

Let stained glass glow again

By Doris Cultraro
Stained glass artist

Now that stained glass is enjoying another renaissance, it's time to shed some new light on it. Here's a 2009 resolution that stained glass owners should keep: fix, repair, restore, redo or replicate it. However you define it, something that is valuable, when not in good condition, requires your attention to bring it back to health and keep its value. If you love it that much, and it's not salvageable, you can have it again by commissioning a reputable studio or artist to replicate your treasure. Original stained glass, found in the Hudson Valley's distinctive homes, is a valuable asset that should be protected. It adds character to your home and pays homage to an art form that was an essential ingredient in home décor from the late 1800s into the early 20th century.

Stained glass was a crowning decorative achievement in the home. It became a way for owners to show their wealth, signify

welcome and create warmth that beckoned residents and guests into a hospitable place. After existing for 80 to 100 years, it's time to bring these jewels of light back to their pristine condition. They've lasted this long, and can last for another century when carefully taken care of. The jewels may be tarnished now, but don't despair. That can be remedied. Glass is a basic renewable resource. A properly restored stained glass window or lampshade will look as good as it did when it was first installed, last for many generations and once again become a focal point in your home.

First and most importantly, find a reputable studio with experienced craftspeople that will provide you with options and guide you towards the best solution for your stained glass. Be advised that most repairs, in order to be performed properly, must be done in the studio. However, there are several "stop-gap" options available if the damage is not too bad. Eventually,

a trip to the studio will probably be required.

Listed below are a few common problems that affect stained glass windows and will ultimately result in their failure. By correcting them early on, (it is more cost effective if you do so) you can help your windows stay in good shape and not deteriorate. By doing nothing, you may lose a valuable asset of your home and decrease its 'charm' value when it's time to consider selling. It's better to fix them now and enjoy them for years to come. Survey your stained glass windows or pieces for damage. Here's what to look for:

- Glass that is broken, cracked or missing
- Lead or solder around the glass that is damaged or pushed back from the glass
- Lead or solder joints that are broken or missing
- Lead that is either lacking waterproofing putty or flaking-off
- Support bars or wires holding lead that are separating from the window
- Windows that are either bowing or bulging
- Spaces between the glass and lead that are visible
- Window frames that are in poor condition
- Windows that are poorly seated in their frames
- Caulk or putty that has deteriorated around the windows
- Previous bad repairs that were only a temporary stop-gap measure
- Windows that have been either taped up for years or covered with cardboard that is starting to deteriorate

If you can say yes to any of these problems, you should consult a professional stained glass artist. He or she will not only discuss your options for repair or restoration, but also provide you with an estimate, a summary of your stained glass' condition and an appropriate scope of work. If you can bring your item to the studio or e-mail photos of your problem, he or she might be able to provide you with information and an estimate on the spot. Otherwise, the cost of the site visit and consultation, which usually lasts about an hour, will be credited back to you when you decide to go ahead with the repair. There is a lot to consider and getting the correct advice from an expert is essential. This is not a job for a hobbyist.

Once you make the decision to proceed with the repair or restoration in the studio, your window is carefully removed, a photo record is made and all the pieces are numbered. When a window is removed, a protective board with glass or plywood is installed. Measurements are taken, and a rubbing is created to match the design. This becomes the roadmap to put the pieces back together exactly as they were... The window may be partially or totally disassembled depending on the extent of the problem.

The old glass is salvaged and cleaned, old putty and lead are removed. Any new glass that is needed will be matched and new pattern pieces will be cut to fit into the window. Because old lead is a hazardous material, it will not be used again and must be discarded of properly. The new lead used today is stronger than what was originally used 100 years ago. The cleaned glass pieces are carefully matched and fitted into new lead channels, then soldered on both sides and

weatherproofed with putty. On re-installation day, your stained glass window will sparkle and glow just as it did when it was originally installed. It will once again be the crowning jewel beckoning welcome to your home and creating a beautiful warm glow.

Stained glass continues to be a desirable decorative element, and has many uses in new homes as well as older homes. Purchases of "older windows" can be made from antique stores, through auctions, estate sales and even be inherited... and refitted for their new environment. These windows usually require some repair and might be acquired at a fraction of their original cost. That's the bargain! The repair or retrofitting costs, to bring the stained glass back to excellent condition and fit into your environment, is well worth the cost, considering how long these windows will last. Their value will increase and your investment will be well served.

These recycled glass gems can be used for sidelights, door inserts, as feature windows at stair landings, in bathrooms, kitchens, cabinet doors, as room dividers, decorative stationary glass panels, entryways, or any place where glass is an option. If you repair what you have, or commission something new, stained glass provides a dynamic focal point in a room that will add sparkle and warmth to your home.

