another story from the Winter Conference, when all the Board Members

finally left the BART and got on the city bus no one had the right cash; we (including me) were trying to cram cash that would not fit into the machine on the bus where you pay, which is located right beside the driver who, as it turns out, could not care less if you paid to ride the bus or not! I mean, there were about 16 of us trying to pay; the machine would not take our cash, and we kept trying to cram it in, holding up the line. We were making a lot of people get really upset and making the driver late on his schedule because he could not get started until we were at least all on board. Finally, we just left the money lying on the machine; it fell on the floor, and this semi-street person and probably left-over Haight-Asbury hippie type coming on board behind us saw the money on the floor, said “cool,” and picked it all up! At least that is the way I remember it happening. What a funny scene; I hope someone videoed it!

Back to Germany: So, not knowing precisely which bus stop was the one I wanted (and since I was in Germany, of course, I was trying to be precise!), I asked the driver “Klinikum?” He nodded yes as if he understood my German, and knew where I wanted to go. So at the first stop, I asked the driver “Klinikum?” (I liked saying that word! And I surely did not want to stay on the bus past my destination). He said “Nein,” and motioned for me to keep my seat. After going through this exercise a couple of more times I thought the driver was taking me “for a ride,” and that I would have to get off the bus and walk a distance, but soon we pulled up right in front of the clinic! Now that was fortunate!

The hospital looked to be fairly new. Cool, interesting architecture; a techie-type design, not large but well thought out and with pleasant landscaping, even in the middle of February. I can imagine that during the spring and summer, the grounds are very nice.

I went in and found an information desk with a young lady who did speak

English quite well, as a matter of fact. I asked for directions to the chapel, assuming that would be the location of this stained glass window, which was the goal of this day’s adventure. The lady directed me to the right hallway, so I went that way, and I looked and looked but found no chapel. I walked through some double doors, and I was right on a patient floor with open doors into patient rooms. I thought about going into one of the rooms and up to one of the patient beds and beginning a discussion in English, to see if the patient would wonder if he had suffered a case of glossopharyngelia during the night.

Finally I noticed the lady, who had come out from behind her information desk to wave me back to her. I went back to see what she wanted, and she informed me that the chapel was in the other direction – you know, the *OTHER* right! I must explain, this was not a language thing or even a left/right thing; it was her first day working at the hospital, so she didn’t really know where the chapel was!

In the main waiting room, just across from the information desk was a large skylight. It was nice. It used good glass in a moderately interesting design but surely not great enough to justify my day’s adventure so far. But then I looked left and something caught my eye. By now, I really am doing all my intrapersonal communications in broken German: “*Ach, dies must beie der kapelle*”). Approaching the chapel, I started thinking, “. . . *verry interesting* . . .” complete with a Col. Klink accent.

The chapel wall facing the hallway was, I guess, 20’ on either side of the entryway, and eight to nine feet high. Unfortunately, I did not pack my tape measure for this trip, but it would not have been much help; all of my tapes are in feet/inches and I’m almost sure the stained glass was built in meters!

From the hallway, at first glance the design seems fairly simple — mostly white and shades of light greens and

blues. It is obvious that Herr Bessel and Derix were in a groove when you notice, on close examination, how subtle the actual color selections were. This project is an excellent application of opak glass.

The panels were all backlit by some light source, and I could not tell if there was a supplementary diffusing material installed behind the panels. But the light sources were definitely not distracting, as is often the case with back-lighted stained glass windows (what a paradox; stained glass windows that are not actually used as windows.)

In addition, the fabrication by Derix was very well done — very nice leading with some of the design element details like lead extensions, etc. having been painted.

So I’m thinking, “*gutte design, gutte colors... ya, dies is pretty cool.*” But my socks weren’t blown off by it. Then I went inside the chapel; I wish I had worn garters, because I almost lost my boots! What a surprise! I usually try to keep up with contemporary installations as well as I can, but either this one slipped past me or has not been published to any great extent. (By the way – isn’t it time for another good book on contemporary glass to be published? Somebody, get busy!)

So, by now, I’m thinking that I need to learn more about Herbert Bessel and need to see more of his work. This installation is perfectly suited for the setting, a hospital chapel. The line work and the color and glass selections help create an environment to which many hospital chapel windows aspire: meditative, inspirational, tranquil, with a sense of peace. I assume that the hospital is multi-denominational, although I think the presence of a tabernacle means that there is a pretty strong Catholic influence.

Of course, I was interested in the art but, just as importantly, in the technical aspects of this installation. Apparently a framework was built that houses the lighting source. Then it was glazed on both sides, thus defining the exterior as well as

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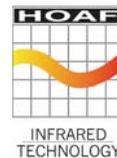
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the interior wall of the chapel. One light source illuminates both the exterior and interior glass walls. The exterior glass is mostly white and lighter shades. But the interior walls feature some of the richest shades of blue opak glass I have ever seen. The glass selection is superb. The subtle gradations of shading that occur in only certain types of flashed and opak glass were very well integrated into the window. Not having seen the design but only the installed window, I can only assume that Bessel had a great time at Derix studio in the selecting and cutting of the glass.

