

CLEARLY

BEAUTIFUL

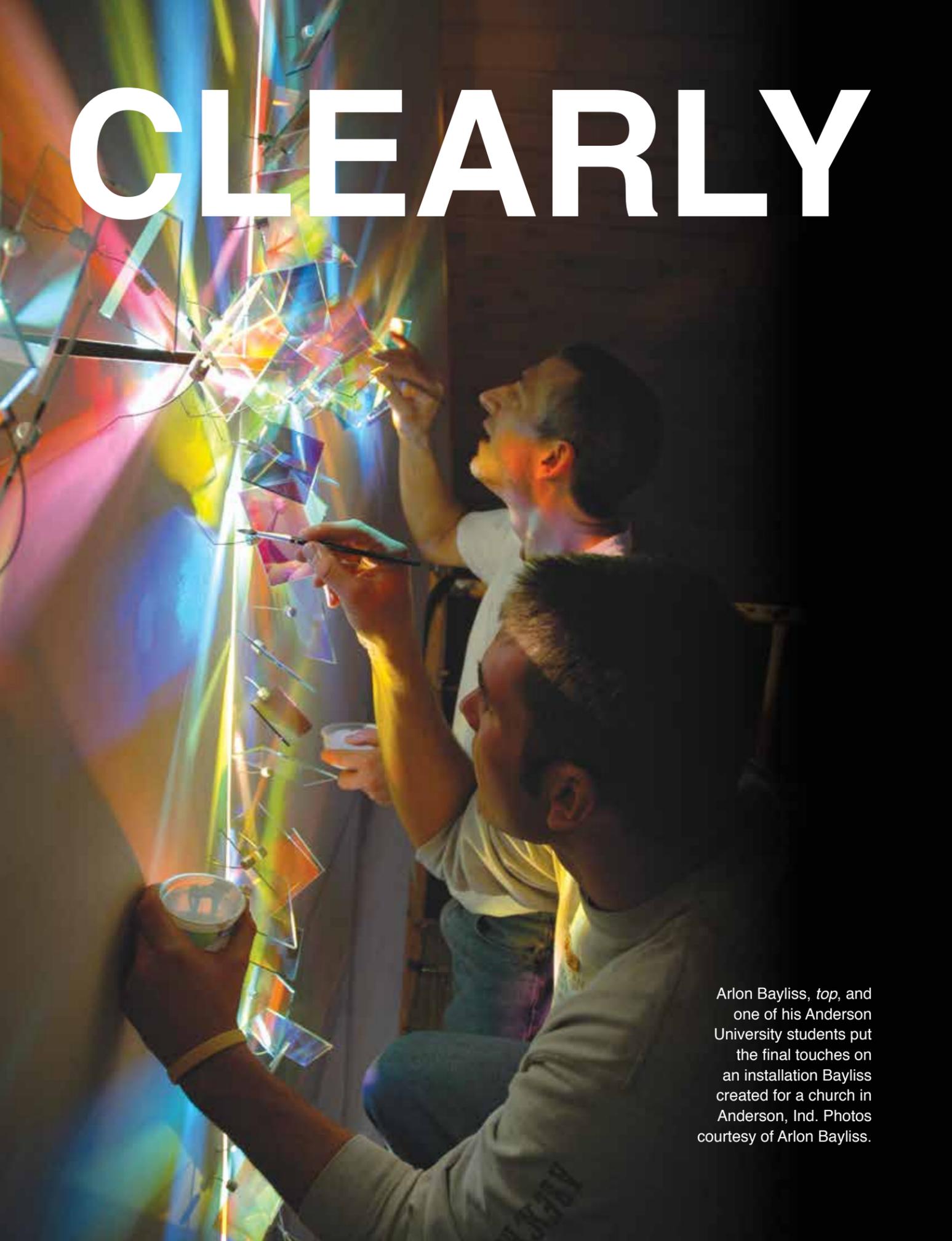
Arlon Bayliss creates art-glass projects both large and small.

STORY AND INTERVIEW BY
SUSAN K. ELLIOTT

Arlon Bayliss will tell you that a glass artist seldom works alone. From his earliest days studying at the Royal College of Art in London, to his stint as a guest artist for more than a decade at Rosenthal Glass and Porcelain in Germany, he has learned that collaboration brings the best results. Now, as design director for Blenko Glass in West Virginia, as well as a professor of art and design at Anderson University in Indiana, he creates monumental outdoor and large-scale indoor installations as well as smaller art-glass pieces.

In his sculptural work, Bayliss engages with members of his community and teams of his graduates and students to develop, fabricate, and install his work.

Continued on the next page



Arlon Bayliss, *top*, and one of his Anderson University students put the final touches on an installation Bayliss created for a church in Anderson, Ind. Photos courtesy of Arlon Bayliss.