Stained glass is a living accent. Activated by sunlight or subdued by dimming light at the end of the day, the vibrant colors can appear jewel-like, dancing on the walls or spreading across a room. Towards dusk, the colors will become subdued. As daylight diminishes, the more delicate colors come forward sending those deeper color tones into the background. Artificial light within a room also affects the glass –

especially when viewed from the outside. Your stained glass becomes illuminated and welcomes people to your home like a beacon.

Here are some contemporary stained glass applications that can be taken with you. Lampshades are always transportable. Panels can be framed in wood and hung in front of an existing window.

Glass can be inserted into wood shutters. Kitchen cabinets can be upgraded with one beautiful sheet of glass to replace plain clear glass, if a design is not wanted. A little glass redo can breathe new life into a tired room.

Even though the weather is cold, let the sun shine in and make that decision to take care of your older stained glass windows, or perhaps, commission something new to add beauty and warmth to your existing residence — be it a lampshade, a window panel or room accent.

Whatever you have now, make sure that your visually inspect you stained glass at least once a year to make sure that it is in good health and will continue to give you years of pleasure!

Editor's Note:
Doris Cultraro, a stained glass artist, is the owner of DC Studios LLC, a full service stained glass studio located in Rhinebeck that specializes in both new custom work and expert restoration and repair services. She has been involved with stained glass since 1975 and has taught her craft at the Pelham Art Center and the Katonah Museum of Art. For more information about her upcoming classes or services, call Cultraro at 845.876.3200. Visit her company's Web site at www.dcstudiosllc.com for more examples of her commissions and restoration work.

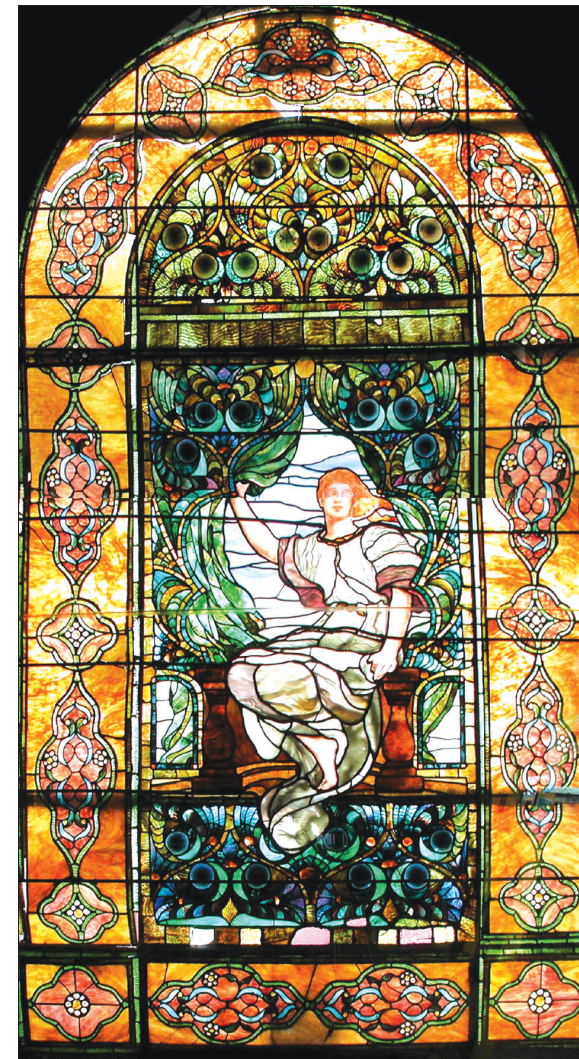


Photo courtesy of Doris Cultraro

The Tiffany-like figural window shown above (which is 10' H x 6' W) is a wonderful example of a magnificent panel that once graced a mansion in Tarrytown at the turn of the (19th) century. Prior to the buildings' demolition, the window was salvaged. It was later installed in another residence during the 1960s. Today, there are numerous problems: daylight showing, poor earlier repairs, broken and missing lead and putty, mismatched glass, failed support bars, and serious bowing. After five decades of no maintenance, it is currently being fully restored at our studio. The detailed images to the right show some of the problems listed in the checklist on the previous page, along with a repaired section.



Photo courtesy of Doris Cultraro
Broken glass with detached wire tie.



Photo courtesy of Doris Cultraro
Missing glass, separation from lead.

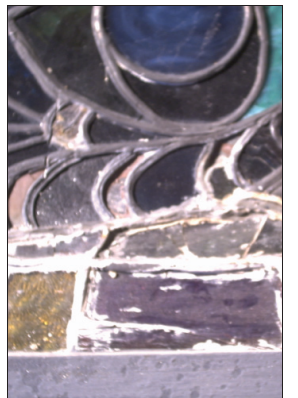


Photo courtesy of Doris Cultraro
Poor replacement glass, glued repair.



Photo courtesy of Doris Cultraro
Restored arch panel detail.

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