

SFDesign

ASID CA North
Chapter Magazine

Issue Number 33
Winter 2013



AMERICAN
SOCIETY OF
INTERIOR
DESIGNERS



CA NORTH

Where Stories Take Form...Gordon Huether Studios

by Christina Julian

Business sensibilities and the artistic mind don't always mix. But for artist Gordon Huether, it's the most likely pairing in the world. With 30 years in the business, his body of innovative work includes more than 150 private commissions across the United States, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. While Huether's work has been described as edgy and provocative, for him, the story is much simpler, "I'm a little old fashioned. When it comes to art I believe it should be beautiful and inspiring."

While his initial foray into the art world came with the production of large-scale, site-specific installations for public spaces, that development cycle (typically 12 to 36 months) moved at a pace that was far too slow for Huether. His curiosity about life, history and the world at large became the catalyst for his fine art. Regardless of the form, Huether is driven by a life mission: "To edify humanity by bringing beauty into the world."

Working in his primary medium of glass and steel, Huether draws from objects and salvaged materials and repurposes them in a multitude of ways (carved, fused, acid etched, slumped). He enjoys the way micro-layers of metals and oxides give glass dichroic optical properties and the transmission of reflected color. Huether carefully considers the myriad of textures, patina, color properties, and specialized treatments he uses in his palette. His work straddles an array of material and themes in everything from his large-scale-



Light Forest, El Camino Hospital

As you move by the installation, inspired by human DNA codes, light dances and plays off the elements of glass tubes, mirrored stainless steel and ribbons of dichroic glass.



Salvaged Metal, Glass

The salvaged metal in this piece is reminiscent of water, a continuation of Huether's interest in nature as a subject matter.

site-specific installations to his precisely honed fine art that is collected and exhibited in New York City, Chicago, Santa Barbara, Southern California, San Francisco and beyond.

Huether is a go-to-guy for designers, architects, landscape architects, art advisors and consultants, real estate developers and everyday folk looking to make an impression. "They all have their own story to be told," Huether says. "I look at ways to understand that story and how to tell it. Then there are the technical engineering things to think about, and the budget that will drive some of the aesthetics and material decisions."

The process and business of art

Huether likens aspects of his process to building a house. "There's the foundation and how the walls will attach. There's a long list of things to do from project management to engineering design refinements, while monitoring and making sure it's going where it needs to go. There are hundreds of deci-

sions to be made before the final installation is complete.”

While the artistic process is tantamount, he also recognizes the importance of process when it comes to project oversight. “Creativity has a lot to do with problem solving. The left and right side of my brain are in some sort of balance. I’ve always known that for me to be creatively fulfilled as an artist, I’d need to have some sort of business machine behind me to make that happen. Going from a little model to the actual installation, there are a lot of steps, and you need to know how to run a business and have a team of people around you that are all pulling on the same rope.”

Huether’s approach hinges on an innate responsiveness to a given site and his studio’s project management workflow, which includes phases for client engagement, design, production and installation. The process begins with a creative brief, which drives the workflow from estimate and budgeting to creation, design, fabrication and installation, as Huether and his crew of 12 collaborate with the client team throughout. He understands the importance of defining a clear scope as well as the value of models, renderings, and supporting construction and engineering documentation to ensure seamless collaboration between the parties involved.



Over Houston, William P. Hobby Airport
The six 12 x 20-foot art glass panels are composed from imagery Huether abstracted from aerial photographs he shot of Houston and the surrounding area.

Client Sherry Scott, interior designer in the Silicon Valley says, “Working with Gordon is a very rewarding experience—not only because his creativity and execution are always more than anticipated—but Gordon does not bring his ego into the equation, which is one of the reasons his artistic compositions continue to get better with each project. As a bonus, his sensibilities around pairing a variety of materials together appear to have no bounds.”



Carmel Dining Room
The screen, inspired by sea foam, cascades down from a light well, separating the foyer from the dining area.

For Huether, there are certain aspects of the process he most enjoys. “I like the beginning and the end of a project. The beginning is thinking about the story, what wants to be told and how to tell it. Then the light bulb goes on and I go ‘A-ha! That’s what I’m going to do.’ When that happens, I start cutting and gluing and making the model; that’s the fun part. Then I like the end, when you see it finished and installed and it exceeds everyone’s expectations, including my own.” Scott shares her take on maximizing the collaborative process between designer, client and artist, “The best way to work with Gordon is to give him a challenge and minimal parameters. The end result will be superlative...and this includes the studied support from everyone on his team.”



Born in Rochester, N.Y. to German immigrant parents, Huether grew up in the Bay Area, and spent the better part of his youth in Napa, where he founded Gordon Huether Studio in 1987. Huether has won over 60 public art awards and 150 private art commissions for corporations, and across the healthcare, hospitality and transportation sectors, in addition to his work for private clients. He’s also served as artist in resident at Artesa Winery for more than 20 years.