

THE GALLERY

GLASS ACT

“FLUID AS WATER, BUOYANT AS AIR AND AS BRIGHT AS THE LIGHT THAT FILTERS THROUGH IT...” MANDI KING’S LOVE OF GLASS IS PERFECTLY CLEAR

WORDS NOEL PROBERT

Every morning, Mandi King rides her bicycle from her Norton Summit home to the Blue Pony studio in Stepney. “It’s easy,” she says. “It’s all downhill.” The bike is more than transport to her, it’s a part of a philosophy that sees sustainability as fundamental, and an indication of the mindfulness she brings to her life and work.

Housed in a run-down warehouse just off Magill Road, the Blue Pony has been a glass art cooperative for 15 years, the longest-running example of its kind in Australia. For three of those years it’s been a workplace for Mandi, a native of Ohio in the US who has been practising her craft in Adelaide since 2005.

Following a stint as glass associate at the Jam Factory, Mandi came to the Blue Pony to continue exploring and experimenting with her art. Four years ago she began producing the series she calls *bubble boxes*, thick,

rudimentary geometric shapes which contain soft, multi-coloured bubble forms.

“I’m mostly a cold-worker,” she explains. “The basic forms are made in the hot shop and I do all the detail in the cold shop.” The detail involves cutting the edges back and polishing them perfectly smooth. “It’s about the juxtaposition between the geometric exterior with the soft, organic form within,” she says of the pieces. “They’re popular, so I’m still making them, but I’ve moved on now.”

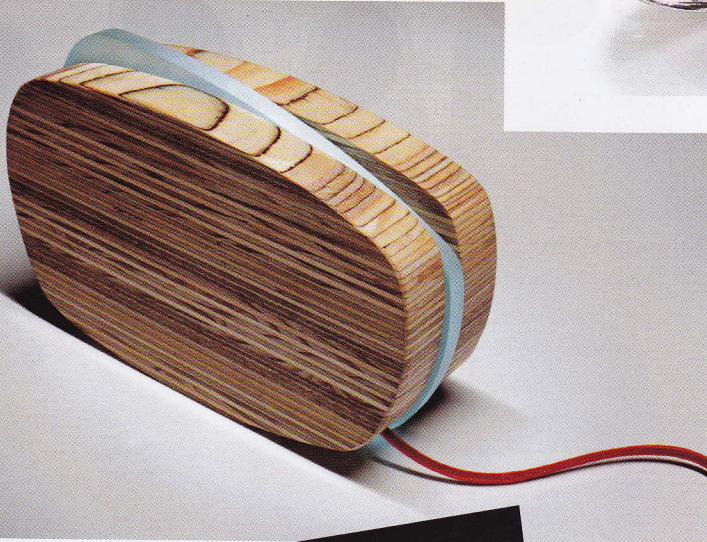
One of her new projects is called *Illumini*. A collaboration with fellow Hills artist Karen Cunningham, it’s a collection of decanters and tumblers inspired by the vineyards and cellar doors of the Hills.

With her partner, winemaking student Anthony Pearce, Mandi is a regular visitor to cellar doors. “We visit one just



Above: Natural States.
Below: Rainbow Rocket Vases.





"GLASS DOESN'T WANT TO BE GEOMETRIC, IT WANTS TO BE ROUND. IT'S HOT, GLOOPY AND ORGANIC."



Opposite page from top: Super Natural Bowls, Organic Bubbleblocks, Illumini Lights. This page: Safari.

about every week," she says. "It struck me that while so many of them are all about 'the local', 'the family' and that boutique experience, all of the glassware is imported. We decided to design something that could be produced locally.

"I wanted to explore the relationship between the glass and the wine, the craftsmanship and attention to detail."

Illumini won the major prize at the LaunchPad design competition in Melbourne last year and will feature alongside the work of top Australian designers such as Khai Liew at the London Design Festival this year.

Another new project sees a series of lights made from recycled plywood and float glass – a thick sheet similar to window glass, but annealed (cooled at a specific rate) so it can be cut and carved into shape rather without shattering. The glass is sandwiched between the plywood and the whole structure is held together with magnets so the components can be moved around. Lit from within by energy-efficient LEDs, the lights offer a new dimension to lighting design. "They're practical, but they're also tactile," says Mandi. "They invite you to interact with them."

Mandi has also started producing a new line of works she calls *Telescopiums*. Starting with tall, blown-glass cones, she cuts them into cross sections and grinds them so the shape collapses into itself. The grinding is done using the coarsest diamond wheel on the lathe, resulting in a rough surface with specks of shiny, polished colour peeping through. Mandi says the look was inspired by opal mining.

"I loved the look of the gems being cut from rock, the first shimmer of something beautiful emerging from the stone," she says.

"I'm still working with geometric forms. Glass doesn't want to be geometric, it wants to be round. It's hot, gloopy and organic. There's something beautiful about the struggle of forcing it into a geometric shape."

She thinks her obsession with the interaction between hard edges and organic shapes is partly driven by her work space. "At school I wanted to be a graphic designer," she says. "My work was very bold, all sharp lines and colours. Working in a dilapidated industrial building, I was struck by these man-made shapes that had been eroded by the environment and my new work has been influenced by that."

Mandi loves the space she works in, not least because it has all of the equipment she needs to do her work. So she was disappointed to learn that the Blue Pony's landlord is closing them down in November this year to turn the building into a retail gallery space. She's now looking around for new equipment to re-establish her practice in a home studio. "I live on four acres of bushland so I wonder how my forms will be influenced when I start working from home," she says.

It's an uncertain time, but one thing's for sure: her ride home from work will be a lot easier. *

Mandi's work can be purchased from the Worth Gallery, an online art sales and consultancy based in Stirling. For more information visit www.worthgallery.com or call Amy Sierp-Worth on (08) 8339 6747.