

LOVE AT FIRST LIGHT

BY MARY CATHERINE COOLIDGE PHOTOS BY KATHRYN BRASS



**“THE MOST IMPORTANT
THING IN MY LIFE IS LOVE,
AND EVERY DAY YOU MUST
DO WHAT YOU LOVE.”
—CHANTALE LANGLOIS**

When you walk through the door of the Design in Glass shop on South Pineapple Avenue in Sarasota, the first thing you notice is color – you see it with your eyes, you absorb it into your senses. After a few minutes of moving through the shop, looking at gorgeously rendered objects d’art, you notice that you are feeling inexplicably soothed and energized at the same time.

Owned by Chantale Langlois, the shop is a showcase for her personal artistic expression in custom fused, carved, etched, and stained glass. And what you find at Design in Glass on any given day will often be different from any other day. The inventory

changes frequently, which is why customers and clients tend to drop by on a regular basis – to check out what’s au courant in the mind of Langlois.

A member of the Suncoast Glass Guild and the Corning Museum of Glass in New York, Langlois’ work and reputation bring her clients either by word-of-mouth or more often, simply by their passing by her storefront window. It’s hard to not be drawn in by the color-filled simplicity of her window displays while strolling down South Pineapple Avenue in the Burns Court District. And once inside, casual shoppers frequently turn into serious clients with big projects.

Everywhere one looks throughout the shop, an object of inspiration, beauty, and often, functionality, rests on a shelf, on the floor, on a wall. Everything from fantastically stylish letter openers for the discriminating desk, to one-of-a-kind candelabras, luminous tiles for kitchen or bath, light-catching jewelry, lustrous lamps, tables, unique wall hangings. Color-rich figurines – aloof felines, charming frogs, mysterious starfish, and lucky ladybugs – are sprinkled ubiquitously around the shop. And with prices ranging from \$30 to \$3,000, there’s bound to be something perfect for every pocketbook.

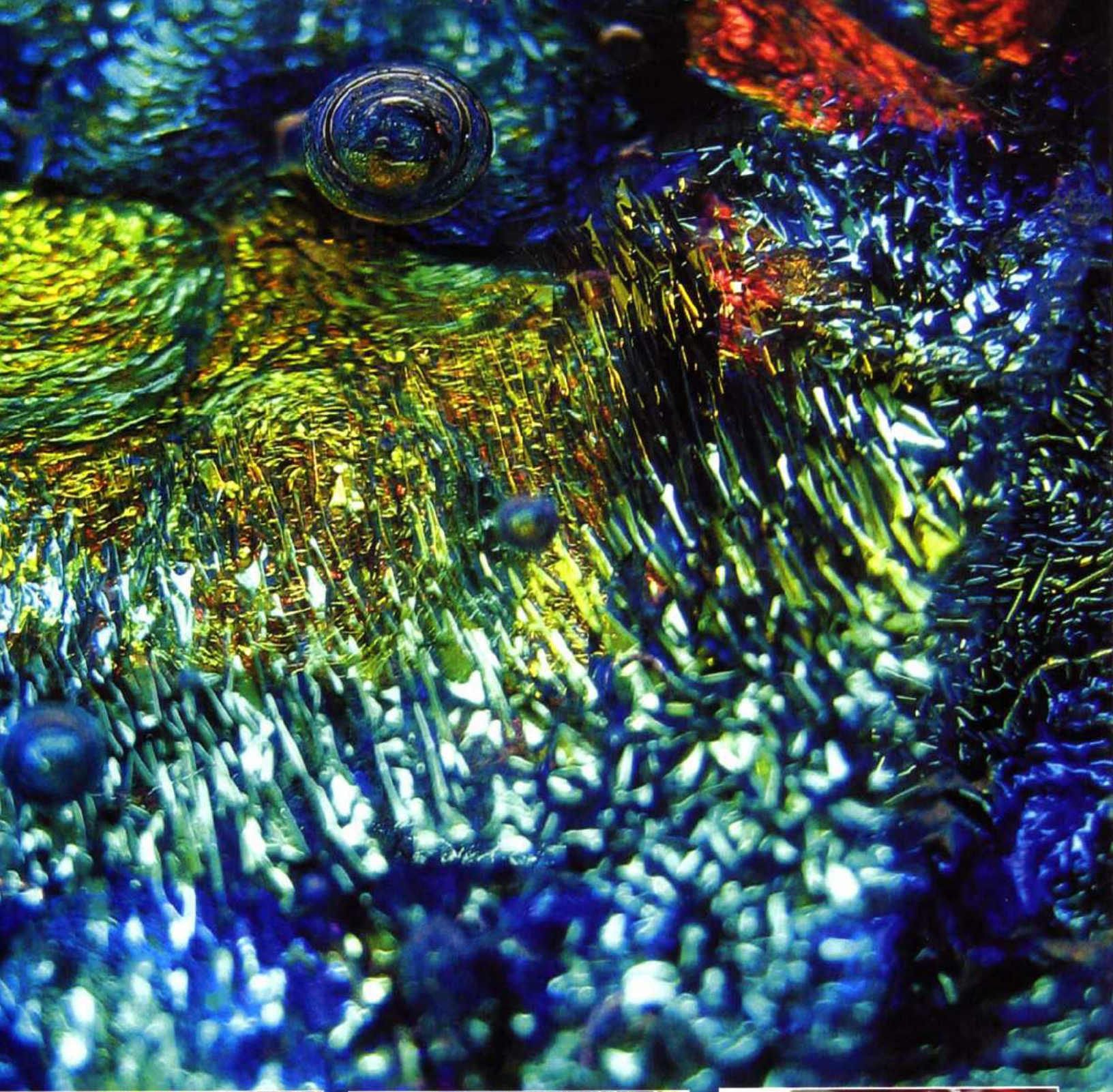
In addition to being a showcase for her own work, the Design in Glass shop houses Langlois’ studio in the rear of the store. And although most of the work on display is something she created, there are intriguing items by other glass artisans whose artistry Langlois admires.

