

GLASS DIGEST

FLAT GLASS • REPLACEMENT AUTO GLASS • ARCHITECTURAL METAL • ALLIED PRODUCTS

58th year

An etcher who works on glass

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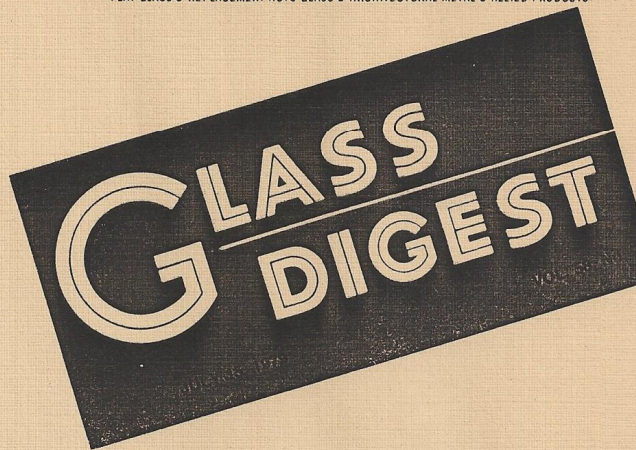
His first achievement was a van owner who asked for a patriotic theme that Robb found easy to produce on picture side windows of the vehicle plus the rear. He turned out a pastoral scene for a garage owner who bartered service on Robb's own car in return for the work. Each of his early efforts—just as precise and intricate as his latest—created more customers. His phone began to ring with calls from interested motorists who had seen examples on the streets, stopped the driver, and asked for details.

As the market grew (limited because he could work on only one commission at a time and never knows how much time the job will take), Robb Rich strove to develop his own tools, in addition to the glass cutters and scribes which he had originally used. While he still uses glass cutters for deep cuts and heavy lines, he has come up with some specialized hand tools to form specific effects, some modified by trial and error from available hand power tools adapted from other crafts. Often, before he begins an elaborate job, he makes the tools he will need.

Some of the complex windows Robb has done take anywhere from two to seven weeks to complete. He drops the project when he becomes overfatigued to pick it up the next day or the following day. Typical of such exhaustive work was a series of outerspace planets all the way around the windows of a van, each planet appearing to eclipse as the viewer moves past.

In the early stages of his career, Robb was at a loss as to how to price his work. After all, there was no precedent to compare it with. He did small window jobs for \$25 and \$50, work which now brings \$300 and \$400 for the same skill and effort. Even now, after seven years of steady etching, the price figure that attaches to a Robb Rich etching is largely a matter of working out an agreement with the car owner after the artist makes an estimate of the time he will need.

Not surprisingly, much of Robb's eminence with car lovers has stemmed from automotive exhibitions. He was invited to show his work in 1975 at the Rockland Gallery Car Show where the feathery all-white creations brought intense interest. And he gave a "command performance" at the Virginia Beach, Va., Van Show where the nation's top van developments are shown each year. Incidentally, the Gabor Rolls Royce, to date the zenith of Robb Rich's artwork, was featured at Expo 78 last year and he was well identified.



Constantly extending his range, Robb doesn't care what the application is as long as it is glass. He has spread into motorcycle mirrors, etched clear plastic, glass blocks, some New York City restaurant windows—switching readily to such tasks as producing diaphanous winged figures on the quarter windows of a pick-up truck!

There is no such thing as a typical customer in Robb's experience. Probably the most desirable is the man who owns an expensive sports car or imported classic, has definite ideas as to what etching should go onto his windows, and wants his automobile just as different as dollars can make it.

Practical ways

Ever on guard against the ultimate tragedy—breaking a minutely etched window just as the design is finished—Robb is continuously seeking practical ways to make his projects easier to do. He spends long hours experimenting on glass panels with high pressure electrical tools, grinders, diamond and carbide tips. Sandblasting has been gingerly brought into the picture to produce backgrounds, foliage, forest scenes, and the like.

Along the way, Robb has discovered that the degree of hardness varies sharply in the production of various glass manufacturers. Some of his cutting tools wear out in 50 hours while on other glass they may last 70. His prime ability to etch a line exactly as he wants it could be enhanced by breakthroughs in tooling. But, until then Robb Rich must remain a craftsman who, like Michelangelo, "has to start the job and stay with it until it is finished."

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