

BellaGlass

SARASOTA Magazine February 2008

MADE IN SARASOTA

Glass Act

One-of-a-kind furnishings from the BellaGlass Studio.

By Ilene Denton

In the immaculate BellaGlass studio in the warehouse district north of downtown Sarasota, Vincent Dessberg and Onjay Mrotek labor over three big, four-foot-by-nine-foot kilns to create one-of-a-kind home furnishings made of fused glass.

Their wares—doors, windows, coffee and dining room tables, side tables, cabinet insets, mirrors, tub surrounds and skylights—feature nature images in fresh spring green and bright accent colors. But since each piece is custom made, “the sky’s the limit” in terms of creative concepts, Mrotek says; for one client, they’ve even designed a door panel featuring a downhill skier.

Dessberg, a 1977 Pine View grad, founded BellaGlass two years ago, and Mrotek joined him shortly afterwards. Mrotek moved to Sarasota in 2005 from Los Angeles, where he’d acted in film and television, including in a recurring role on *Gilmore Girls* and an appearance in an episode of *C.S.I.* Also a director, his recently completed film that he shot here, *A Grain of Salt*, was shown at Burns Court Cinema in December. Working in the visual arts is a departure, but not such a big stretch, he says: “I think it’s the director’s eye.”

Door panels in a bamboo motif flanked the entryway of their showroom on a recent visit. On display was a 48-inch by 24-inch aluminum table with a fused-glass top in an edgy red and yellow geometric pattern. A seven-foot door panel in a bird-of-paradise

motif stood in one corner, its yellows, reds and four different shades of green gleaming as the sunlight hit it.

With some 350 colors and textures of glass to choose from, Mrotek and Dessberg lay out shards of colored glass like mosaics on a larger, clear piece of glass. Then another layer of glass is placed atop it, and it is put into the kiln for two days at temperatures that reach 1,350 degrees Fahrenheit. “We slowly take the temperature up and down to avoid stress cracks,” Mrotek explains.

The art of fused glass has a long history, Mrotek says; archaeological evidence dates back to the Egyptians in 2000 B.C.E., although most credit the early Romans with developing the technique.

“I love stained glass; I think it’s beautiful. But it has lead lines, which are intrusive,” says Mrotek. “With fused glass, you also have dimension; it makes each piece pop.” Plus, he says, “There’s something about glass. It’s solid, it’s permanent. I can put (a BellaGlass creation) outside for the next decade and it will look exactly the same.”

For more information, visit the company’s web site, www.bellaglass.com.