



# Pioneering spirit

Nearly four decades ago, Lisa St. Martin landed an unlikely apprenticeship that launched a career and a passion.

by **Julia Gerlach**

**Q** You've been working with glass for a long time — how did you get interested in it?

I remember being at an amusement park when I was about 12. I watched a guy making flameworked animals, and I kept asking him questions. He basically ignored me, and when I persisted, he said I wasn't capable of doing glass because I was a girl. I took that as a challenge. I started my formal glass training in 1976 when I did an apprenticeship with Jon Meyer through a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

**Q** How were you selected to receive that grant?

When I was a sophomore in college, I saw an advertisement for a glassblowing apprenticeship in the back of a magazine. I applied and was invited up to the studio in Corning, New York, for an interview. My whole family went on that road trip. Jon gave us a tour around his studio and then opened the furnace and handed me a blowing iron. I guess I did all right because he said if I wanted to work with him I should come back the following week. Jon said he had about a hundred

responses to his ad, but could tell I was the right person as soon as he put that iron in my hands. I was there for about 10 months and learned everything from sweeping up to charging the furnace to assisting Jon in the studio's work and designing and making my own pieces.

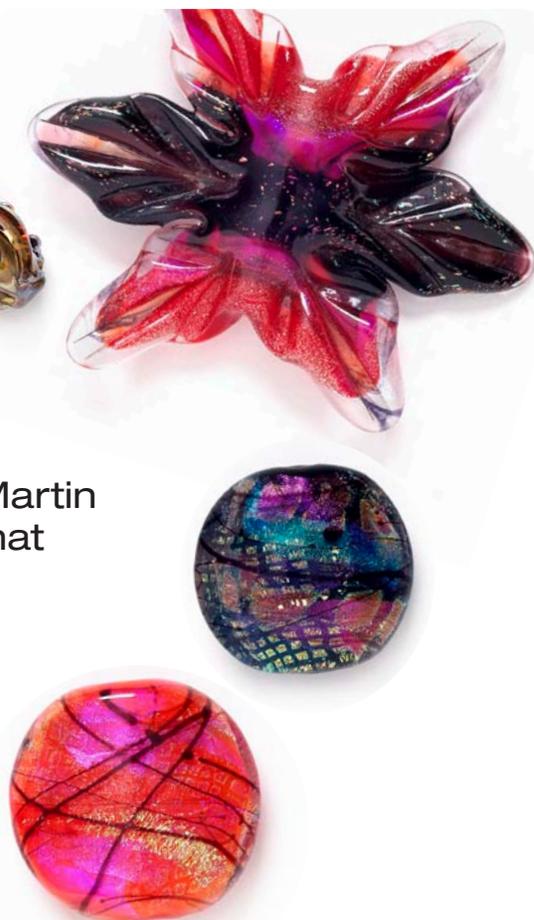
**Q** What were the most important things you learned in that apprenticeship?

Jon's background was in industrial and mechanical engineering. Since equipment wasn't easily available, we had to build everything. I got an in-depth education in building and hooking up equipment, the basics of glass chemistry and physics, and a very old-fashioned regard for craftsmanship. I learned to work with very few tools, and I still do most of my work with just two tools. My marver is over 25 years old!

Also, I think it helped me develop an inner strength. I was a very unlikely choice for Jon — I'm a girl and a rather small one at that. But I refused to let my size or gender dictate what I could learn and accomplish.

**Q** How does your interest in glass chemistry and physics affect your design aesthetic?

Artists who come to bead making through jewelry design look at beads as components, and many of them



start making beads to use in their finished jewelry. I see bead making as one aspect of working glass and therefore have a more sculptural approach. I might use my pieces in jewelry, but I see each piece as a separate piece of glass art. I think that is why my beads are so large — they are small sculptures.

**Q** You have a degree in education and teach a lot of bead-making classes. Is teaching your passion?

I love getting folks excited about glass. Glass, to me, is as much about science as it is art. I believe if they know why the glass is doing what it is doing they will understand how to control the results better. I have a portable set of flameworking equipment that I take into schools, museums — wherever they do programs about the science/art of glass. Currently I mostly teach adults in bead making, but I also teach classes on historic approaches to glass and color chemistry, and I'm always adding new classes. My husband says I can't help myself. It's true. Teaching glass — two of my great passions — how could it get any better? ●

