

Creative Living

Bob Sklar editor/591-2300



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Glassblower practices an age-old craft

By Keely Wygonik
staff writer

ON THE surface, glassblower Don Schneider seems all showman. A wizard of the elements who, by the light of a flickering flame, pulls, turns and twists glass to make it perform the way he wants.

It's more difficult than it looks, and Schneider, 41, who describes himself as a furnace working glassblower and lampworker, is more artist than showman.

Schneider learned his craft the old-fashioned way, at Greenfield Village. He started out as a rug hooker, but got hooked on glass blowing after he and the village glassblower became friends.

"He talked me into taking his class. I just got fascinated with it. After my third piece, he told me I'd be working at the village. And I did, two years later in 1976 during the bicentennial celebration."

A year later, Schneider left, but his village training gave him a solid foundation to build on. From reproductions of Early American tableware, he progressed to lampworked beads and one-of-a-kind furnace worked pieces of glass.

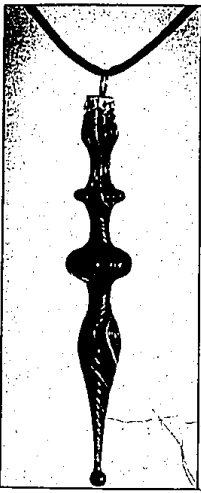
SCHNEIDER SPECIALIZES in two kinds of glass work: Lampwork, reheating glass rod and tubing in front of a flame to change its shape; and furnace work, pulling molten glass from a furnace and blowing it into shape.

He divides his time between studios in Plymouth and the Fox Tower Glassworks in Beulah, Mich., behind the Brookside Inn. And some of his time is spent on the road, doing demonstrations at gift shops, art museums and the Detroit Science Center.

"When people tell me it looks so easy, I know I'm having a good day. It's a lot harder than it looks," said Schneider, who doesn't mind answering questions from the half circle of people gathered around him.

IT WAS during one of these trips that he was introduced to ancient glass beads.

"I was at the Toledo Art Museum and they took me into the glass studios room and showed me glass beads that dated back to 4500 B.C. I was fascinated by how sophisticated they were. They were the high art of the



Swirls of colored glass cover a spiral-shaped Christmas ornament designed by glassblower Don Schneider.

day. More valuable: then gem stones."

Schneider calls his beads the expressive part of his lampwork. Three of them were featured in an article about American glass beadmakers in the fall issue of Ornament magazine.

THE WORK is labor intensive. Although it takes an average of 10 minutes to make a bead, Schneider might spend up to two days preparing the glass for beadmaking.

He starts out with clear core, which is formed into a bead by slowly rotating it in front of a flame.

To add color, he heats a colored rod and applies it to the clear tube by rotating it in front of the flame, allowing the color to preheat, soften and stick to the bead.



Plymouth glassblower Don Schneider rotates a piece of glass tubing over a flame to make a bead.

Sometimes, he decorates the bead, adding other colors to give it a zig-zag effect. Or, he adds millefiori made by fusing four to five glass rods together into layers.

The tip of the heated millefiori is placed against the bead to make the design that resembles a flower.

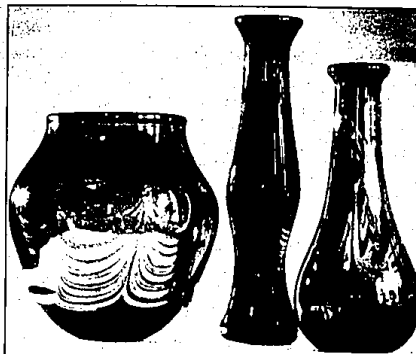
Millefiori translated means "a thousand flowers." No two are alike and Schneider often applies clear glass over the millefiori to magnify the design.

Most of the glass he uses for his lampwork is of the Pyrex type, the same kind your kitchen casserole dishes are made of.

THE FURNACE work is different because he makes his own glass.

"It's a very magical process. You process dry powders that look like cake mixes to make molten glass. Because I have complete control

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Left: At Fox Tower Glassworks in Beulah, Mich., glassblower Don Schneider creates vases like these from molten glass. When thermally active glass is reheated, the metals surface, creating interesting colors and patterns.

Staff photos
by
Bill Bresler

Career musician finds work invigorating

By Cathleen Collins Lee
special writer

After 32 years with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, you might think Salvatore Rabbio, principal timpanist, would be counting the days until retirement.

But Rabbio, 56, doesn't feel he is at the end of anything. Rather, the Farmington Hills resident thinks he is on the threshold of a wonderful new stage in the life of the orchestra.

For Rabbio, that new era is marked by the orchestra's music director, Neeme Jarvi, and his new home at Orchestra Hall.

"It is brand new and so exciting to be working with Jarvi," Rabbio said.

"He creates that excitement and that love for making great music. I've been there so many years that you have to be pretty darn good to make me feel that excitement. But he's like plugging a light into a socket."

Rabbio is also delighted with Orchestra Hall.

"Ford Auditorium was an absolute musical nightmare," he said. "When you're at Orchestra Hall, you know that this is a hall built strictly for making music. When you arrive, you feel that there couldn't be a better place to show off your craft. And it's absolutely beautiful; the more you look, the more you see."

