

# Creative Living



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(F1E)

## Hot glass, heavy art

By Corinne Abelt  
staff writer

**B**ARBARA WALLACE SAYS she's a glass blower because it combines three things she loves — art, music and dance. The art part is self-explanatory. The music is what she turns on to work by and the dance, more precisely choreography, is the fast-paced, timed movements she goes through non-stop for 45-60 minutes at a crack.

No hesitations, no stopping to look around, just intense activity, from the time she first puts the glass on the end of the long blow pipe or punty, until she cuts it loose to put into the annealing oven.

Between the beginning and the end, she will have the piece in and out of the furnace and the glory hole beside it (to reheat) from 20-25 times.

AT THE glass studio at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association (BBAA), she and her assistant, Gerry Mace, two 100-pound lightweights, had danced and strained their way through a couple of rounds before the glass furnace and were getting ready to go one more round before they called it a day. It was a 55-degree November day.

"In six hours, we'll do three large pieces and five small ones . . . I can wring my clothes out when I leave here," Wallace said.

Wallace is one person you'd never choose to complain to about how busy you are. In addition to a full-time job in advertising, she teaches glass blowing at the Center for Creative Studies on Monday even-

ings and Saturdays and at the BBAA on Wednesdays.

SHE PUT herself through three years of college making stained glass, heading toward a degree in elementary education. After student teaching and more work with glass, she decided to change direction. Instead of completing her degree in elementary education, she decided to go for a degree from the Center for Creative Studies. It took six years, but in 1986, she received her degree.

Her first exposure to working with hot glass was at the Toledo Museum in 1981. She knew then it was her medium. She has since gone to glass workshops in Maine, Seattle and North Carolina.

"I've had my hands in it for a long time," she said.

SHE WORKS on two to three different levels. The small pieces like those she has in the BBAA Holiday Sales Show, through Dec. 10, are her bread and butter pieces. Larger works such as overlay vases are at Ilona Gallery of Farmington Hills, Signature Gallery in the Michigan Design Center and the Detroit Artists Market.

Yet, when describing her work, she said, "I'm known for sculpture — bronze with glass. The Detroit Institute of Arts purchased a piece of mine (like that) in April and it's been on display for four months."

She will be at the Detroit Institute of Arts doing a demonstration and talk for Founders Society members Thursday, Dec. 8, with Herb Babcock of the Center for Creative Studies. They should be a good combination, Wallace said.



Barbara Wallace and Gerry Mace (behind) wear goggles to protect their eyes when working in front of the glass furnaces. The vase is already well on its way.

"We're both sculptural types." Mace, a free-lance photographer, came into glass blowing by fluke. She arrived here from Boston to do a piece on glass blowing and ended up at the business end of a blow pipe.

"I talked her into staying," Wallace said. "She does the actual blowing for me. I have to move real fast."

WALLACE'S VASES are complicated. She uses one color glass for the inside, another for the outside. Then she adds glass shards that she makes herself ahead of time for color and texture, and canes that attach themselves to the sides when the vase is almost complete.

The vase they were doing that warm November day was to be jade green with a white overlay. The molten glass came in and out of the furnace many times — to pick up the second color, to be turned from a blob into a large teardrop by Wallace, cupping and shaping the hot glass with a damp, folded newspaper, to have the initial bubble blown in by Mace.

"By her blowing and me papering I can get a larger and a thinner piece. Besides, it's not so lonely when you have someone working with you," Wallace said.

The pace quickened as the glass at the end of the blow pipe began to grow larger and rounder. Mace blew again and again and raced over to get more shards ready as Wallace shoved the pipe into the furnace as deftly as a pool hustler putting the six ball in the side pocket.

IN THE furnace the shards became soft and congealed with the whole. As soon as that happened, Wallace would put it out quickly to pick up more shards — paper, blow, shape, heat. Repeat.

"Two more blows. Keep going — blow. Blow. Blo-o-o-ow — nice."

In and out again to pick up the cones on the marvering table. It took two tries to get all of them in position.

"I got it. I'm gonna go for the other one to see if I can get it across — I got it. Perfect."

In the lightning-fast series of finishing steps, the shape had been refined and flattened, the irregular top opening cut, shaped, polished and reshaped again slightly, before it met with Wallace's approval. It would come in and out of the furnace at least 10 more times for minor but important touch-ups.

In the annealer, it would then cool down slowly for about 12 hours "so there is no stress on the glass," Wallace said.

In the entrance to the glass studio, Wallace smiled, wiped her sweaty hands on her jeans and talked about a piece she and Mace had done a short time ago, a beautiful one that got so big it wouldn't go into the glory hole and couldn't be finished. But it had been a beauty.

"This is something I always wanted to do and I love it," Wallace said.

And the future? Well, in Japan there are some incredible glass artists — and she'd sure like a chance to work with them.

Staff photos by Jerry Zolynsky



Barbara Wallace just dropped a piece of overlay glass made especially to smash for shards. She retrieves the best to use for the piece she is about to make.



Barbara Wallace shapes the hot glass with wet newspaper while Gerry Mace blows.

## Selling gift items

The Holiday Sales Show at Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association continues through Saturday, Dec. 10. Hours are 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

The offerings by local and regional artists include hand-crafted

jewelry, wall hangings, glass, hand-painted scarves, candles, chimes, folk art Santas, hand-decorated baby clothes, ceramics, a whimsical line of children's furniture and many tree ornaments. Open free of charge, 1516 S. Cranbrook (north of 14 Mile), Birmingham.



## Tour visitors welcome

"Violette Treasures" is the theme of the 29th annual Christmas Walk sponsored by the Detroit Symphony League. The Birmingham-Bloomfield Walk, featuring six homes from contemporary to New England farm traditional, decorated for the holidays, will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 7.

Grosse Pointe homes will be featured in the walk there from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 14.

Those attending the Birmingham-Bloomfield walk will visit Magnolia Hill, the old Vernor es-

tate; Victoria's basement completely decorated with Middle Eastern treasures; a charming home with seven Christmas trees; a country style home done by Bonnie L. Meyer, ASID; a home decorated in the Williamsburg style and the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Affleck House.

The door prize will be Christmas tree done by Bonnie L. Meyer, a first-prize winner in the Festival of Trees. Tickets are \$5 for groups of 10 or more, \$8 advance and \$10 at the door. For information, call 851-2132 or 642-9385.

The dining room table is set, and Christmas decorations fill the New England farm house, done in shades of blue and raspberry by interior designer Bonnie L. Meyer. At left is a lemon yellow-and-white bedroom fit for a little princess. This family home is one of six on the Symphony League's Christmas Walk.

JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

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