Constantly on the lookout for beautiful glass, Langlois welcomes the opportunity to offer the work of other craftspeople, but she only offers items she feels passionate about. “If I like, I buy,” she says. Particularly, “blown glass or sand-cast [glass],” she says, because “that’s something I don’t do.”

So what exactly does Langlois do? “I play with glass everyday,” she says, laughing – making it clear that she doesn’t view her work as simply a job – it’s a joy.

And that joy is evident not simply in the rich diversity of gorgeous colors streaming through glass of all shapes and sizes – although that in itself is calming and inspiring, it’s evident in the quality of energy in the room – a thrumming undercurrent of vibrancy that is felt, even if it’s not seen.

With any artist – Beethoven with his music, Pollock with his paintings, Dickinson with her poems – the essence of the artistic outcome is energy. Energy from the artist into the art, and energy from the art out into the world. With really good art, that energy doesn’t just flow in one direction. Ideally, it flows from the world – the audience, the client, the buyer – back into the art and back to the artist in a synergistic flow of creation. In a consistent fusion of





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experience. In other words ... fused energy.

And "fused energy" is precisely the phrase Langlois uses to describe her work — which basically consists of melting, or fusing, layers of glass together in a kiln following a mold she creates herself.

Langlois does a lot of custom contract work for clients — not just in Sarasota, but throughout southwest Florida and beyond. Her custom work is installed in some of the loveliest homes in Sarasota, including private residences at the Ritz Tower and single-family homes on Casey Key, in downtown condominiums in Naples and Boca Grande, and in homes as far away as Martha's Vineyard and Oklahoma.

Typically, Langlois makes an initial visit to a home to talk with the client and get a feel for the client's needs. She takes photographs and then heads back to her studio to mull things over and let ideas begin to take shape. Oftentimes, clients don't know exactly what they want to do — they just know they want to fill a space or enhance an existing area, and they want it to be fabulous.

Where others might simply see a "hole in the wall," Langlois can envision just the right glass installation that will transform a lackluster aspect of a home into a lustrous one that illuminates and complements the homeowner's existing décor and interior design with the "fused energy" of light, love, and beauty.

A client might present her with a problem — for

example, a front door area that has become passé, which might be redesigned into a stunning entranceway with sculptured glass framing the doorway. Or a mundane skylight in a bathroom might be made over into a shimmering portal that entices its owner to feel expansively relaxed while soaking in a warm bath.

Basically, Langlois says, if a client has a need or a void in their home — a space that is ugly, boring, or just needs to be filled — she can conceive and implement a design that not only matches the rest of the home's interior and architectural design sentiment, but also expresses the client's sensibilities.

It's not all about just feeling good, though. Langlois takes her craft seriously and imbues her art with high form and function. Her in-home custom glass designs can run anywhere from \$3,000 to \$20,000.

Langlois took a circuitous route to glass work. While attending interior design school in Canada, she serendipitously happened upon a Tiffany lamp store while out shopping one day

That chance encounter with beautiful glass lamp fixtures led Langlois to begin studying and working as an assistant at the workshop of Les Artisans du Vitrail at the Économusée in Québec City's Limoilou district. The artistry of "vitrail" (which means "stained glass" in French) is a craft that dates back to the Middle Ages. It was at this studio that Langlois honed both her craft and her passion for fusing glass into shimmering objects of both décor and function.

A Quebecoise by birth, Langlois has been living in Sarasota for eight years. She originally came to the area with the intention of staying for just three months. Her plan was to study and learn English, because — as she says, "In the glass world, everything is in English."

She rented a place on Lido Beach, thinking she'd pick up English in a snap and then return to Québec. She soon found that learning English takes just a wee bit longer than three months, and eight years later, she's still here. Her English, now fluent, is still charmingly enriched with a lovely Québec accent and the occasional sentence oddities. ("I was having frustration" instead of "I was frustrated" for example.)

She may have brought her passion for glasswork with her to Sarasota from Québec, but she found something here that had eluded her in Canada — true love. She's not only found her life's creative passion in working with glass and running her own studio and shop, she also met





and married her husband here in Sarasota.

In fact, she says, it is her husband who helped her achieve her dream of establishing a studio and shop for her glass art. She opened the shop with the help of her husband on Valentine's Day 2004. "It was my dream, and he supported my dream," Langlois says. "Without him, I would not have all of this," she adds, gesturing toward the shop.

In addition to the studio that is located in the back of the shop, Langlois has a much larger studio just a couple of blocks away. Eventually, she'd like to have the entire Pineapple location be storefront, so she could expand her in-shop offerings and work exclusively out of that larger studio. Longer-term, she would like to bring on in-house metal and woodworkers so she can work collaboratively with other skilled craftspeople.

For now, though, she says she's simply thrilled

to have the opportunity to do something every day that she absolutely loves – to "play" with glass.

"The most important thing in my life is love," Langlois says, adding, "and every day you must do what you love."

For Langlois, the journey that started with a chance visit to a Tiffany lamp store has led her to a life filled with passion – for a new career, a new country, a new language, and a wonderful husband.

Clearly a case of love...at first light.

CHANTALE LANGLOIS DESIGN IN GLASS

417 SOUTH PINEAPPLE AVE.

☎ 365.6525