In the interior space, using the beautiful blues and blue-greens as a field, Bessel incorporated small detail areas of contrasting and complementary color. Again, these were excellent selections. Other details included pieces of what appeared to be dalle glass squares laminated onto a base glass, then leaded into the panel.

Most of the lead continuations (where what appears to be a lead line that comes to a point) are painted, but the detail that appealed to me the most was the “*wischen*” technique. As we all well know, antiques, especially German antiques, generally have a great striation-type texture. On tints and on almost all opak/opals, these striations can be enhanced by a painting technique called “*wischen*” in which a wash of paint is applied to an antique glass that has heavy striations. After application, a tool (or the palm of the hand) is lightly dragged across the surface, removing the paint from the higher areas of the glass but still leaving it down in the deep grooves and striations. In the completed window, this technique adds greatly to the texture of the glass.

Surely this window did not need paint, but the areas of the window and the degree in which it was utilized only enhanced the beauty of the glass.

When I had completed my viewing of Bessel’s window, I reversed my route

to end up in the *Hauptbahnhof*. Again, this is a big place, but when you leave through the main entrance, the city is right in front of you. If you can negotiate crossing the busy street (I found later that there was a pedestrian way across), you come into the old pedestrian part of town containing the old castle. This was pretty cool, but my departure time did not allow visiting it because I still wanted to see the Cathedral. It is situated right in the middle of town, hard to miss because of its size.

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There was a chance that it might be warmer inside, but alas, it was actually colder. I can only imagine going to Mass with no chairs or pews, and having to stand in the cold during a long and painful homily. But, the windows there were definitely worth seeing. It is always cool to see in person windows that you have seen published before. I decided to sneak a couple of pictures, without flash, of course, because who wants to take pictures of stained glass with a flash? After about four shots, I was accosted by this security guard – *Nicht photos!!* Unfortunately, the shots I was able to get off were a little blurred, but you can see some in the windows in Laurence Lee’s book, *Stained Glass*.

Going back outside in the cold (but sunny day) seemed like a workable option. As I was strolling back to the train station, I noticed an old church that had apparently been recently remodeled. At the entry, there is a sign that gave the name as St. Klara Kerche. It was built in 1273! I had passed it on my way into the cathedral but opted to see later if I had time. Of course since I couldn’t take any more photos in the cathedral, I had time, so I went in.

The stained glass in the nave looked like a fairly new installation. The windows were clear rondels with a few very light tints placed at random. But the beauty of these windows was in their simplicity. They provided excellent ambient light with which the viewer could appreciate the beautiful and simple worship space. You know, at times we could all benefit if we practiced the adage of “Less Is More” (incidentally, a term coined by Mies van der Rohe – also a German!).

What was *very* impressive about this chapel was the shrine that you pass through as you enter. It is hard to describe but it looked like ¾" glass, apparently water-jet cut, edges polished and stacked 10-12 ft. high, alternating with solid opaque material, maybe plastic, Corian, or something similar. Of course, the thickness of this glass provided an indescribable green glow in the shrine. When the votive candles are seen from the opposite side, you might be able to imagine what 50-60 of these flames would look like when viewed through some very thick pieces of glass.

As there were no flat planes in the entire surface, the whole installation undulated as if you were in a womb – at least as I remember it. It would be interesting to talk to the designer, fabricator and installer to learn how this sculptural glass piece was put together. Surely, it has a tremendous amount of weight.

One of the many things that I appreciate about the Europeans’ aesthetic in glass as well as in other artistic forms is

The skylight located just inside the main entry to the hospital. The chapel is located down the hallway to the left. The acrylic cube serves as a multi-refractive lens, providing some very interesting images of the skylight as the viewer moves around it. It must be very heavy!

that they have a great ability to juxtapose the old and new. A good example of this can be seen in Schaffrath's very cutting-edge cloister windows placed in Aachen's gothic cathedral. If the artist's work is sensitive to the architectural forms, colors, textures and other elements, then this approach can work. So, at St. Klara, this very contemporary architectural glass sculpture placed in its gothic setting truly works.

Unfortunately, because of the low light levels, and me without a tripod, the photos are not as crisp as I would like, but they at least give some idea of what is there.

I might not make a special trip to Nurnberg to see St. Catherine or Bessel's work in the Klinikum, but if you find yourself there in the same situation I was in, then surely, you should make the effort to see both. Special thanks to Robert Jayson, Stephan Lamberts, and Manfred Mislík for their assistance on this trip. Also, I would like to thank all the patient and friendly Nurnbergers for their assistance in helping me find my way. It was a great day; it was a great experience. I have always said it is a wasted day if you don't learn something new. The day in Nurnberg allowed me to credit my account for some of those less-than-optimal days.

For further information on Herbert Bessel, visit www.fvke.de/ausstellungen/bessel.

