



JoAnn Boatwright / The Argus
Fused glass artist JoAnn Wellner in her Hillsboro studio (left).

Glass sunflower tiles (below) made by Wellner are for the Oregon Glass Guild's upcoming auction.



Landscapes in glass

By JoAnn Boatwright
The Argus

Landscape paintings in fused glass are the current passion of Hillsboro artist JoAnn Wellner, whose philosophy just might be "do it yourself."

Idyllic scenes from Wellner's European travels, as well as pastoral views that might be any place, including her long-time home in Western Washington County, hang in her Hillsboro studio. The landscapes may finally be what Wellner has spent much of her adult life trying to perfect—a "painterly" look in glass.

"I've always loved glass," said Wellner, who began working in stained glass years ago when she wanted a window and did it herself. She'd tried oil painting, but grew frustrated because she couldn't create what she envisioned in her mind. "With glass, I could make something that I could be proud of."

Her success with stained glass—doing privately commissioned large pieces and churning out hundreds of sun-catchers and ornaments for the bazaar circuit—transfused into fused glass with some mid-1990s classes. Her goal, Wellner said, was to embellish her stained glass pieces with fused glass accents.

Now she works primarily in fused glass, purchasing the raw material—flat—in various stages of texture and in

dozens of colors from Portland glassmakers, Bullseye and Eschscholtz.

The Portland area, she said, has become a center for glass artists in recent years. "There's a lot going on here," she said.

Wellner saw Portland artist Roger Thomas's work in a gallery and "came unglued." "His work looks like oil painting," said Wellner, who decided she wanted to study with him. For several years, she has trekked into Portland to learn fused glass techniques from Thomas, who also teaches in Europe and has work in galleries from Virginia to Hawaii.

Wellner herself sells garden art glass at The Artful Garden and ornaments at Hill Country in downtown Hillsboro, and is collaborating with Hillsboro jewelry designer Kelly Miller, who uses Wellner's fused glass in a jewelry collection that is gaining nation-wide attention.

Last year, Wellner's goal was to appear in a regional glass show and this year she has completed a series of glass tiles for the Oregon Glass Guild's auction and will be part of the guild's spring show. She'd also like to create custom glass tiles for high-end interior designers.

Like many artists, Wellner said the hardest part of her job is marketing her work. Wellner considers herself a mostly self-taught artist. As a fourth grader growing up in

Glendale in southern Oregon, she won a poster contest and \$20, but trained for a career as a dental hygienist.

She met and married Richard Wellner in Portland and, arriving from the loss of their first child, Wellner sought solace in art. They've lived in Hillsboro since 1973 (except for a couple of years at the turn of the millennium when they were in Roseburg and family roots and friendships run deep for the glass artist).

The Wellners' two sons live in Beaverton and Richard, now retired, is his wife's biggest fan, building a light-filled studio for her to work her magic.

The magic, she said, comes from never really knowing what will come out of the kiln. "It can be exciting, but it can also be distressing," she said. The "distressing" pieces, she said, are "happy accidents" that eventually become incorporated into other projects.

Wellner's next goal is to study with renowned Italian glass artist Miriam di Fiore in Mirano and Venice.

What keeps Wellner going may be that do-it-yourself philosophy: "If we have a desire to do something, we should do it or we will look back on it with regret," she said. "When we have these urges, these little dreams, we need to remember that we are the only ones who can act on it. We need to do it for ourselves."

Artist JoAnn Wellner created a self-portrait (right). Landscapes in fused glass, inspired by her travels, are Wellner's current passion (below).



Glass garden art.

