

# Stone, Glass and Wood

Tactile trinity confers authenticity. *By Anna Sonser*

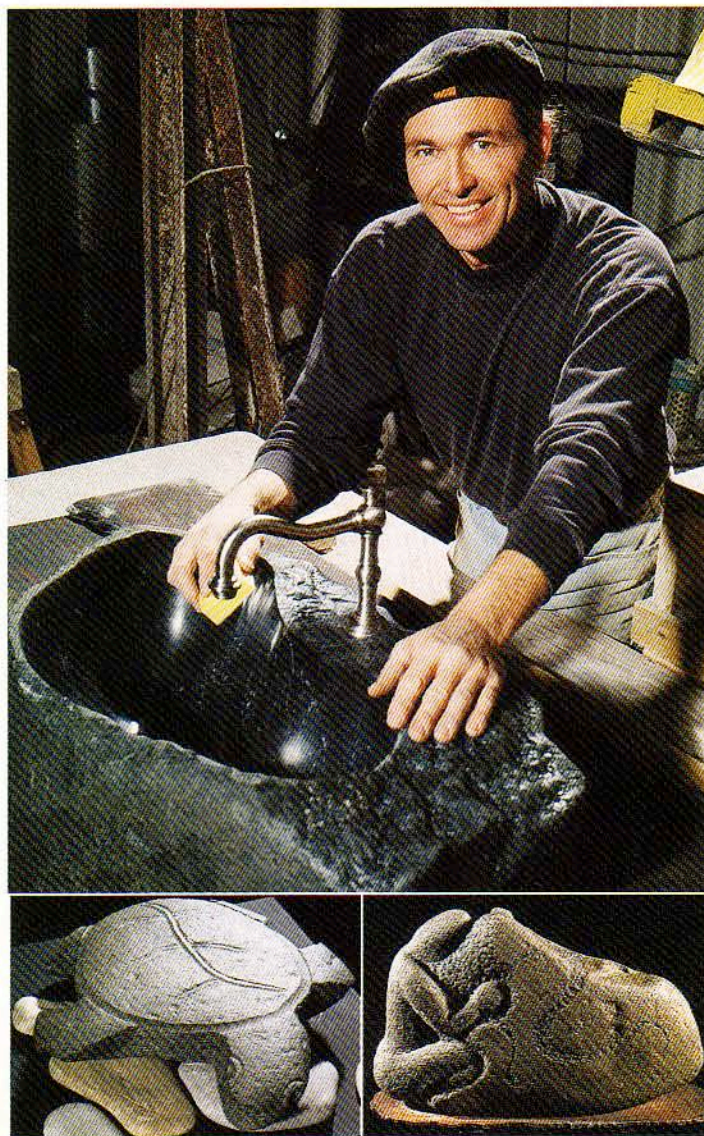
## Heart of Stone

With its characteristic durability and permanence, stone is for many cultures a symbol of divine power. A look at the work of sculptor Walt Rickli and that notion springs readily to mind. Slate from India and Iraq, limestone from Texas, or green granite from Quebec—these materials are all putty in his hands transformed, paradoxically, into intimate monuments, laden with presence and with a warmth that is resoundingly personal.

That his work is a vocation becomes immediately apparent. When he talks of his latest opus, an environmental awareness project for the City of Burlington's parks department, you get the sense that here's a man who has answered his calling. Entitled *The Return*, destined to become one of the largest granite sculptures in Ontario, the work represents three salmon returning from the lake. "I mean to convey a sense of hope," explains Rickli, who is looking for private funding to complete the project.

"I want this to be an interactive art piece, for people to come and touch the stone. People love to touch stone, earth and water—probably because we're realizing that the world is too far away from nature."

Rickli began his artistic career in



Stonecutter Walt Rickli makes his presence felt in a timeless way, above; superb examples of his craftsmanship, below.

Lowville working for twenty-five years in the family business creating gardens in southern Ontario. He always loved stone and experimentally began carving Japanese basins used in tea ceremonies. From there, it was a few steps away from forming a student-and-teacher relationship with Gary Sassi from Vermont, one of North America's greatest granite sculptors. "I

