

OCTOBER 2004 ~~\$3.50~~  
COMPLIMENTARY

# *Nowveau*

Delaware Valley



**THE ART OF  
CRAFTING A HOME**

**GLASS VASES**

**THE SINGULAR  
BEAUTY OF  
HANDCRAFTED ART**

**A SHOWCASE FOR CREATIVE LIVING  
IN THE DELAWARE VALLEY**

a flow, a balance; it's movement, it dances. It's beautiful," Geoff remarks.

Customers obviously delight in being part of the process. "I have to interpret what people want and what they like, so it's as if there is a piece of each customer in every design," Karen says. The pair also creates stained-glass windows for nonresidential structures and is currently fabricating and installing twelve Bible-themed windows for a church in Ewing, NJ. The cost of the stained-glass and hand-beveled windows is based on the complexity of the panel or window design and on the amount of beveling, calculated by the square foot and by the inch, respectively.

"People really like our craft in a spiritual sense," Karen reflects. "They find what we do comforting; it looks very idyllic. It com-

forts them to know that there are people out there doing this."

Geoff adds, "I think there is great truth in Tiffany's idea: People should surround themselves with beautiful things"—just the job for glass, light and the Caldwells. ♥



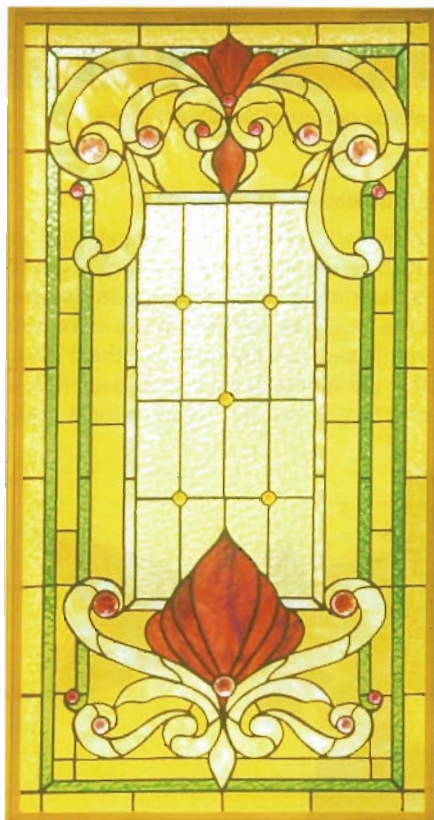
## Fishing for Art...A plunge into the world of decoys reveals an array of treasures.

by Linn H. Jeffries

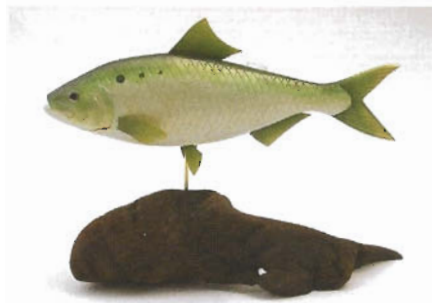
**W**hen is a fish not a fish? When it's a functioning decoy, of course. Or a work of art.

The diminutive sculptures carved by Rich Brooks are both.

Why fish? The word *decoy* usually accompanies the word *duck*. "But," says Rich, who lives in Langorne, PA, "I've always been a fisherman, never a hunter." And the fact is, the use of fish decoys dates back at least a thousand years. When the first settlers had made the trek to the wilderness that would become Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin, the native Chippewa peoples kindly taught them the trick of spearing fish through holes



Classical curliques window in opalescence and tinted muffle glass; 22" x 38"



American Shad decorative carving on driftwood



Carver Rich Brooks displays his decorative and working decoys at the Shad Festival in Lambertville, NJ.

chopped into the ice of frozen lakes. To attract their prey, the Chippewa used decoys. Theirs were simple, but effective; the settlers took the concept to a more creative level and added paint and precise carving. Today, fish decoys have become a form of folk art collected by many, and they're even used by some to catch fish.

### A Blue-ribbon Traditionalist

Enthusiasts hold annual competitions in which decoys are judged, and Rich is one of the stars of these competitions; in the past seven years he has won more than 130 awards and ribbons, many of them blue. How did he reach such a pinnacle? As a teen, he was a painter. Then he spent near-



Lake Trout working decoy on walnut stand



**Brook Trout working decoy on walnut stand**

ly three decades working with wood and leather as a hobby while attending to a business career in which he put his abilities as a graphic artist and writer to use in marketing and sales. About two years ago, Rich decided he'd had enough of the corporate world. His son, Marc, was an adult, and his wife, Rita, was still working in the medical field, so he quit. "I don't make as much money now, but I also don't have anywhere near as much stress," he says happily. "In fact, the actual carving of the fish is a meditation." The painting, however, requires total focus. He uses artists' brushes and oil paints (sometimes acrylics), but never uses an airbrush, and he carves the pieces using chisels and knives. "I'm something of a caveman," he observes. "I prefer traditional techniques and materials to machines."

Rich uses white cedar and white pine and occasionally such hardwoods as black walnut, red cedar or butternut. The latter he leaves untouched by paint so the natural grain will show clearly: "It's amazing how similar the lines are. Wood grains must have been designed for the carving of fish!" Even on a painted piece, the grain shows through, and so do the knife marks, as he rarely sands the wood. "If you're a good carver, there's no need for sanding. Also, I want it to be obvious that the decoys are wood, not plastic."

Another textural element is the paint. He likes to apply it thickly and tells of the broad smile of a blind boy upon holding one of the fish. "He was able to appreciate

the texture better than the people who can see them," Rich says.

### **Not Just a Pretty Face**

Along with its beauty, a fish decoy is also judged on the way it acts in the water, for in order to attract his dinner, the fisherman must attach a line to brass loops on the decoy's back and swim the decoy in a circle beneath the surface of the ice. Rich endows his decoys with swimability by drilling a slot in the belly of the fish, inserting steel shot, and closing the hole with epoxy filler. Et voilà—kinetic sculpture!

Decoys range from being precisely representational of a particular species to being pure folk art. Rich is fond of biologically correct portrayals, but he loves to use his imagination. "I've always been drawn in that direction," he says. "Even when I'm painting a realistic fish, I'm inclined to let creativity take over. It's a means of self-expression and it honors the tradition of folk art. Each artist develops a recognizable style and with it a certain amount of celebrity status. The most collectible folk art fish decoys can sell for as much as \$20,000."

### **The Joy of Fish**

Who could have predicted where it would lead when Rich started collecting *duck* decoys twenty years ago? "Rich's decoys are amazingly popular," notes Peter Errico, co-owner of Riverbank Arts in Stockton, NJ. And at Canal Frame-Crafts Gallery in Washington Crossing, PA, owner Deborah Crow liked Rich's work immediately because it's unusual, interesting and superb in quality. "He's so enthusiastic, you can tell he loves what he does."

It's not everyone who can turn a pleasurable hobby into a success, but Rich Brooks is one of the fortunate few. "After twenty-five years in the corporate world, I'm now finding life to be thoroughly enjoyable," he says gratefully. And as his sunfish and shad minnows swim into the hearts of the people who take them home, their lives become a bit more joyful, too. ♥