

Sunday News

● Nov. 26, 1978

magazine



Rita and Kris:

**Kristofferson gets
his act together
without booze**



"Water towers" by George Sell



"Glas Architectur II" by Harriet Hyams



Abstract window design by Avidon

The stained glass boom

by SUZANNE CHARLÉ

The window was in my great aunt's house in Fort Wayne, Ind., just at the top of the first landing: a great bejeweled disk, spilling amber, emerald and ruby light into the gloom of the hallway. It was an object of wonder and no little mystery; I had never seen anything like it.

I didn't know it then, but there were probably hundreds like it, and thousands very similar, in old homes in Park Slope and Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Seattle. The Victorian burghers and their architects were fascinated with stained glass, and used it every place they could—in skylights, lamps, library doors, even kitchen cabinets. In time, that fascination passed, and stained glass was relegated to church windows and imitation Tiffany lamp shades.

Of late, stained glass has again caught people's imagination. Galleries, including Hadler, Graham,

Contemporary Art Glass, Incorporated and Makers (all of Manhattan), are showing the new glass, and the Museum of Contemporary Crafts has put together a show, "The New Stained Glass," that will be touring the country. More and more, stained glass is finding its way into private homes as panels, doors, screens, windows and autonomous works of art.

"Architects—people in general—have shied away from stained glass for a long time," says David Wilson who has designed stained glass for a number of years. "You'd say stained glass and they'd think Tiffany. That's beginning to change."

In fact, this new glass bears no resemblance to the ornate Tiffany glass—or, for that matter, to any of the styles—Victorian, art nouveau, art deco, medieval, Renaissance—traditionally associated with stained glass. The new glass reflects the diverse and eclectic trends in

modern architecture and art. Some artists shun brilliant colors in favor of emphasizing the linear quality of the lead and the textures of the various types of glass. Others, like George Sell, carry on the tradition of representational glass and extend it in remarkable ways: A stained glass panel hangs in a window and echoes the cityscape outside. Still others treat the glass as a canvas: Richard Yelle does his abstract paintings directly on the glass, while Albinas Elskus etches and paints meticulously realistic subjects—roses, bees, nudes, apples, whatever suits his fancy.

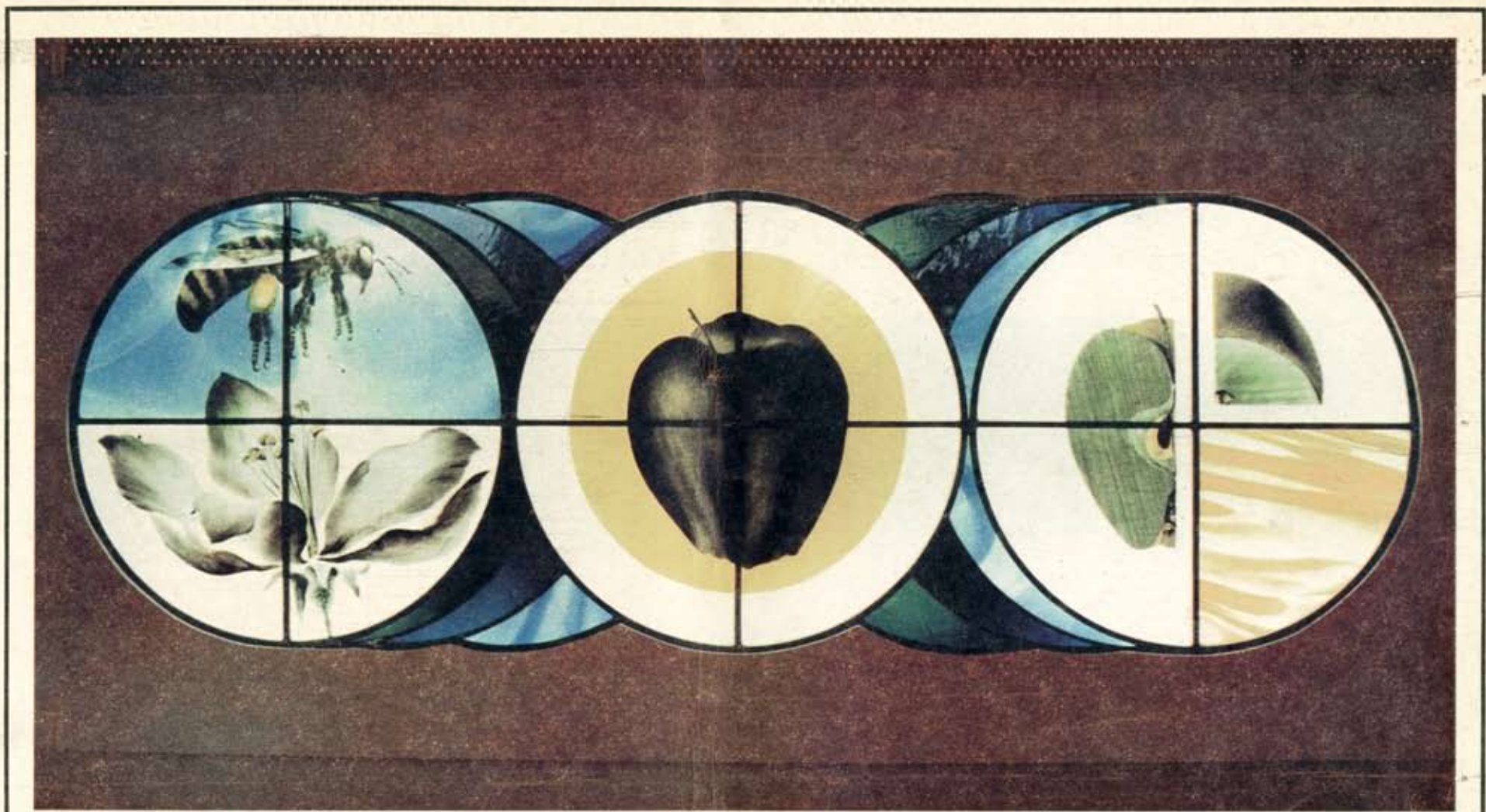
"You can do almost anything with glass," says Marni Bakst, another New York artist, and she's right. In their designs, these craftsmen use mirrors, lenses, x-rays, etching and sandblasting techniques. One is even experimenting with the effects of neon on stained glass.

