

You've got to love it

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Stained glass is a profession and a passion for artist Lisa Maywood

By Michael Good

Lisa Maywood is a little crazy about glass. She's been obsessed with it since high school, although there were a few years there when she was trying to pretend she wasn't.

"I started when I was 15 years old," she says. "It was an elective at my local high school in the Pasadena area... I just fell in love with it."

Maywood went to school at USC, studied art, then moved to Boston and found work in advertising. She comes from, in her words, "a family of doctors." Her brothers and father are physicians, although her mother was working in fashion design before getting married and starting a family. So there was some expectation that she would pursue the life of a professional, not an artist.

"I had been out of school, working, for six years in advertising. And it was really hustle-bustle and a lot of stress. So I'm at work, in Boston, in my cubicle, on the Internet, and I typed in 'stained glass'... that was 1999. I was looking for an adult education class, something for fun."

Maywood is momentarily distracted by a hummingbird outside her Mission Hills studio, which leads to an aside about the esthetic advantages of her neighbor's unkempt yard, which if you squint almost looks like a meadow.

"And so I typed in stained glass. And this school popped up. I thought, no way, oh my gosh, this is a dream come true." After some consideration, she decided, "Why not? Other people have done crazier things before. For vacation, I usually went home to California to be with my family. And I told my dad, 'Hey, I'm going to Switzerland. I need to check something out.' So it was a ten-hour flight, and then two hours on the train, and I get to this small town and I know nobody. And so I telephoned my dad, and he said, 'So, do you think you can handle it?' And I said, 'Absolutely not. But I'm determined to do this anyway.'"

After a week in Switzerland, Maywood returned home, quit her job, brushed up on her French and enrolled in the school, which is called Ecole de Vitrail et de Creation. For the next three years she went through a traditional European-style education and apprenticeship in glass. She learned to work in the style of the masters of the Middle Ages and repair the windows they built. She learned not only how to cut glass and solder it into lead channels and assemble a window, but also how to paint on glass and how to use a kiln to fuse pieces of glass together. Her final project was to build a window using the techniques she'd learned, in the traditional style of the Medieval Cathedrals.

When she got home, there were no jobs for her, so she went into business for herself. That was 2003, and it's still working out, she says, with some degree of certainty.

"You know when I was young and in that high school class the very first time, I became like... I don't know if this happens to people much anymore. But I really felt like it was my calling, and something ignited in me. I can't put it into words. It was like I got this illuminating glow over me and I said, I just love this so much, which... is pretty amazing."

For nearly a decade, Maywood has been repairing historic windows, building windows in the style of the early 20th century architectural glass designers and creating her own artwork out of cut glass. Most owners of old homes don't realize what an important part stained and leaded glass played in the design of their houses because so much of it has gone missing over the years. Houses from the turn of the 20th century to the end of 1920s often had architect-designed glass windows and cabinet doors. In some cases, the motifs—stylized flowers, trees, insects and animals—were part of a total design scheme that included cabinetry, furniture, rugs, window coverings, tile and lighting. In others, the scheme was less all-encompassing but nevertheless contributed to the uniqueness of the house.

On Maywood's worktable is a geometric design reminiscent of the Prairie Style houses of the 20th century Midwest. Each cut piece is arranged atop a paper outline. The laborious task of soldering it all together comes later, after the glass is cut. Maywood pulls out a box of glass samples.

"This is European glass from Germany. It's the glass we used when we were in school. The colors are unbelievable. Like, for example, these are blues." She pulls out a small slice of glass. "If you want blue aquamarine." She pulls out another. "If you want steel blue. If you want aquamarine real. I mean, I just go crazy. This is like my candy."

She returns to the subject of her father, who's now retired and lives in La Jolla. "He's actually been really supportive because I really put my heart and soul into it two hundred percent. He said, as long as you do that I will help you live your dreams. So that was really, really cool."

Maywood also teaches stained glass at the Art Academy of San Diego in North Park. She demonstrates her cutting technique on a piece of glass with a tool that allows her to rotate the cutting blade to a fresh and sharp edge while dispensing a microscopic drop of oil to lubricate the blade. On her finger is a band-aid, a hazard of the trade.

As she takes the piece of glass in both hands and cracks it along an almost invisible line, she says, "I like doing something that pretty much hasn't changed since the eleventh century. With the exception of electricity for the kiln and some great hand tools, it's still the same."

I mention how most people today, when choosing a career, would think first about what sort of lifestyle they'd like to attain, take into consideration their natural abilities and proclivities, then choose a profession that fits—and pays.

She laughs. "This is just the opposite of that. You have to love it so much, just to keep going."

And she does. Even if it makes her a little crazy.

To commission a window, get a window repaired or purchase one of Lisa Maywood's artworks in glass, call 858-220-3282. Her website is [verredesigns.com](#). To take one of her classes at the Art Academy of San Diego, visit [artacademyofsandiego.com](#).



For the man who loves books: An Old World European design reminiscent of church windows (Photo by Lisa Maywood)