

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ARTS - August 2005

by Deanna Mascle

Creating a Glass Destination

Brooke Forest White Jr. shares the magic of Flame Run

For Brooke Forest White Jr., the art of glass-blowing is magic, pure and simple. His discovery of it was an epiphany and his choice to pursue it full-time was life-altering. “Hot glass is magical, and I was spellbound from the moment I first encountered it at Centre College,” White recalls. “The physical aspect of working the glass and the fire captured my imagination.”

He still has the first pieces he made at Centre. When he looks at them now, he’s reminded of the awe he experienced as a new artist.

“I love the process of glassblowing. There is a creative release that occurs between myself and the glass that results in my finished work. I am not attempting to make broad social commentary with my work. I am striving to present my love of color and fascination with hot glass. The work reveals itself and then it is my responsibility to interpret and create.”

White is a Kentucky Arts Council 1998 Al Smith Fellowship recipient and a juried participant of the Kentucky Craft Marketing Program. His work has also been recognized at the national level, including the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., the Huntington (W.Va.) Museum of Art, the Asheville (N.C.) Art Museum and the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art. This year’s Governor’s Awards for the Arts were hand-blown glass vessels from the “Noble Series” created by White.

White’s first exposure to the glass-blowing process came about through a college class that he took to fulfill a general core studies requirement. Although he considered dropping the class at the beginning of the semester, by the end he was assisting his professor, renowned glass artist Stephen Rolfe Powell. White continued taking art classes and ended up with concentrations in economics and glass art.

After graduating, White was accepted at the University of Kentucky Law School. He opted out of law school only a few weeks later, however, and called Powell for help pursuing his art. He has been creating art glass ever since.

After apprenticing for several years, White opened his first studio in 1995. Five years later, he was approached to operate a much larger studio in Louisville.

In July, White opened Flame Run, an art glass studio in Louisville. He co-founded the gallery with fellow artist Susie Garbee Slabaugh and together they have renovated the former Tractor Supply site in the city’s East Market Street Arts District. Five other artists work with them at the hot shop as well.

Flame Run features the largest glassblowing studio in the region and a gallery representing glass artists from across the country. The facility includes individual studios and a gallery, a family room with a kitchen, and a



Brooke Forest White recently opened a new glassblowing studio in Louisville that is the largest of its kind in the region.

basketball court out back. The hot shop is set up on one side of Flame Run, and the gallery is on the other. White and Slabaugh built a deck above the shop area so visitors can watch the artists blow glass.

The studio's artwork ranges from \$20 paperweights and holiday ornaments to a \$5,000 blown-glass vessel. When people question the price of art glass, White explains that some bigger pieces require four or five artists' time and may take them two to three hours to create. The furnace keeps glass at a little over 2,000 degrees. In its molten form, glass is the consistency of honey and wants to drip off on the floor.

"Currently, we are working on a custom wall sconce for a private home and an outdoor installation for a major corporation," White says. "At the same time, we constantly create new one-of-a kind pieces. We also produce several different production type items that are less expensive."

For White, opening Flame Run has been the high point of his career. "Flame Run's mission is to share the endless possibilities of glass with the public. We accomplish this through studio and gallery tours, hot glass demonstrations, community classes, private lessons, visiting artist workshops, special events, teambuilding seminars and studio rentals. With Flame Run, we want to put Louisville and Kentucky on the map as a destination for contemporary glass artists, educators, and collectors."

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