

THE DRIVE

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Wave Makers

Tsunami glassmakers eschew 'artist' label

Every once in a while the feeling hits – not for everyone, but for most – the need to be creative. Some people have nurtured that feeling and developed artistic abilities in various mediums; some of us know better.

Some of us know that the best thing we can do when "the feeling" manifests itself is to appreciate the work of others. Walking through the Detroit Institute of Arts or attending a local exhibit usually works.

Then for a time the need has been satisfied. But it will come back. For most of us it always does.

In Windsor, art fans needing to get their fix should check out Tsunami Glassworks Inc. Eva Milinkovic and Kris Gene officially opened the showroom and studio in the 1100 block of Mercer Street on April 15.



The space features the couple's growing collection of work, which includes expansive architectural pieces, designs for corporate awards and smaller-scale practical pieces such as candle holders, bowls and vases that you can picture in someone's home or work area.

The showroom area is bright and bare, with all attention focused on the pieces on display. It offers a quiet backdrop for their work, a balanced presentation of modern and more traditional designs.

"There really aren't any limitations," Gene said in the showroom of their studio. "If someone were to call and say 'I need a 20-foot window for my house,' anything is possible. We could do it."

The majority of what is on display was created at Sheridan College in Oakville while Milinkovic and Gene were teaching during the winter. The two returned to the glass program where they met following years of renting studio space and studying under the guidance of Jeff Goodman, one of the most successful glass artists in Canada.

They were married in September and moved to Windsor in February after



deciding Windsor was the perfect place to open their own studio. That decision was based in part on the success of Kabuki Design & Art Glass Ltd., a stained-glass art studio created by Gene's father, Kim.

The wave symbol used at Kabuki led Gene and Milinkovic to settle on Tsunami as a name for their business.

Although their studio officially opened in April, the name Tsunami was

selected years ago — long before the Southeast Asian disaster in December.

"We're pretty young in glass, just seven years out of school," Milinkovic said. "That's not a long time. But we've been busy. Not many people are willing to start their own studio and almost no one our age has done that."

The two found their way to glass work by different avenues. Although she remembers being enthralled watching

glass artists at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre as a little girl, Milinkovic initially studied photography and worked as a commercial photographer before enrolling in Sheridan's glass program.

Gene, who grew up in Windsor, always had an interest in the arts but chose bio science as his field at the University of Guelph in the mid 1990s. He changed paths and studied psychology at the University of Windsor before a job at a furniture company opened the door to a new career. The furniture company designed and manufactured its own pieces and required that Gene learn welding. That skill is incorporated in his glass work today.

Milinkovic and Gene are dedicated to experimenting with different styles

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and strategies. Milinkovic describes her work as more "organic" and Gene's as leaning toward the "traditional" end of the spectrum, but both are dedicated to not following a single category of design or a particular style. Some examples displayed at their studio are produced independently and show their different techniques and specialties.

Interestingly, neither Gene nor Milinkovic lays claim to being an "artist." Although an outsider would easily apply the classification after seeing their work, they refer to themselves as "makers." The expression indicates they

understand the practical approach many potential customers or clients may have to their work. That idea is fine with them.

"We understand that for the most part it takes people seeing it, people being exposed to it," Gene said about creating a clientele base. Often it's about something in a person's environment that he really enjoys. "I'm less apt to consider myself an 'artist.' I'm a maker; I make things."

"I agree," Milinkovic added. "I'm a designer."

Although they are always interest-

ed in personally introducing their work to new people in Windsor and Detroit, Gene's and Milinkovic's designs have also been displayed on a grand scale before. Both have had pieces in gallery exhibits across Canada and the U.S.

Anyone interested in looking at their work can drop into Tsunami or call 258-7620 to make an appointment.

There are also plans to teach glassblowing to students and to eventually showcase the work of other artists in their studio.

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