

RESPECT THE GLASS: *It's Key to Working in Restoration*

by John Watts

During the course of my years in stained glass, I found that an important aspect of our work is in the respect for the stained glass itself. Every window — whether in a home, church, or office setting — was built by a craftsman for that individual setting and purpose.

Although we all covet to add working on windows by Tiffany, LaFarge, LeCompte and a myriad of other famous studios to our list of accomplishments, we should not lose sight of the fact that those windows were created for the same reason and settings as all the stained glass we, as restoration studios, are called to work on. Following the *Standards and Guidelines* for restoration, set by our accrediting organization, is an integral part of the process.

As we (Glass Heritage, llc) have been blessed with much work, we believe the reason for our success is in the attitude of caring for the glass. We consider ourselves the caretakers of the glass. Each window is as important to us as the major signature windows. Clients have a need to know their windows are of value and are being treated with the same stringent standards and values. A catalogue window from a 1900s studio or a private studio window has as much value to the owner as a Tiffany would. Giving the windows and their owner the same respect they deserve is an important component of success.

Each client with a restoration project has a window that represents an important aspect of their life and environment. Churches rely on their windows for inspiration; businesses rely on theirs for identification and communication. Each has an important significance to its owner.

Stained glass has long been represented as a gift from God; its vivid colors and patterns are inspirational. Medievalists believed that each piece brought with it a blessing from above. Each piece deserves

the same respect today. Each client deserves the same respect.

Many times we get caught up in the quest for work. We neglect to understand that our work on someone else's glass is meaningful. Our clients want to believe that theirs is the most important project we have ever worked on... because to them, it is. We, as a studio, have a need to constantly understand the importance of every window we touch, regardless of whose name appears on it. Each of the works we restore (or design, for that matter) is a Tiffany to its owner. Studios would all benefit from a "we get it" attitude when assisting their clients.

Knowing that their windows are in the hands of a studio that understands the importance of the work and its value to the owner can lead to a better trust between the studio and its clients. In this day, quality, service, and price are equally valuable. Owners do not want to feel that their windows are just another job for the studio. They want to know that their work is the most important job you have ever worked on, and, for a majority of us, it is. Clients are looking to deal with people who understand the value that their stained glass has to them. Studios should be able to communicate with their clients and support the value of the project.

A contact person who is aware of what will happen to the glass in the studio and has the ability to deal with the questions and concerns of each client is an invaluable asset. A hands-on approach to all clients is a necessity to the success of any studio, whether it be the owner, partner, or sales rep. The days of just being able to deal with an established studio only because of their name are waning. Clients want the one-on-one contact with someone who is knowledgeable, understands the value and importance of the work being performed on their windows,

and values the standards and guidelines under which the work is being done.

Each piece we, the studios, deal with should be treated as though it is a one-of-a-kind, high-profile, signature piece. Our studios need to be open and honest in their assessments and pricing. Getting that "one big job" is great, but all the smaller jobs are equally important, and there are always more of those than the "big score." We need to constantly understand that our attention to detail and sensitivity to the work itself are equally important, regardless of who did the original work or the size of the job. Sometimes we tend to lose sight of that and focus on just getting the next job on the bench. Caring for the client and keeping them informed should be the norm. We need to keep them informed and let them know we care about their glass as if it were our own.

It is possible to bid and win many projects solely on the fact that we, the studio owners, "get it." The value of the glass, or its signature, should have no bearing on the quality of our work or its price. Each piece needs the respect of the studio. We shouldn't "low ball" our price. We shouldn't price based on whose signature is on the glass. We should price fairly, maintain a pure respect for the glass, and treat it with equal standards. We need to communicate that respect in everything we do. Constantly following the SGAA's stringent guidelines on restoration should be the benchmark for quality and proper work in our studios, without compromise.

While price will always be a factor, personalized service and respect for the glass is a mainstay of our industry. Quality craftsmanship, fair pricing, unwavering dedication to our *Standards and Guidelines*, and an unbiased respect for the glass are of paramount importance to the client.

