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Bathing with a view: Erin Martin placed a curvaceous tub in the master bedroom, allowing the homeowners to enjoy vineyard vistas, p. 118.

Glass Uprising

He may have had humble beginnings, but today Napa artist Gordon Huether creates large-scale works from glass and metal for clients around the world.

The story of Gordon Huether's artistic beginnings has an almost Disney-esque quality: A teenager keeps getting into trouble in his mother's San Francisco neighborhood, so he's sent to live with his father in Napa Valley. His dad, something of a Renaissance man, is into all the hippie arts and crafts of the 1970s, including macramé and stained glass. Looking for something to do, the teen starts dabbling in glass art, first creating a small stained glass panel featuring a green-and-red parrot and then making what he now describes as "the world's ugliest Victorian-style stained glass window." That window, ugly though it was, provided an epiphany.

"I held it up and saw the sun shining through it," Huether says. "I made up my mind then and there that I wanted to work in large-scale glass and I wanted to make an impact on the world through my art."

For a young artist with just two less-than-attractive works under his belt, it was a lofty ambition. But, more than 30 years and hundreds of pieces later—including artworks that serve as centerpieces for everything from museums to hospitals to parking garages—Huether has clearly achieved his goal.

The works are all created in Huether's modern, barn-like studio near the city of Napa. "Perhaps I could have grown bigger or faster if I'd moved elsewhere," says Huether. "But I love it here, and I wanted to make my life and career here."

Gordon Huether Studio, gordonhuether.com



Working in his Napa studio, artist Gordon Huether prepares a glass plate by adding colored powder to it—an important step in creating one of his signature modern stained glass panels.



1. With a 1962 photo of a department store display created by Huether's father in the background, artisan Christian Honings works on an installation for a Massachusetts synagogue. "When I started, it was me alone in a studio listening to the Talking Heads," says Huether. "Now I have 12 people working for me—and I listen to Notorious B.I.G. along with the Talking Heads." 2. A window wall with display ledges allows the artist to see how light affects his work. 3. Metal also has a strong presence in Huether's art. Here he manipulates a 1,377-pound piece of steel destined for a Houston police station. 4. Cubbies hold tools of the trade: panes of colored glass.





1. Artisan Martin Honings adds the finishing touches to glass plates before they are fired in a kiln. 2. The plates, shown here pre-firing, will be displayed in Huether's downtown Napa gallery. 3. On the left, in a window designed for the President Lyndon Baines Johnson Library & Museum, Huether incorporated a childhood photo of Lady Bird Johnson, her words, and images of the wildflowers she promoted and preserved. The panel on the right shows an aerial view of Richmond, California, and was created for the Richmond Civic Center. 4. Huether starts each project by surveying the landscape and architecture of a site and figuring out how art can join in the dialogue between them. When designing an installation for John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek, he looked to the hills. "Of course, John Muir was all about nature," he says. "I looked past the hospital to the mountains in the distance, and I decided to bring them closer to the building."

