



ABOVE: Eric Markow (right) and Thom Norris worked for five years to develop their woven glass process. LEFT: "Nest babies" are among their most popular works.





Weaving Glass

Eric Markow and Thom Norris create vibrant one-of-a-kind works of art in their Falls Church, Virginia, studio. By **James T. Black**

There's probably nothing as fragile as two tiny eggs sitting in a bird's nest—especially when it's all made of glass.

That's the creative challenge Eric Markow and Thom Norris face every time they fire up their kilns. As the inventors of a unique "woven glass" technique, these Falls Church, Virginia, artisans use an unforgiving medium to create unforgettable works of art.

Creating Colors "Glass is about the most difficult material to work with," Eric says. "It takes us six weeks to take a piece from idea to completion. In our early experimental days, we could almost

be done and then get a crack."

The artists worked for years on the process. "Eric introduced me to stained glass shortly after we met about 14 years ago," Thom says. "We took a workshop and started doing pieces on commission. We were always looking for new colors. We'd visit stained glass shops and ask to see what they had in the back—any glass that might be too odd to sell up front."

When the partners found that commercial glass comes in only about 100 colors, they decided to make their own. They started experimenting in their studio by fusing pieces and sheets of the material together, cooking some for up to



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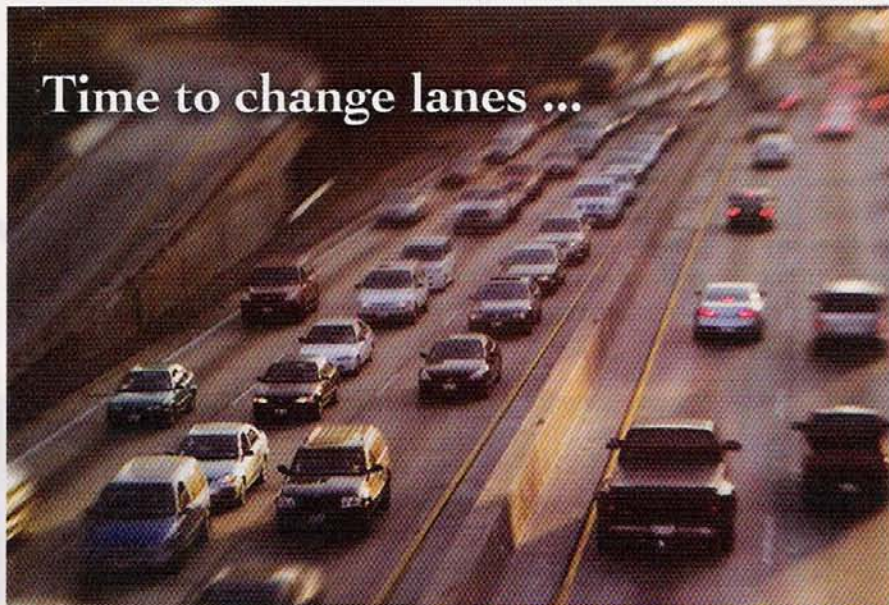
“Eric trained as a chemical engineer, and my degree is in biology. Because of our backgrounds, we know a lot about scientific methods.”

THOM NORRIS, GLASS ARTIST



Eric gets ready to fire a piece in the kiln. Some glass cooks for 200 hours before it's ready.

Time to change lanes ...



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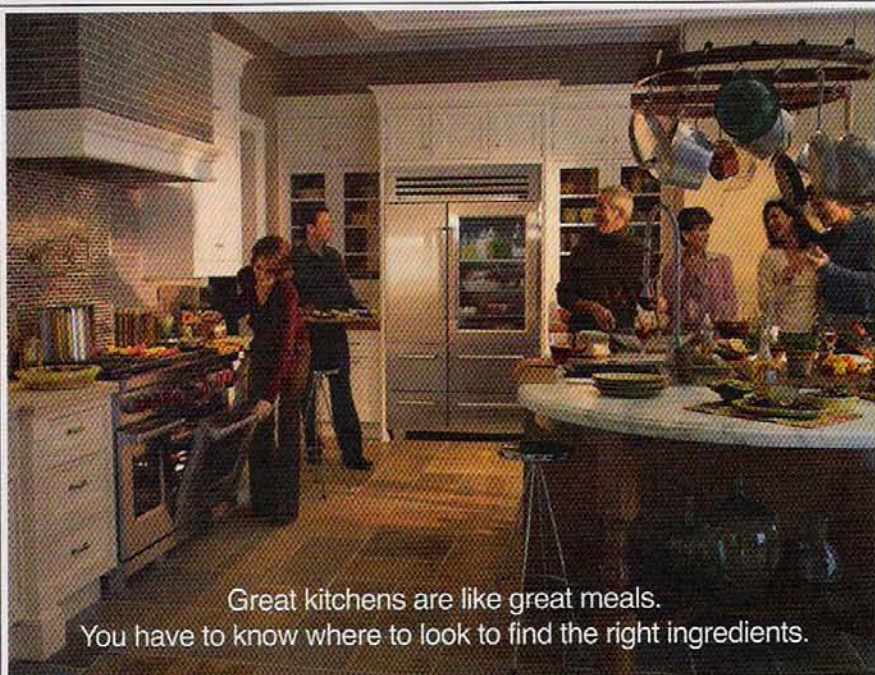
24 hours at temperatures of more than 1,000 degrees.

