



# Glass act produces finest of treasures

By **LOUISE MACKENZIE**

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**T**HE Glass From the Past gallery in Barleylands twinkles like a treasure trove with hundreds of pieces of jewellery, stained glass windows and stunning trinkets.

Every piece in the shop has been hand-crafted by owners Caroline Weidman and Pete Mangan as well as local artists and students who take part in the weekly workshops at the complex in Billericay.

Each object is unique and beautiful, from the patterned beads to the intricate painted glass designs.

The pair set up the glass-cutting studio in January 2008 and started the shop the following year.

Caroline plans to head to Italy to learn the art of Murano glass sculpting, a process in which glass is melted and then shaped.

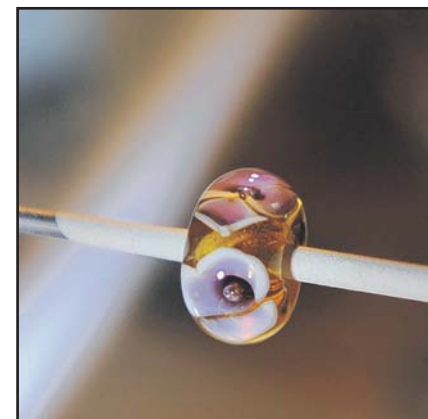
She said: "When you buy a cheap bead it will probably have come from a sweat shop somewhere where people are working 20-hour days with no breaks. When you buy from us the piece has been made with love, care and attention."

Caroline and Pete work out of studio 22, which was expanded last year to incorporate a place to teach the art of glass bead making.

I went along to find out how skilled the process of glass-cutting is with a taster workshop session with Caroline and her regular Tuesday night group.

Workshops in glass-cutting cover a wide range of techniques including casting, fusing and making mosaics.

Caroline has three regular classes, covering all disciplines, on Tuesday nights, Friday afternoons and a new class starting in January on Thursday afternoons. There is another which will be taught by John Newstead on Monday afternoons, specialising in three-dimensional copper foil work. An inspiring teacher, many of Caroline's



■ Beautiful – one of Caroline's beads

students have gone on to set up websites and sell their work in the shop.

All of the regulars have their own projects to get on with each week, including stained glass windows and a glass dinner service.

I took my place at the bench with some sheets of glass in front of me. I was a little apprehensive at first, but this didn't last long as Caroline showed me how to cut the glass safely.

"When you cut and shape by hand you get a natural flow and rhythm you do not get when cutting on the machine, says," Caroline. "The most important thing is not to be afraid of the glass."

I took the glass cutter and held it at 60 degrees like Caroline instructed and then scored heavily so I could hear the satisfying scrape along the glass.

After that I took the breaking pliers and gently pressed the glass and it snapped off. It was a little jagged at first, but Caroline said it would get neater with practise.

I started making thinner and neater strips of glass and then moved on to cutting out curved lines and circles and smoothing them off with the grinder. Inspecting my work, Caroline was happy with my attempts.

The combination of the satisfying crunch and snap of the glass and the creative element is addictive and I could see myself returning.

Those interested in attending regular classes need to attend at least one taster day. Participants to the traditional leading, copper foiling or fusing taster days need to attend a half-day beginners' glass cutting or must have previous experience of cutting glass.

E-mail Caroline on [info@glass-fromthepast.co.uk](mailto:info@glass-fromthepast.co.uk) or call 07792 475085.

■ Easy does it – Helen Smith making a decorative copper foil wall hanging  
Pictures: **MAXINE CLARKE** BA39397\_27



■ Great skill – glass artist Caroline Weidman making a bead

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