In all, it's estimated that nation-

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Stained glass kitchen window by Erik Erikson



"The blossom and the bee" wall panel by Albinus Elskus

PHOTO BY ROY MORSCH

Stained glass

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wide there are 5,000 professionals working in stained glass, and an impressive number of them are in the New York area. Some, like Ray King, learned their trade in the traditional manner, working first as apprentices (in King's case, under Philadelphia's Marco Zubar and later England's Patrick Reyntiens). Most, however, backed into the field: Jerry Alexander first became interested in stained glass when, as a history major, he studied Renaissance art; George Sell, formerly a college professor, got involved when he decided to try to repair an old Tiffany lamp shade; former stockbroker Chester Gelband says one day he "saw the light" and found there was more color in glass than on Wall Street.

Although some pieces are done with no client in mind, most artists prefer to work on a commission basis.

Each project has its own demands. One of Marni Bakst's clients wanted windows, but was considering moving to a new apartment. The solution: glass shutters that could easily be removed and refitted to other windows. Robert Sowers, who designed the field-sized window in American Airlines' terminal at Kennedy Airport, faced a different problem in designing garden doors for his Italianate brownstone.

"The ceiling in the room was high, with beautiful molding," he says. "The original sliding door between the room and the foyer had a handsome etched-glass panel. I wanted a design that was contemporary and that would be able to live with the rest of the elements." He decided to laminate the glass (a process in which the pieces of glass are glued onto one large plate of clear glass, thus avoiding the need for lead). That way, Sowers explains, the doors "echoed the light quality of the etched glass." The warm palette of colors gave a friendly feeling to the room, but lightly tinted glass allowed the garden to be seen.

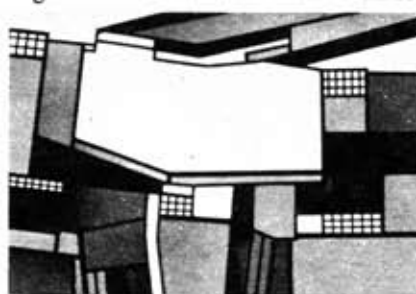
"There has to be a lot of give and take between the client and the artist," says Ray King. "One client came to me and wanted a room divider in the shape of a rainbow. I was worried: Stained glass is so beautiful that, if you're not careful, a subject like that can make the piece *too* pretty, *too* sweet." King drew up several designs and eventually hit on one that gave the feeling of a rainbow but that satisfied King's own interest in line and shape.

"That's the curious thing about stained glass—it is a medium that can actually be too beautiful," says Richard Avidon. "It's very seductive, very easy to do something that is pretty

and nothing more. What I try to accomplish in my work—I suppose what others try as well—is to harness the sunlight in an emotion-giving experience. That sounds almost mysterious. In a way, that's what stained glass is—mysterious."

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you'd like to take a deeper look at stained glass there are numerous books on its past and present. "Stained Glass: An Architectural Art" by Robert Sowers is considered by many to be the most important book on the subject. Although the book is out of print, many libraries carry it. "Stained Glass" by Lee, Seddon and Stephans is particularly good on ancient glass, while "New Glass" by Otto Rigan is a handsome introduction to



work currently being done by West Coast artists. "Ludwig Schaffrath: Stained Glass & Mosaic" is a very elegant book, imported by C & R Loo of Emeryville, Calif., that studies the work of one of the world's greatest designers.

For the person who would like to try working with stained glass, there are several helpful guides: Peter Mollica's "Stained Glass Primer," volumes one and two; Erik Erikson's "Step-by-Step Stained Glass" and Patrick Reyntiens' "The Technique of Stained Glass."

And of course, there are courses. Below are several now being offered. Most only accept a small number of students—usually no more than 12—since supervision is very important in learning the craft. Fees and schedules do change, so the reader is advised to ask for the most current information. (Unless otherwise stated, fees do not include glass.)

Durhan Studios, 115 E. 18th St., N.Y. (GR3-3500) \$70. Tuesday, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. (a new class begins every six weeks). Albinas Elskus and his partner, Paul Coulaz, teach the basics: how to cut glass, lead, solder and cement. Students work on a training panel for the first two sessions and then work on their own designs for the remainder of the course. An advanced course, covering painting, staining, etching and firing techniques, is given once or twice a year. It runs eight weeks and costs \$170.

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