

# HIGH CLASS *glass*

BY ADRIENNE BROWN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TARA WEST



There's one main misconception Kara Derksen wants to clear up: stained glass doesn't always have to have colour. In fact, Derksen loves to work with combinations of clear glass, which reflect the colours in the room in which they're featured.

That's not to say Derksen, a colourful person herself and the owner of Kara's Stained Glass, doesn't create gorgeous works of art with coloured glass, too.

"People see stained glass as old fashioned from old homes," says Derksen, "they don't see it as a modern day concept." But the pieces hanging in her workshop, plus the constant requests from local builders for one-of-a-kind pieces for their new homes, proves stained glass has a prominent place in today's décor.

One of the busiest and most popular stained glass artists in Canada (and possibly the largest producer as a single artist), Derksen creates everything from window panes to panels for transoms, candle holders, ornaments and serving dishes. No two pieces are ever the same because she makes everything by hand.



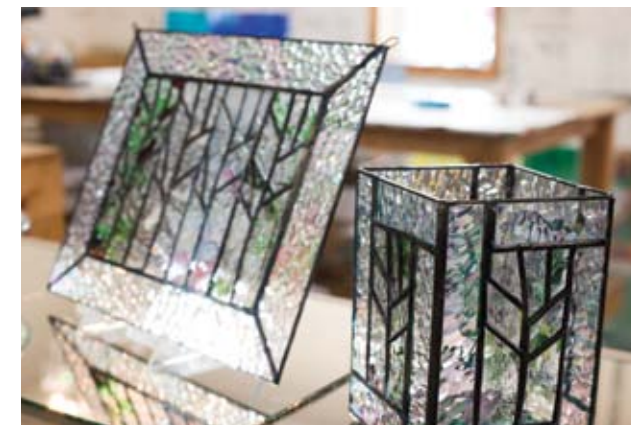
"It's a creative process that takes design time and production time, but the end result is wonderful," she says. "I love my job because it just brings such joy and light to peoples' lives." Derksen has created many custom pieces to celebrate special occasions or to remember special people. She loves to bring out everyone's story and create a unique piece of art that can be treasured forever.

Derksen started her stained glass business over 15 years ago and has expanded her studio as her business has grown. She previously put her finance degree to work in the marketing field but signed up for a stained glass class on a whim. Eight months later, she had her first gallery showing and hasn't slowed down since.

"It's been a blessing having this job," she says, pointing to the number of Friday nights she had her kids watching movies in her studio while she worked away on projects for clients. Her kids are grown now, but she still appreciates the freedom she gets from owning her own business.

In summers, she travels to Prince Edward Island to take work to galleries there and for vacation. Derksen's art is featured in galleries across the country and she tailors some of her subject matter to the different locations. This year, she's working on a coastal beach house series with starfish and bubbles that's reminiscent of the sea, perfect for the east coast.

Here at home, when new clients approach her for projects, she likes to visit them in their homes to see their colour schemes and style and get to know them so she can design something appropriate for their spaces. She



works with clients to choose the right colours and degree of translucence or opalescence, then heads back to her studio to get to work.

"Glass is a beautiful way to fracture light and bring another dimension to your home," says Derksen. "We are drawn to light. We travel for light and we decorate for light."

Many homeowners who have commissioned her for work have taken their stained glass with them when they've moved. "There are so many people I didn't realize I'd touched," she laughs, but people continue to come to her with stories about the glasswork they've found in other cities across the country and recognized as hers, about the art she's done that they treasure, and about how much joy her work has brought them in times of need. Her stained glass kaleidoscopes made with charms and trinkets tailored to the recipient's life and interests are particular stand-outs for many customers.

Visitors can also drop by Derksen's shop any time to see what she's been working on and pick up individual art pieces, which are great for gifts.

When she's not working on large panels for homes or her ever-popular candle holders, Derksen works on projects for local charities. She has made ornaments and thank-you gifts for a variety of causes, most recently a collection of delicate dragonflies gifted in appreciation to fundraisers for Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region.

Regardless of the style, meaning or purpose, Kara Derksen can make an appropriate piece of art from glass – and it will shine forever.

Where: 325 Breithaupt St., Kitchener  
519.570.7110, [www.karastainedglass.ca](http://www.karastainedglass.ca) OH