

Living in Glass Houses

By Charles Cumpston

Increasingly glass is being utilized inside residences as well as outside.

"Glass is being used in a wider variety of ways than ever before in residential applications," states Joel Berman, whose company Joel Berman Glass Studios is located in Vancouver. "Textured glass in particular is finding its way into the home in a number of unique ways including: interior and exterior doors, showers, vanity tops and doors, shelves, partitions, flooring (glass tiles), balustrades, stair treads, canopies, tables and more. Glass can

function in any surface application," he explains.

Eugene Negrin, owner of Galaxy Glass & Stone in Fairfield, N.J., agrees.

"We are seeing a dramatic up tick of frameless shower enclosures with textures, colors and patterns," he states.

"There are also interior partitions with artwork, custom laminated glass staircases and floors, again with decoration. Mirrors continue to be fairly strong with an increased interest in custom-silvered antique mirror," he adds.



Consumers are looking for comfort, safety and reduced operating costs for their homes and the glass industry has provided products which enable windows to satisfy those needs.

Function and the demand for new design are among the primary driving forces behind the use of glass in the home.

Tim Czechowski, co-founder and co-owner of Artwork in Architectural Glass, which has offices in Good Hope, Ga., and Newport Beach, Calif., also mentions the increasing use of glass floors in residences. "Glass flooring on a whole is very popular in commercial environments, and designers are using it in homes to increase daylighting—to brighten areas under stairs, decks or floors," he explains.

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Glass and mirror can be used to create a high-tech look, popular with many consumers.



Glass is being utilized in a variety of ways in every room in the house to make unique design statements.

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The Driver

What is driving this increased use of glass?

Fred Wallin, who heads up marketing for Kingsport, Tenn. based glass manufacturer AFG Industries Inc., makes the point that consumers are looking for comfort, safety and reduced operating costs for their homes. "Glass offers a myriad of options for meeting these needs," he explains. "It doesn't hurt that the federal and state governments are doing everything possible to minimize the growth rate of energy consumption," he adds.

"Function and the demand for new design are among the primary driving forces behind the use of glass in the home," states Berman. "Moreover, design is valued higher than it has been in the past. Changing demographics are also having an influence. The Baby Boomers are aging and are transferring their wealth to the next generation. That generation has an increased appreciation for design."

In Negrin's opinion, demand is being driven "by a combination of the design professional and our offering these professionals choices of products and continual education of available possibilities."

Big Building Boom

It's good times for professionals in the architectural glass and glazing industry. A more than year-long boom in big building projects, especially in the high-rise residential market, is changing skylines in cities across the country and keeping glazing subcontractors and fabricators busy.


"Big buildings are booming in our area," reported Jeff Haber, one of four managing partners of Nanuet, N.Y. based W & W Glass LLC, the largest glass and glazing subcontractor in the New York City area and one of the largest in the U.S. "There is still an insatiable demand for all glass towers, specifically residential condos in our area." He added, "There is a slowdown in some cities but not here. Last year at this time, the quantity of projects was plentiful but the quality wasn't there. Now, the quantity is less but the projects are of a higher quality, which makes for a better situation."

Arthur Berkowitz, president of J.E. Berkowitz LLP in Westville, N.J., also sees growth in this area. "Over the past several years, with the improving commercial/architectural markets, we have seen a significant amount of demand for our insulating glass coated-glass products, for larger/monumental projects, that we define as being in excess of 100,000 square feet," he said. "To handle them successfully, it requires a combination of in-house personnel, experienced in architectural promotion, project management, technical services, and quality assurance, along with the fabrication capacity, especially challenging in both IG, and heat-treating. In addition, our focus on higher quality standards, particularly in heat-treating optics, and flatness, allows us to meet or exceed the critical tolerances and specifications associated with projects of this magnitude."

The story is the same along the West coast. "We're very busy with large building projects across the country and especially here in our West Coast region," stated Mike McConnell, manager preconstruction services, from Enclos Corp.'s Pleasanton, Calif. office.

"This has always been our niche and primary focus," McConnell added. "The cyclical nature of the industry definitely changed in the last year or so. This year the high-rise residential market has really taken off and is keeping us very busy. The office building market slowed due to vacancy rates, but we expect it to rebound in the near future."

"In the meantime," McConnell said, "we'll continue to step up to the challenges brought about by a healthy boom in the market."




In this outdoor application, glass was utilized to surround a firepit.

Berman echoes this, counseling designers to “use your imagination. Anything is possible,” he states.

Negrin advises, “Deal with a qualified glass professional who has a proven track record of consistently and successfully producing and supplying specialty decorative work and products. One good example of a problem that could be created through inexperience in custom decorative glass would be in the manufacture of “antique” hand-silvered mirror. According to Negrin, “The mirror may be what the design professional wants; however, if it is not supplied with an adhesive that is compatible with the more sensitive paint on the back of the mirror than machine-produced mirrors, there could be possible damage to the silver with “spots” bleeding through the mirror which would require replacement of the order.”

Wallin offers this advice. “AIA offers a variety of glass courses for credit which will provide the design professional with a good understanding of how to use fenestration products to the best advantage of their design creativeness and their clients’ pocket-book. The Web sites of AFG along with our primary glass competitors can also be helpful in understanding the products (aesthetics and performance) available,” he states.

It all adds up to increased use of glass in the home and satisfied consumers. **AG**



Glass plays a key role in the tight airiness of this room.