



Rich spent his youth crisscrossing the country, doing mostly free-lance engraving on vehicle glass. The art on this Corvette was all hand cut.

"I was an angry young man," Rich says. "There were a lot of things going on in my life over which I had absolutely no control. I look back on it and think that there's no way I'd have the energy now to get out of bed and do something like that."

Ten years ago, in an effort to get control of his life, he returned to his home town and opened American Glass Artist, a business he admits is the complete opposite of those traveling days.

SPECIAL CUSTOMERS

"I like to nurture my clientele," is how Rich describes his current operation. "I think it's nice to know they can get service from somebody these days."

The bulk of his customer base comes by word-of-mouth from the tri-state area of New Jersey, New York and Connecticut, and that nurturing begins with the initial call to the business, when each would-be customer is asked to make an appointment.

Part of that, he says, is simply based on the fact that he has a small shop and he doesn't want several people roaming around it at once, picking up works-in-progress and getting in each other's way. Another portion of it is the uninterrupted attention he prefers to give each customer.

"If you make an appointment, I'll accommodate you any way you want," Rich explains. "You've got people working until all hours, and some people can't

get by during the day or they're stuck on the highway. I want them to be relaxed."

To encourage that, the outside of his shop is landscaped with plenty of flowers and designed to look like a little country store. The inside he describes as, "very elegant looking," although Rich the tinkerer admits he's partially furnished it from garage sales and even dumpsters.

To further set the mood, customers are greeted with music and coffee or tea.

One of the first things Rich discusses with the client is his budget. Because his specialty is personalization rather than mass production, he admits customers probably end up spending more than they would in a mall store.

For instance, a set of his mugs or champagne flutes begins in the \$50 range and goes up, while his mirrors, windows and pocket doors range from three figures to four. His customers rarely balk, though.

"I either get people up front who have done their homework and know what I do, or they're disappointed with someone else," he says, adding that the higher costs are strictly because of, "the amount of work that goes into it."

He also notes that not only aren't his customers paying for expensive shop space and fancy packaging, but even for a job such as gift mugs for the members of a bridal party, he takes the time to find out what each person is interested in, and