

Featured Bead Artists

Bill and Rae Grout of Aspen Hot Glass Studio

by Jessica Rose

While visiting the Seattle Public Market, Bill Grout came across a booth filled with glass beads by glass artist, Isis Ray. Intrigued by the miniature works of art and already having experience in lapidary, spending many hours grinding, sanding and polishing quartz crystal into unique forms, he decided to research this new art. When he made his first beads in 1993, he realized that he could form a completed piece in minutes, and that the beads “polished themselves.” It was then that he knew he was hooked. As a young child, he would play around with glass tubing and a Bunsen burner that was part of his chemistry set, so to him, the process seemed simple enough in principal. Bill says, “Twisting hot glass is a thrill to me. The end result is cool, but watching the glass move and attempting to control it while it’s hot is magical.”

Just as magical was the year 2002, when Bill met his wife Rae while seeking marketing help for his new glass company. As with any good marketer, in order to market Bill’s product, Rae had to know more about what he did, and so the relationship began. Bill sat Rae down at his torch and showed her how to make beads. Rae says, “That was it. I fell in love with Bill, his five year old daughter, and making beads.” In 2003, Rae moved over 250 miles to be with Bill and become a full time bead maker. They were married shortly thereafter.

With a background in art, Rae finds that her oil painting studies and skills have helped with her bead making. “Oil paintings provided me with a wonderful experience in color combination.” She says, adding, “I had been involved with a class for several years that allowed arties to enter Wood Land Park Zoo in the early morning before the park opened to the public to study and draw the animals. We were told to draw the rhythms of the animal, not just the animal. This practice carries on into my glasswork now.”

Bill has only taken one class since he started working with glass, and Rae says the only class she has taken was “through my husband, Bill; he was, and still is, a



Top: Bill and Rae at home in The Rockies. Left: Rae’s Rain Forest bead set. Below, Right: Rae’s Caribbean bead set. Bottom: Bill’s marble.



left an impression with the detail, quality and variety of work they did." He continues, "Nowadays, I am delighted to see work from people new to the glass scene who are exploring their own look, with so many fresh ideas that it just humbles me."

Rae's beads almost always contain at least one ribbon cane or a lot of stringers. She says, "I love the texture mixed glass gives a bead." Bill loves twisting glass cane and says it is right up there among the techniques he prefers. He adds, "I enjoy pushing myself to explore the wide range of techniques glass offers."

Signature beads are not uncommon to a glass bead artist. Bill's signature bead has been ooh'd and aaah'd by many. He says, "The ribbon cane grew from a desire to make a complex small bead that would not be replicated overseas anytime soon." Rae actually has three beads she considers her



very strict teacher who constantly pushes me towards perfection." Outside of that, both Bill and Rae, for the most part, are self-taught.

We asked the couple what they found to be most interesting in the process of working with glass. While Bill states it is "the twisting and manipulation of the glass, as well as the challenge it presents which captivates me, providing me with a rewarding experience," Rae says "it is the thermodynamics that is most interesting to her."

Rae is inspired by the off-hand work of Dale Chihuly and openly calls him the "God of Glass." As for beads, Rae says her favorite artists are "Kim Miles for her stunning encased florals; Kimberly Affleck, for her Sea Horse; and of course, her husband Bill for his ribbon cane beads." Bill, on the other hand, says, "Isis Ray, Michael Barley and Larry Scott were some of the people I met in person early on who



Top left: Bill at the torch.
Top right: Bill's pinch beads.
Bottom: Bill's ribbon cane beads.

signature beads but states, "the one that stands out to me has a wonderful history behind it." This would be her arrow head beads which she calls "Courageous Heart Arrowheads." This bead design honors her Great- Grandmother, who was part of the Blackfoot Indian tribe, who gave up everything to marry Rae's Great-Grandfather (a white man). Her Courageous Heart Arrowhead beads have been published in *Flow Magazine's* 2006, and 2007 Women in Glass Issues, in the Photo Spectacular section and others.

Bill tells us that he does not have any of his first beads. He says, "I sold every one

I ever made," and further explains, "in the early days, handmade glass beads were something new at art shows in Montana, so I could sell just about anything if the price was right." Rae, however, has her first beads, and keeps them safe in a lipstick case which she carries around with her to remind her of when she fell in love with Bill and hot glass.

Bill and Rae agree that safety is a very serious part of making glass beads. Good ventilation and good eye protection are priority. Bills adds that "a hard surface floor with rolling chairs to get out of the way fast when you need to," and

emphasizes to always "keep safety first." You can read more on the subject of safety on the couple's web site under the tutorial called "Safety in Beadland" by Bill Grout.

Both Rae and Bill make beads for a living and sell them to people who make jewelry or collect glass beads. They sell both on line and at a local artist market, and plan on getting into back into Art Fairs. Rae also designs jewelry, with both her and Bill's beads, and then sells the finished designs through a gallery in Casselberry, Florida, called Nartique Glass. Rae's necklace designs are so unique that she had them copy protected through the U.S. Library of Congress.

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To see more of Bill and Rae's creations, please visit their website at www.aspenhotglass.com



Top left: Rae's Four Elements bead set. Bottom left: Rae's Orca necklace with Rae's Orca sculpture and Bill's ribbon canes. Top and bottom right: Close up photos of Rae's Four Elements beads.