"I tell a lot of people, there's nobody else in the world [who] gets to do what I do, and what a privilege that is," Arlon Bayliss says.



Above: Bayliss sometimes likes to wrap his glassware pieces with “tails” made from different glass colors. **Right:** After inspecting a limited-edition vase, Bayliss signs the base.



In the glass studio at Blenko, Bayliss has to imagine what is possible for glass artisans to create. He says he is “honored and grateful to be part of something bigger and grander than me and my work—yet where my work and I are needed.”

He shares his glass career with wife and partner Mary Jo, an experienced sculptor and educator. In the trivia department, Bayliss says that their dog Sophie “likes to balance things on her head and put away her bowl when she’s finished eating.”

In a recent interview, Bayliss explained how he creates his sparkling and colorful art.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON RIGHT NOW?

Currently I’m working on several new pieces for Blenko: a limited-edition piece to celebrate West Virginia’s 151st birthday. There will be 151 pieces in the edition, and they have been doing this every year since 1982. There also will be two or three new lines for Blenko to produce later this year. The West Virginia Birthday

piece is a tremendous challenge. I love doing it each year. Collectors expect something special, and, to me, it’s very important that each piece stands out, yet still looks like Blenko made it.

WHERE IS YOUR STUDIO?

I just moved to a new studio. My studio is a refuge for the artist inside me. It’s just a couple of blocks from my house in Anderson, Indiana, 40 miles northeast of Indianapolis. I’m not settled in yet, but I can’t wait until I am.

WHAT TYPE OF WORK DO YOU DO?

I like to work in three distinctly different, yet related, ways. I design glass for Blenko, I create architectural art installations for public places, and I make unique studio art glass for galleries and museums. I’m also an educator.

DESCRIBE YOUR STUDIO.

I always put lots of drawings and images and objects on the walls—things that I like and drawings I’ve

done. I have done this since I was a student at the Royal College of Art. I’m a visual thinker. If I surround myself with inspiring things as well as work in progress, it helps older ideas percolate and creates opportunities for me to make new connections. I make sure there is a comfy armchair where I can relax and just think, a round table, a few chairs for meetings, and the means to make a pot of tea—essential for conversations with clients, contractors, and assistants. Oh, and plenty of books—all sorts of books—from flies for salmon fishing to images from the Hubble Space Telescope. My studio is both messy and orderly. I make a mess when I’m working. Creativity is a messy business! But I’ve learned the value of cleaning up before moving on to the next project. Not only does it organize the space better, I think it also helps me regroup my thinking and prepare for the next challenge.

DO YOU LISTEN TO ANYTHING WHILE YOU WORK?

I nearly always listen to music when I’m working. I have found different kinds of music help me with different tasks. For example, if I’m really thinking about some difficult problems, I’ll play classical music, like Bach’s Cello Suites. For energetic, physical work, I’ll play all kinds of stuff—Bon Iver, Johnny Cash, Joni Mitchell, Ella Fitzgerald. I use music to help me focus my energy and creativity.

DO YOU HAVE A SPACE TO WORK WHEN YOU’RE AT BLENKO?

Blenko also provides me with a design studio. I love it there. It’s got lots of shelves and white walls, and I can line up all the work that the skilled glass teams have produced and think about what needs to be changed. I do a lot of thinking there in the evenings when the factory is quiet and I can reflect.

WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS FOR CREATING A NEW DESIGN?

Different projects require different approaches. Mostly I begin with some imagery that I have been recently looking at. For example, it might be natural forms like feathers or ferns. I’ll have pictures of these around me and will often sketch shapes using these as inspiration. Then comes a period where I try to forget that I know how things are made. I’ll deliberately draw ideas that may be impossible to make. I try to let my creativity run freely. There are no bad ideas. This is followed by a stage of being practical—resolving what might be possible. And, most importantly, I consider how things could be made. Over the years, I have found that this “Jekyll and Hyde” approach really works for me. It helps capture a wide range of ideas and enables me to do some



Bayliss and glass-makers at work on a blown-glass piece in the Blenko factory in Milton, W.Va.

really good problem-solving, too. Finally, it’s time for prototyping or sampling, model making, and experiments. Most ideas just can’t be figured out without handling the material directly and trying out an idea in the real world. Plenty of ideas get changed or improved when working in real time with real materials.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT IN LIFE?

It may be a surprise to your readers, but I count it a far

greater achievement when I positively impact the lives of the young people I teach than when I make a beautiful object. There is something lasting and eternally powerful about teaching that’s hard to beat. ♦

For more information, visit arlonbayliss.com and blenko.com. Visit the Treasures Facebook page to watch a video documenting production of the 2014 West Virginia holiday vase that Bayliss designed.