Eventually Eric and Thom learned that by adding glass powders to the mix or by layering different colored sheets together, they could create new hues. Their technique also made the glass more malleable, so that at high temperatures it could stretch and bend almost like rubber. After five years of hot, tiring, and often frustrating labor, the artists perfected a way of combining brightly colored strands together to create textured pieces that look more like woven fabric than fragile glass.

“It took us a long time to find which temperatures create which colors. Some pieces are in and out of the kiln four or five times, and everything has to be staged perfectly,” Eric says. “Basically we wanted to come up with something unique and different. I think we did.”

Showtime Eric and Thom exhibited their first pieces at a Baltimore show in 2004. Since then, they've created hundreds of woven wonders ranging from a glittering 7-foot-tall saguaro cactus in 30 shades of green to delicate 6-inch-wide “nest babies” that come complete with glass twigs and eggs.

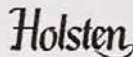
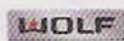
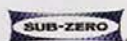
Because a piece can take weeks to complete, the artists only make 100 or so a year. Demand keeps growing—more than 50 galleries now carry their wall sculptures, nests, and table sculptures, and they take part in a few art shows across the country each year. “We probably stay just



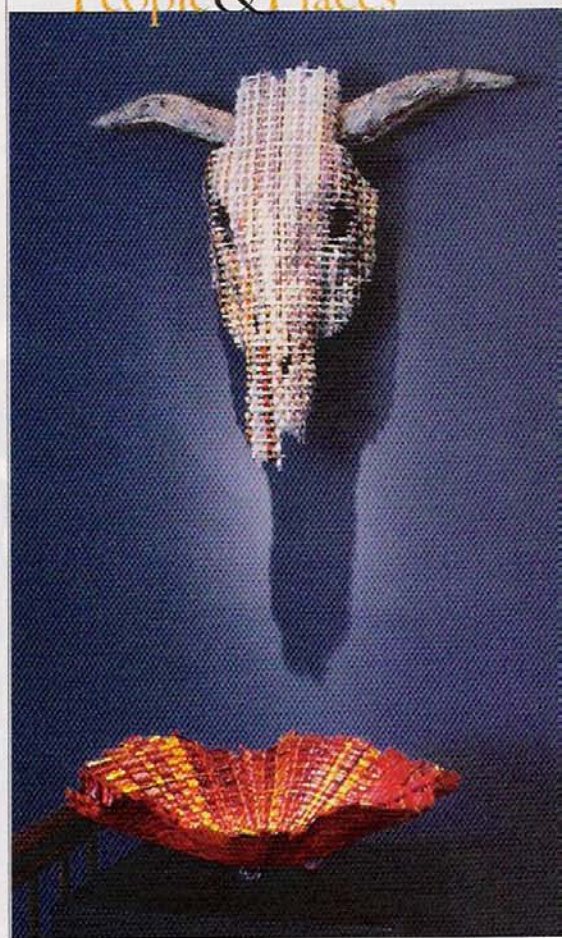
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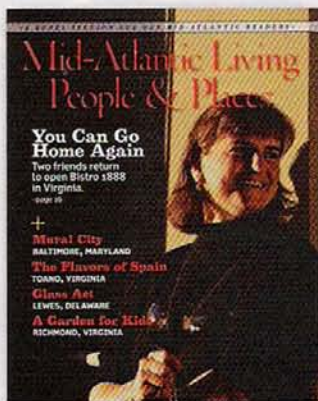
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as busy preparing for a few shows a year as we do filling orders," Thom says. "We have 15 new Japanese origami-inspired pieces in our solo New York show this fall. We worked on those all summer."

The Science of Art Both agree that their love of science has a lot to do with their artistic success. "Eric trained as a chemical engineer, and my degree is in biology," Thom says. "Because of our backgrounds, we know a lot about scientific methods."

Those methods include spending





ABOVE: Thom mixes glass powders to create a unique color. Commercial glass only comes in about 100 hues, so the artists often combine colors in order to develop new ones for use in their art.

long hours in the studio mixing, measuring, and manipulating glass. "After a piece is heated we have to wait for it to cool before working with it," Eric explains. "Some glass only cools a few degrees an hour, so it can take a week to get it in and out of the kiln successfully."

Like their gleaming glass creations, Eric and Thom have successfully fused their careers into a wonderful mixture of art and science. "Our experiments aren't as trial and error as they used to be, but we're still learning," Thom says. "And I think that's what you should always strive for, whether you work in a lab or a studio." ●

Markow & Norris woven glass pieces range in price from \$375 to \$10,000, and there is a four- to six-month waiting period for a custom piece. For more information call 1-888-282-7081. To find a schedule of upcoming shows and a list of galleries that carry their creations, visit www.wovenglass.com.

Hot Glass, Cold Glass

Although they won't reveal their entire weaving process, one secret to Markow & Norris' success was their ability to reach a happy medium between "hot" (blown) and "cold" (stained) glass. While looking for a way to bring new colors to "cold" glass, the artists created mixtures that are heated somewhere between the two temperature ranges. "We don't get it as hot as blown glass," Eric explains. "We like to say that blown glass looks like honey—and our process uses glass when it is more like taffy."



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