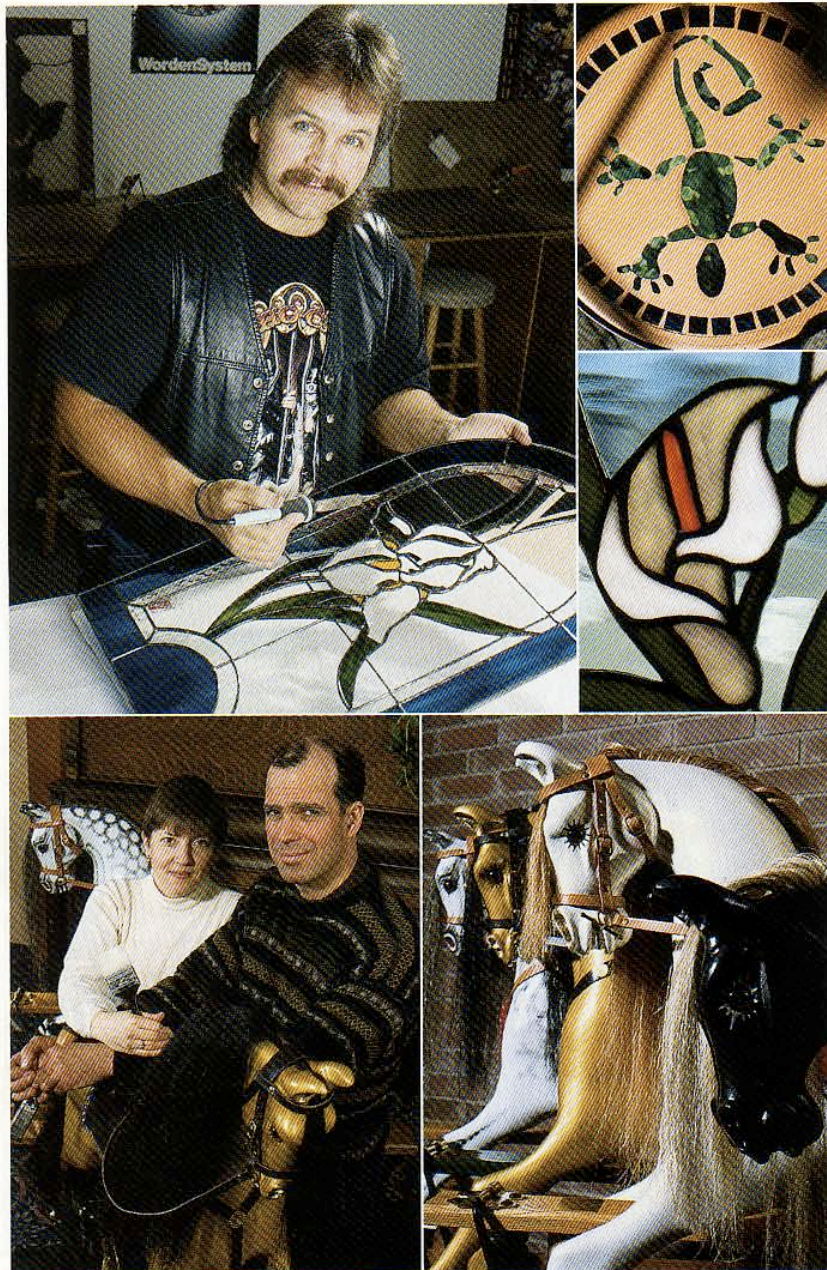
learned my art the old-fashioned way," recalls Rickli, who continues to spend weeks at a time in Vermont. "Sassi continues to use the old methods, which makes me aware of how quickly granite sculpting is a dying skill." One that's not quite finished yet—witness Rickli's six foot tall water feature, a three stone composition that looks like it's been in the desert for hundreds of years, and that's found a home in an adobe style house with airy vaulted ceilings. Or his healing gardens, first popular with AIDS, cancer and seniors' hospices. Particularly stunning is a bathroom sink that emerges from three pieces of slate from India and a polished black granite boulder which, says Rickli, looks like the sky at night.

A dying skill? As long as there's stone and Rickli, there will be sculpture.

## Glass Houses

Apparently, stained glass needs its own space. There's nothing minimalist about it, nothing that blends in. It is designed for colour, maintain Don and Lisa Brown, who might know.

Skilled in the art of designing and crafting stained glass for the past nine years, the couple has created everything from sun catchers and Tiffany lamps, to front door and side windows, table tops, and cup



Don Brown, above with detailed samples of his glass art, right; Denise and Ivan Bailey rock their world with their expertly crafted horses, below.

board doors for kitchens, overhead skylights and florescent lighting panels. What began as a hobby has grown into a business, Mystic Stained Glass in Burlington, where the ambitious can learn to make stained glass on their own, or confidently ask Don and Lisa to do it for them.

"Most people come with their plans for schemes already in place," explains Don who, nonetheless, offers two catalogues filled with his and Lisa's own designs, along with 150 to 200 titles offering everything from the styles of

Frank Lloyd Wright to haute Victorian. The next step involves choosing from 800 to 1,000 colours of glass, and deciding just what looks good together. The design is then traced on paper, the glass cut by hand, ground, foiled or leaded and then soldered and, if you wish, given an added patina. All of which takes about a month and roughly \$50 to \$90 per square foot, depending on the level of detail.

Don advises installing the pieces behind your thermal pane windows with

silicone or fine wood trim. That way they go with you when it's time to move. "Stained glass is a craft, but it's also a form of art, you could say," he concludes. "Understandably, a great piece is hard to leave behind."

#### Rock Your World

Horses, with their strength, grace and beauty have captivated human imagination for generations. Denise and Ivan Blaney promise to captivate and inspire your child's or your own imagination with beautiful, hand-carved Victorian rocking horses—family heirlooms treasured and passed from one generation to the next.

"Each wooden rocking horse and each child's dream is born here on our family farm along the Bruce Trail near Beamsville," explains Denise, whose husband Ivan is a skilled carver of horses and birds of prey. Each rocking horse is unique, hand-painted in a variety of faux finishes, and adorned with only the finest natural horse hair for manes and tails. Even the saddles and bridles are hand-crafted in the best leathers.

The rocking horse is not a new story. Since ancient times, toy horses have been carved for children to enjoy. By the 16th century, the rocking horse became an object of exquisite detail, finding a place with the elite including—three hundred years later—Queen Victoria, who strongly influenced the industry by choosing a Dapple Grey above other styles.

Today, Mountain View Rocking Horse Farm suggests: Victoria's Rocker, the traditional Dapple Grey with a saddle of London tan and antique red, and a red blanket; Grandpa's Pony, which comes with two-tone tan colour hair; or Midnight Thunder, resplendent in translucent black with light grey hair, a Havana brown saddle and green blanket.

I have my eye on Sky Dancer who promises to come cantering my way in shimmering pearl white with a strawberry blond mane and tale, a London tan saddle and cherry red blanket. I am relieved to learn from Denise that you're never to old. The love affair with the horse, unlike the frail human kind, is built to last.