

RESURRECTION: A STAINED GLASS REREDOS

St. Albert the Great Catholic Church

by Jeff Smith



Austin, Texas

First, a confession: In San Jose in 1980, about the time of his meteoric rise to “household-worlddom,” glass impresario Dale Chihuly shared his formula for success in the arts. It was simple, really. Just three basic points.

Point Number 1: Photography.

Point Number 2: Photography.

Point Number 3: PHOTOGRAPHY!!!

I’m probably not the only one who’s neglected this sage and obvious advice at the conclusion of a successful installation. There is a whole host of reasons and excuses: the weather wasn’t cooperating... the liturgical furnishings hadn’t been installed yet... you’d been so focussed on completing the project that you forgot cameras and/or neglect-

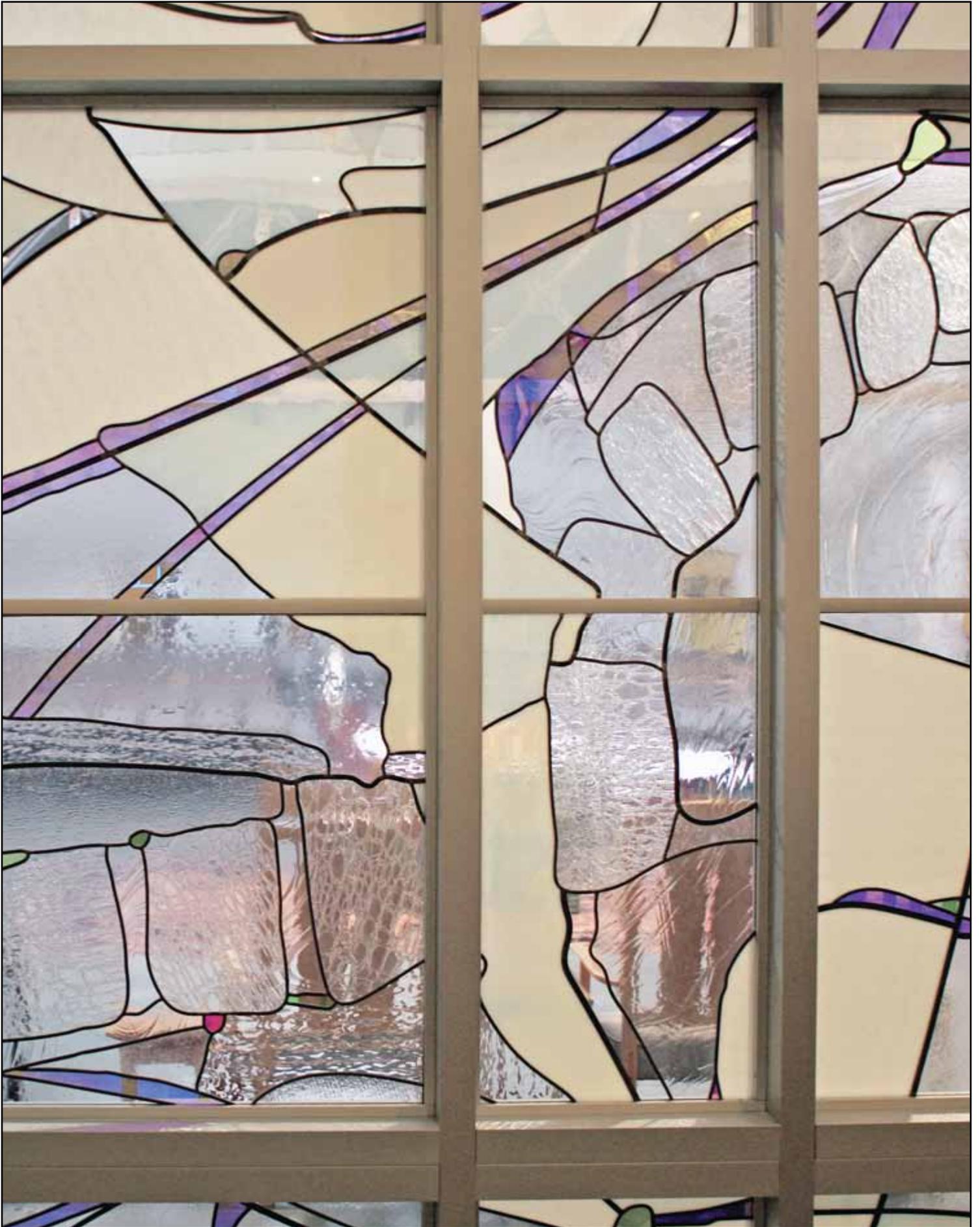
ed to line up a photographer... maybe the ideal sun angle was months away. Or maybe your art was still wrapped in a chaotic job site and you promised yourself you’d deal with it later.

