

# “Glass jam”

A community celebration of friendship and glass

By

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As I approached David (Dave) McDermott’s home and Glass Studio in Sandwich, Massachusetts on Cape Cod two years ago, the driveway was packed with as many cars parked as would fit. After looking around for a while I spotted the last open space and squeezed my car in.

The short walk to Dave’s Studio behind his house was lined with tree stumps, each serving as a pedestal for an experimental blown vessel. Dave’s back yard was like an outdoor gallery with glass vessels in all shapes and colors on display in the sunlight.

Warmth enveloped me as I opened the studio door and friends turned to say “hello” and invite me in. Everyone that entered the studio received a big “HELLO” from all the others in the group. My first impression was that the warmth I felt on walking in came from the glass furnaces; but soon I realized that the warm feeling came from the friendliness of the people gathered inside of the studio.

Dave McDermott is a master glassblower, having worked at Pairpoint Glass for twenty-five years. In 2002, Dave married Yukimi Matsumoto, a formally trained artist and glass blower from Japan, left Pairpoint and set up his own glass studio. His brother helped him build a spacious building behind his house and Dave installed ovens and furnaces he built himself.

McDermott Glass was open for business. Shortly after lighting the fires, Dave and Yukimi invited their glass-working friends to come to an open house in celebration of their new studio. On the day of the open house, more than twenty friends were present. Attendance included many fine Massachusetts’s glass artists, including Mike Magyar, Billy Mayher, Ed Poore, Owen Dodge, Charles Kaziun, Jr., Robbie Mason, among others. Don Parkinson, the head of the glass studio at the Sandwich Glass Museum also

came. Dave invited his other friends, Paul Noyes a woodworker and John Gonella a welder/sculptor. People connected with the glass field like the curator of the Sandwich Glass Museum and several art glass dealers also came. It was a very interesting mix of talents and knowledge.

Dave gave his visitors a tour of the new studio with furnaces and glory holes blazing. At the end of the tour, Dave looked around at all of the versatile glass artists. Here we were, knowing how to make fantastic things just staring at his equipment. No one was making anything. In a spontaneous act of generosity, Dave invited all the artists to use his equipment and work together on anything they wanted to make.

At first, we were all a bit shy because most of us had never worked together. What's more, each artist was a master in a different technique or style of glass art. However, being true glass lovers we picked up tools and began working. A good number of us were very experienced glass artists in our own disciplines of glass so we worked together seamlessly. Even Dave's dog Chico walked gingerly among us as we worked. Everyone worked together so smoothly.

As we worked, we talked casually about what we could all do together. We also did a great deal of laughing, often teasing each other in good spirit. One artist was a flame worker, another was a glass blower, over there someone could make a great goblet, and over here someone else could blow a perfect vessel. By combining talents in an improvised way, like a jazz jam session, we created great new designs and had fun too. This was the birth of the "glass jam," an unexpected collaborative effort between glass-working friends.

When lunchtime came Dave and Yukimi put some hot dogs and hamburgers on the grill and served a big salad. They also had light refreshments and chips. We all sat around outside and enjoyed our picnic together, eating, talking and laughing. We shared our experiences in the glass world and traded stories. When lunch ended, we went back into the studio to create more works in glass. This time, however, we used chalk to work out the design of the next object we were going to make on the concrete floor.

One of the first pieces some of us made together was a pedestal bowl with an encased flame work design in the pedestal. The flame work

consisted of a snake, which I made, and a flame worked flower by Charles Kaziun, Jr. Charles and I coached Dave through the encasement of our flame work design. Once Dave encased the flame work, Dave and his wife Yukimi blew a glass bowl and then joined the bowl to the pedestal to finish the piece.

While we were working on the pedestal bowl, on the other side of the studio Mike Magyar and Billy Mayer flame worked a dragon and encapsulated it in a vessel which they blew. Then Owen Dodge blew a vessel and applied a floral design to the exterior. Others made excellent goblets with beautiful and interesting designs. Dave's assistant, Miss Maki Mizutani, a visiting glass artist from Japan, assisted Dave, Yukimi and others in making several additional art glass vessels.