RABBIO WAS interviewed at one of his favorite places, the screened-in porch he built on the back of his home last summer. The simple porch, made of wood and decorated in yellow and white, looks out on an acre.

There is plenty of room to garden, grow tomatoes and putter around, all activities that offer him a break from the intense concentration required by music.

Rabbio and his wife, Nina, share this home and its quiet, almost country setting. Inside, the many framed museum posters reflect their interest in art; they visit museums whenever the orchestra travels. A wind chime made of ceramic treble clefs hangs opposite the front door. Their

two children, a daughter and son, are grown.

Pausing between an orchestra meeting and an evening performance, Rabbio is warm and relaxed. He explains that it is a mystery to him how he became involved in music. And it was just a lucky accident that led him to the drums.

RABBIO'S PARENTS immigrated from Italy at a young age. When they met and married, they worked hard to make a living. There wasn't any room for music.

But when Rabbio was in junior high school, he had an opportunity to sign up for band.

"Now my parents, being of Italian origin, said I should take up the ac-

cordion," he recalls with a smile. "One musician can be a whole orchestra," they told me.

"So I reluctantly signed up for accordion, but all the accordion classes were filled up. I ran home pretty quick and said, 'How about drums?' I don't know how I knew to choose the drums. It's a gift from upstairs that I'll always be grateful for."

Rabbio played the jazz drums in the marching band through high school. But when he started at Boston University, he happened to hear a recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on an old 78. He was never quite the same again.

Henry "added his workshop, where he often experimented with gasoline engines," according to a state historic marker outside the house, moved to Beechwood Avenue in downtown Garden City in 1952.

Bob Sklar is assistant managing editor for special projects.



Salvatore Rabbio
principal timpanist

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Historic sites provide captivating peek into our past

TRACKING HISTORIC footprints in Oldenland:

• It's steeped in history.

And I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to the Hill House for the Livonia Historical Society's annual holiday party Dec. 9.

The Hill House, in Livonia's Greenmead Historical Village at Eight Mile and Newburgh, looked terrific in its patriotic holiday setting.

The Greek Revival-style house, a national historic site, dates back to 1841. That's when Livonia Township pioneer Joshua Simmons commissioned Farmington architect Sergius P. Lyon, husband of his niece Lucinda, to design and build it.

The landmark home was the Simmons' third residence on their 160-acre farm, Meadow Brook.

The prosperous farm was a testament to the pioneering spirit of Simmons. He brought his new wife, Hannah Macomber, here from Bristol, N.Y., when he was just 25 and built a three-sided log shanty.

The farmstead, including a farmhands house built in the 1830s, stayed in the Simmons family until 1915.

In 1920, Sherwin and Jean Hill acquired the farmstead to raise dairy cattle. They renamed it Greenmead, after her childhood home in Baltimore. They also hired noted architect Marcus Burrows to remodel the main farmhouse.

A master builder, Simmons built a barn at Greenmead that's still standing. He built the first frame barn in



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Plymouth in 1827 for Erasmus Starkweather. And he hewed timber for the first mills in Plymouth and Farmington townships.

Simmons also built farmhouses for each of his three sons. The Lawrence Simmons House, built in 1861, still stands northwest of 12 Mile and Farmington Road, in Farmington Hills. It, too, was designed by Lyon.

"The handsome Victorian-style, stone house displays seven different gingerbread designs in the trim," the state historic marker on the front lawn tells us.

Lawrence lived there 12 years, including the period of the Civil War.

• It's called Sleepy Hollow.

But the Farmington Hills crossroads was a bustling village by the 1830s. Over the next century, it was home to three mills, a cooper's shop, a soap factory, a shoemaker's shop, stores, a slaughterhouse, a tannery, churches, a school and a cemetery that's now a historic site.

The miller's cottage and the cooper's house still stand across Drake. The cottage was moved across the stream in 1988 to accommodate road paving.

First came a gristmill, the first in Farmington Township. In 1827, Ed-

ward Steele built the mill on the banks of the Rouge after journeying from East Bloomfield, N.Y.

When J. T. Little bought the gristmill in the 1840s, he renamed it Pernambuco after a Brazilian port he'd visited as a sailor. The surrounding valley became known as Pernambuco Hollow. Pernambuco Flour was popular in Detroit.

Peter Hardenbergh bought the mill in 1868. His family made flour until 1886.

In the millpond, west of Drake, "youngsters fished and swam in summer and skated in the winter. Floods in 1904 and 1908 broke the millpond dam, which was not repaired," a city historic marker at Drake and Howard roads tells us.

The Wadsworths bought the mill in 1902 and converted it to a cider, flour and feed mill. They dismantled it in 1936 and Sleepy Hollow became a memory.

• Soon after Henry Ford I and Clara Bryant were married in 1888, he built their Honeymoon House in Dearborn. The two-story, one-bedroom house boasts timber cut and saved at his sawmill.

Clara designed the specs for the kitchen, sitting room, parlor and bedroom.

Henry "added his workshop, where he often experimented with gasoline engines," according to a state historic marker outside the house, moved to Beechwood Avenue in downtown Garden City in 1952.

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