

Jeannette Therrien

Jeannette Therrien is a glass artist and designer, and one of the founder members of Marlborough Open Studios. She lives in Ogbourne St George with her sister-in-law Caroline, for whom she is a carer, and her poodle Rupert.

Tell us about yourself

I am originally from Southend on Sea, my father was French Canadian (hence my surname). I lived in London for a while, and started a business with my brother. We came to Wiltshire when we bought a Camping Shop in Swindon, and although I initially lived in Calne, eventually moved to Marlborough and then Ogbourne.

How did you become interested in Glass design and making?

After having gone through a difficult time when my then partner died, I wanted a new start. Caroline suggested I think about college, although I probably wouldn't have gone for it if I hadn't discovered that there was such a thing as an Access Course run by Swindon College – which is especially for people who haven't followed the traditional route into education. Following this I did a BA in Ceramics with Glass at High Wycombe University – most people dropped one or the other discipline during the course but I carried on with both (I like to make life difficult for myself!)

After I qualified, I set up a studio in the basement of my house in St Martin's in Marlborough, and after a while found the building in Wagon Yard that became the Clay and Glass Studio. I was keen to teach – as I wanted to pass on to others what I had learnt. Initially I ran the studio by myself, with the downstairs for pottery, and upstairs for glass.

I realised after a while that I needed help to afford the studio without having to work all the hours God sends, so started to work with other artists. Over the years collaborators have come and gone, but the group of people that are there now have been there for some time.

You run most of your classes at home now?

That's right, I moved to Ogbourne St George in 2001, and have a purpose built studio. Although I am still involved with Wagon Yard, it's run now by Jacqui Melhuish, who specialises in ceramics. Now known as Wagon Yard Artists, there is a gallery upstairs that sells the work of the six artists involved, and is open at weekends.

I run regular classes in the studio as well as the occasional one-off workshop, and I teach at Marlborough College Summer School every year. I also produce my own work.

What type of work do you make?

It's varied, I make both stained glass and kiln formed pieces, from purely decorative objects and jewellery, to functional pieces used in doors and windows. There are also indoor and outdoor pieces. I have a special kiln that allows me to make glass rods, that are then used in different ways to make very distinctive pieces. I went to the USA to learn this technique a couple of years ago. Glass is surprisingly versatile.

Do you take commissions?

Yes, the vast majority of my stained glass work is by commission. I love the process of meeting clients, discussing designs and glass selection. I'll usually sketch out the ideas and tweak as

necessary, before agreeing colours. People can be as involved as they like, I've even had clients come with me to buy the glass for a piece.

I also accept commissions for kiln formed glass too – I'm happy to discuss ideas with people if they are interested.

Do you exhibit?

I do – I have one coming up this Summer at Croome Walled Gardens, a National Trust property in Worcester. It will be outdoor work, and I'm busy preparing for it at the moment. I also take part in Marlborough Open Studios and have done so nearly every year since it started. (I'm proud to say I am a founding member, it has been amazing to see how much it has grown over the years).

What is it that drew you to the medium of glass, and what do you like most about it?

I love its versatility, the vibrancy of the colours and how they look in different light. I really enjoy the technicality of making each piece too, the intricacy of putting everything together. I am passionate about passing my knowledge on, and enjoy seeing people achieve more than they thought they could. I've made some great friends through my classes too. I feel very fortunate to do what I do.

Do you enjoy other artists' work?

Absolutely, I love seeing what other artists have produced, especially others working in glass. I like to get up to London once or twice a year to see a major exhibition. Grayson Perry is one of my favourite artists – I love his approach to both art and life. I also recently went to Messum's Wiltshire to see the work of an amazing glass artist called Elliot Walker. I was very impressed with the place.

What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy Tai Chi, and go to regular classes in Liddington. It's great form of exercise that I think is important to keep up as I get older.

I enjoy meeting up with friends when I can, and also enjoy a bit of gardening.

My caring duties looking after Caroline, who has Alzheimer's take up a lot of my time, but I don't begrudge it at all.

Do you enjoy reading?

I don't read so much as listen to audio books, which I can do while I am working. (Also, I don't get on brilliantly with spectacles these days!). I am partial to a good crime or legal thriller by John Grisham or Michael Connolly. One I particularly enjoyed, but not of that genre is Wild by Cheryl Strayed, I'd thoroughly recommend it.

I don't listen to music, I much prefer a good podcast – from the omnibus edition of The Archers to a good radio drama.