Such a lapse was the case with me at St. Albert. Except for a couple of snapshots taken literally over my shoulder as we packed up and left Austin, *Resurrection* was relegated to mind’s eye until early this year, when I got around to having it photographed. (Hopefully you didn’t notice one of those murky mugshots buried in an earlier *The Stained Glass Quarterly* article.)

Upon entering the nave for the first time since *Resurrection’s* installation, I was pleased to discover that neither those hasty photos nor my mind’s eye did the stained glass justice. Maybe

you’ll agree. Now back to the story: This veil-like stained glass reredos separates a soaring, bright sanctuary from a chapel hidden in plain sight behind the altar. The warm, open, yet contemplative worship space at St. Albert the Great is rendered in native stone, exposed wood beams, slate tile, natural light and antiphonal seating. *Resurrection* creates a sense of spatial flow between nave and Blessed Sacrament Chapel while preserving privacy and separation between. Access into the chapel is through doors tucked in the recessed space between the free-standing stained glass and the stone wall behind.

Resurrection’s nearly achromatic palette remains alive whether viewed from Nave or Chapel, day or night. Seen





This and opposite page: Resurrection reredos, views from the nave.

in transmitted light from inside the chapel, white opal glasses become amber-tinged echoes of surrounding wood and stone. Front-lighting (common in the nave during the day) reveals the reflectivity of the opals. Textured clears provide sparkling, veil-like

glimpses into the chapel. The one exception to an otherwise achromatic palette are dichroic glass accents that stream down from above connoting God's presence. (Or is it prayers and supplications flowing upward?) Depending on point of view, the



dichroic accents shift from golden mirror to magenta, blue, or green.

Resurrection is the thematic culmination of the jewel-like fourteen *Stations of the Cross* windows located along the sides of the nave (the 14th

Station depicts the laying of the body of Christ into the tomb). *Resurrection* was inspired by the butterfly, an early Christian symbol of resurrection. In its lower sections, a “landscape” of clear, textured glass represents the empty





tomb as chrysalis or cocoon underscoring our fleeting time on Earth. Emerging upwards is a diaphanous butterfly of wispy opal and other white glasses. This sparkling glass backdrop for the Mass changes dramatically as one moves from bright front-lighting in the nave into quieter, amber-tinted backlighting in the Chapel.

This installation has received an International Design Arts award from the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art & Architecture and an American Institute of Architects Artist Citation award from the American Institute of Architects/Texas Society of Architects.

Dimensions: 24.3' w. by 24' h.

Materials: German, French & Domestic Mouthblown Glass; Machine- and Hand-rolled Obscure Glass; Dichroic Glass; Lead; Solder.

Architect: Negrete & Kolar Architects, Austin, TX; Roger Kolar, AIA

Liturgical Design Consultant: Dekker/Perich/Sabatini, Albuquerque, NM; Robert D. Habiger, AIA

Jeff Smith discovered stained glass at Louisiana State University with Paul Dufour. He also studied with Ludwig Schaffrath and Johannes Schreiter. In 1977, he founded Architectural Stained Glass, Inc. in Dallas. Smith's accolades include awards from the American Institute of Architects, the International Forum on Religion, Art & Architecture, and the Corning Museum of Glass. In 2001, Smith escaped to the Davis Mountains of west Texas. For an overview, please visit www.archstglass-inc.com.

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Resurrection reredos, Chapel view.