

Five questions with Catherine Benoit

By Nancy Nourse
RECORD CORRESPONDENT

If you take the time to travel the Circuit des Arts this year, nestled in the woods around Austin, you will find Catherine Benoit under a story-book type canopy tent. Benoit has been perfecting the art of making blown glass for the past four years.

Between visitors to her display area, Benoit took time out to visit with The Record:

THE RECORD: How did you first get interested in this art form?

BENOIT: "I knew at an early age that I didn't have the patience for classroom studies. I was much happier when I could create something with my hands. I was lucky enough to be selected at 'l'Espace Verte' in Montreal. It was there that I decided that this was what I really wanted to do."

THE RECORD: You say that you felt that you lacked the patience for learning in the classroom but you have chosen a career that seems to require a great deal of patience. Isn't that a little ironic?

BENOIT: "I suppose that it may appear that way, but working with glass keeps you thinking and moving all the time, if not by constantly rotating the pole that the glass is attached to, then by trying to keep one step ahead of the transformation of the glass substance so that you can achieve your original plan. If that doesn't seem to be working, then you have to be able to think quickly enough to come up with another idea that will work. Sometimes it is a slow process, but when everything is going well, time just goes by so very quickly."

THE RECORD: Could you tell us a little

about the process that you use to create these works of art?

BENOIT: "Glass is an unusual substance that sticks to itself when heated to high temperatures. I start with a uniform block that is attached to a long pole, turning it constantly to keep its uniform surface. The glass is returned to the 'glory hole' and the firing oven many times throughout the process. It is important to keep the glass at a uniform temperature to make it easier to work with. If it begins to cool down too quickly, or unevenly, in all likelihood, the piece will become cracked."

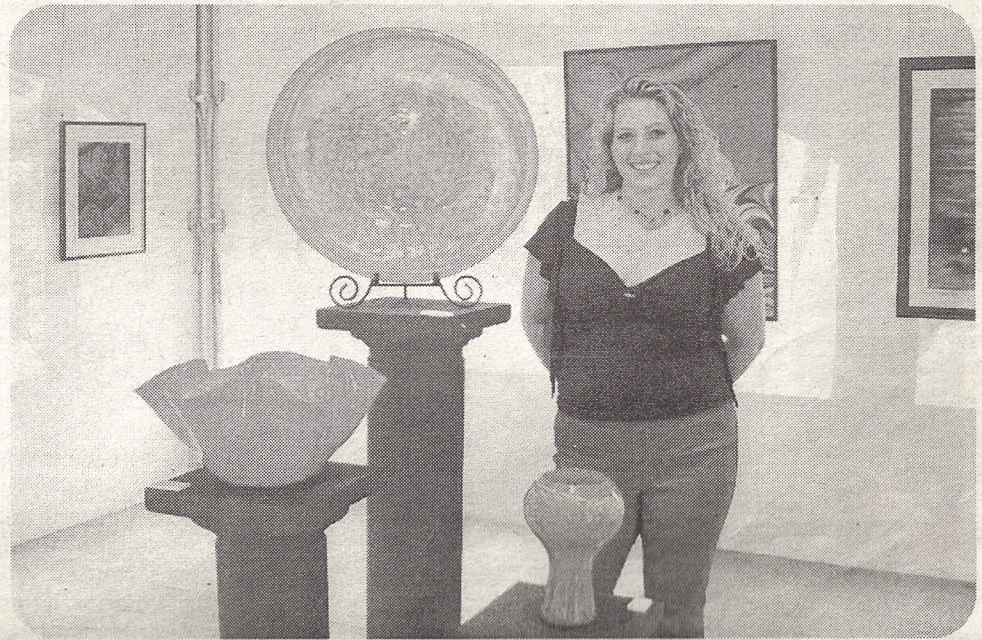
THE RECORD: You have some very unusual pieces that look like a stalactite suspended from a glass bulb and dangling a ballerina. How is that possible?

BENOIT: "Working with glass is a fascinating art because there are no limits to what you can create. Your only limitations are the techniques that you have yet to learn. To make the ballerina shape, I used something called the Lost Wax Technique. When the wax is dry, I remove any imperfections before finally seizing the waxed form."

"It also uses a plaster-type casting for the stalactite shape. I pour wax into the shape I want and then let it cool until the plaster is set. I then heat the entire unit until the wax melts and leaves a distinct shaping in the plaster. The plaster cast is then heated with glass blocks which melt into its new shape. When everything cools down, the plaster cast is broken to display the results. The ballerina is then glued onto the elongated piece of glass which is attached to the bulb at the top."

THE RECORD: Do you live in the Estrie area?

Q & A



NANCY NOURSE/CORRESPONDENT

Catherine Benoit, daughter of former MNA Robert Benoit, at her exhibit tucked away in the woods around Austin.

BENOIT: "I grew up here but my work live here full time. My life is so hectic at has taken me to Montreal where I live at the moment that it is more practical to least for now. In 10 years or so, I hope to live in the city."

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