Toward the end of the day, we had all had such a terrific time that a glassblower, Michelle McGuire, suggested, "Why don't we do this again?" Immediately David agreed that we should. We all decided to gather again, and Michelle coined the name "glass jam" which has stuck for our group's get togethers. On the spot we planned the next glass jam to be held several months later at the end of the summer.

Everyone agreed that the next meal should be potluck so that Dave and Yukimi would not have to supply all the food and refreshments. They were graciously supplying the studio, glass and fuel. We also decided that we would spread the word about the next glass jam by e-mail to invite other friends who might enjoy it.

Our second glass jam attracted about 25 people including a new mix of talents and expertise. The word was spreading. We had a buffet style lunch that now included, chips, veggies, hot meatballs and sauce, cold cuts and buns for sandwiches, several salads, and deserts such as my home made brownies (with plenty of nuts). Participants brought soda for everyone and bottles of water; toward the end of the day's Glass jam Dave bought a large container of Dunkin Donuts coffee for everybody.

Some artists brought their own tools to the second glass jam. Ed Poore brought a copper wheel-engraving machine. I brought my flame working tools. With our own tools we could expand the techniques we used in Dave's studio. This led artists to give little demonstrations of techniques of interest to others in the group. Ed Poore engraved some goblets; I made some flame

worked parts and showed how to make a flame worked flower and leaves. Onlookers (especially a few glass collectors who had found their way to our glass jam) suggested what they would like to see us create and the artists obliged their requests. All artists had opportunities to demonstrate their chosen techniques and styles of work. Everyone worked in a spirit of generosity and sharing.

Dave showed several new glass artists including Monte McGuire, how to make perfect goblets and coached their efforts. Says Michelle McGuire an aspiring glass artist:

*“Dave encourages everyone, even those of us with only a couple of years of experience (but a passion for glass), to contribute alongside those with twenty to thirty years of experience. Dave is very generous with tips and techniques and demo’s for the less experienced...he takes us under his wings and challenges us to push the boundaries of our skills.”*

Even with Dave McDermott’s helpful instruction for those who needed it, the focus of the glass jam still remained on artistic collaboration and fun. The surprising benefit of the session was that we all learned how well we got along with each other beyond glass working. We really were birds of a feather.

All the glass we made during the glass jam was annealed in Dave’s large kiln. He saves the work made during each session and puts it on display the next time we gather, so that everyone can see it. The artists let Dave keep all work made at each glass jam.

After several glass jams, the year-end holidays came along and someone suggested that we should have our first annual glass jam Christmas party. We reserved a room at a nice restaurant across the street from Dave’s studio and held our first Christmas party there with Dave, Yukimi and Maki as our guests of honor. We all had a wonderful time together, and planned our next glass jam during desert.

Since then we have held a glass jam roughly every three months. The number of friends has steadily grown so that now about 40 people attended the last gathering – and stayed for some or all of the day. People come and go as they wish. The buffet has expanded to include a terrific variety of delicious food choices with plenty for all who come. The potluck hot meal

has expanded to include delicious lasagnas and other delectable foods. Deserts included cakes, cookies, and boxes of chocolates.

Dave now has a collection of assorted work we have all made together during our glass jams. He is proud of every piece and shows them off with a sense of great accomplishment to all visitors to his studio. Each piece represents a moment of time spent with and among friends.

In their art careers, most artists strive to make great work and have it recognized by the greater community of glass art lovers. To anyone who looks at David McDermott's work, it is obvious that he has achieved mastery of glass in this sense. Very few artists in their careers, however, can claim to have created and inspired a whole community of art glass lovers through a generous spirit of sharing everything they have to offer. David and Yukimi McDermott have now accomplished this higher goal.

Word is spreading; our last Glass jam was featured the next day in a front-page article and pictorial spread in the "Cape Cod Times." The glass jam continues to grow, educate the community and expand interest in art glass. It is exciting to think of future possibilities and great collaborations and ideas that David Mc Dermott has enabled through the generous spirit, which his glass jams create.

Debbie Tarsitano 2005







