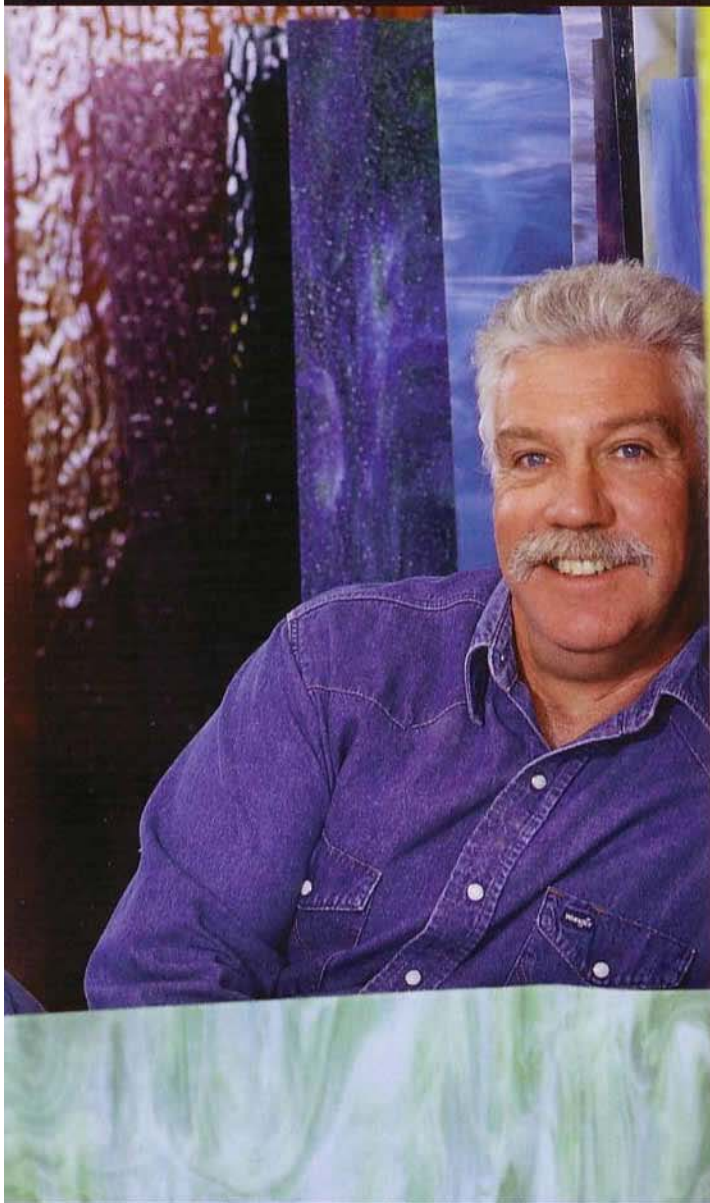


MASTER
of the
SOUTHWEST



Text by Teresa Esquivel • Portrait photography by Elliot Lincis • Architectural photography by Christiaan Blok

If a would-be artist never draws a line, an aspiring actor never utters a word, or a potential athlete never moves an inch, their abilities go unsung. Lee Prosser doesn't have that problem. Like many success stories, his is as much about innate creativity as it is about a little happenstance and a lot of perseverance.

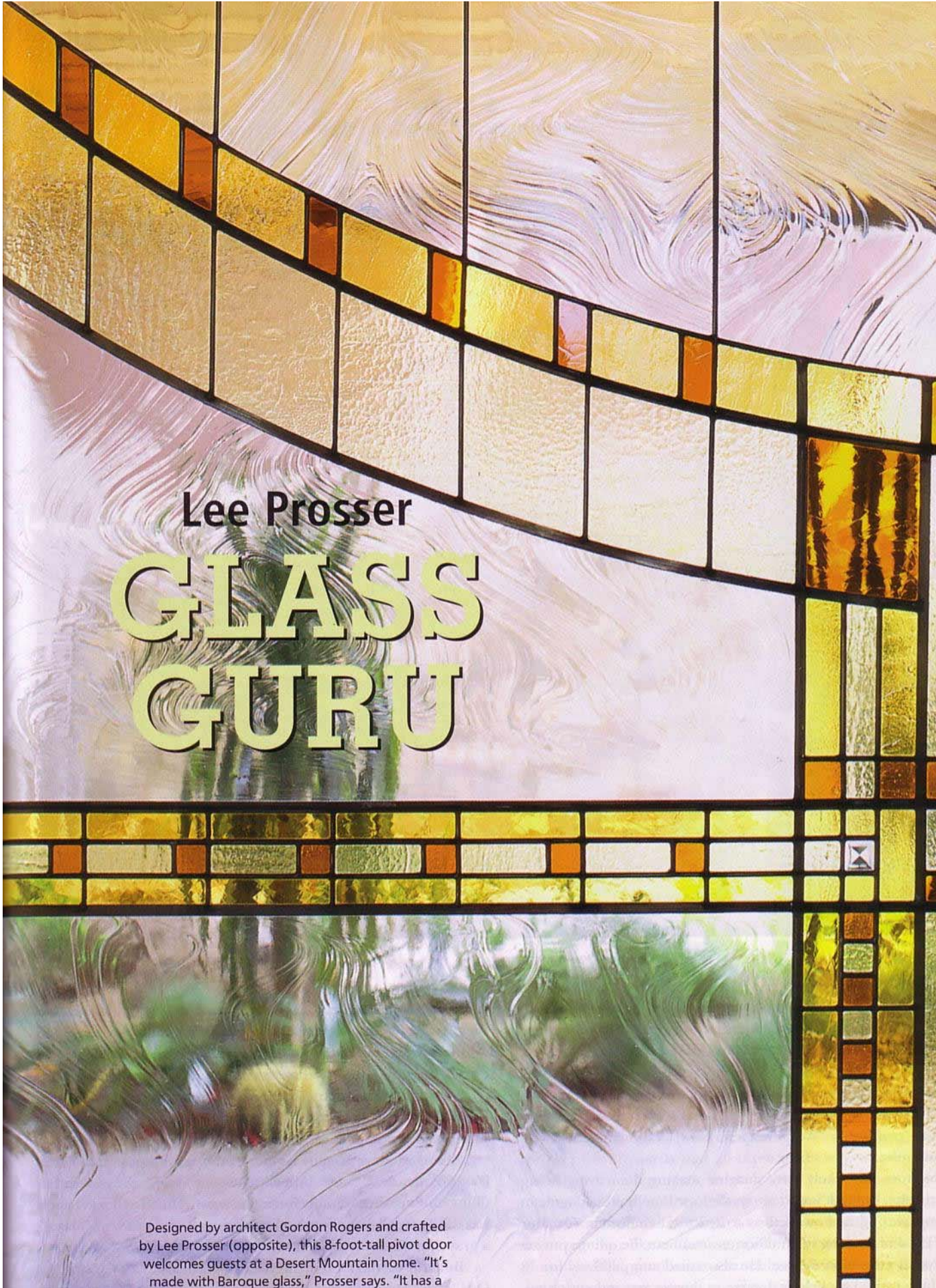
Robust, friendly and quick to laugh, the London-born transplant lives on a 5-acre ranch in Rio Verde with his wife, Julie, a native New Yorker. Together, they are The Light Benders. They craft custom stained and sandblasted glasswork for a range of projects, including new homes, chapels, restored historic houses and

many repairs antique lamps, makes trophies and does repairs of broken sidelights and the like.

"I tend to be the face of the business because I meet clients and do the installations," Lee says. "But the production of the windows is a collaboration with my wife."

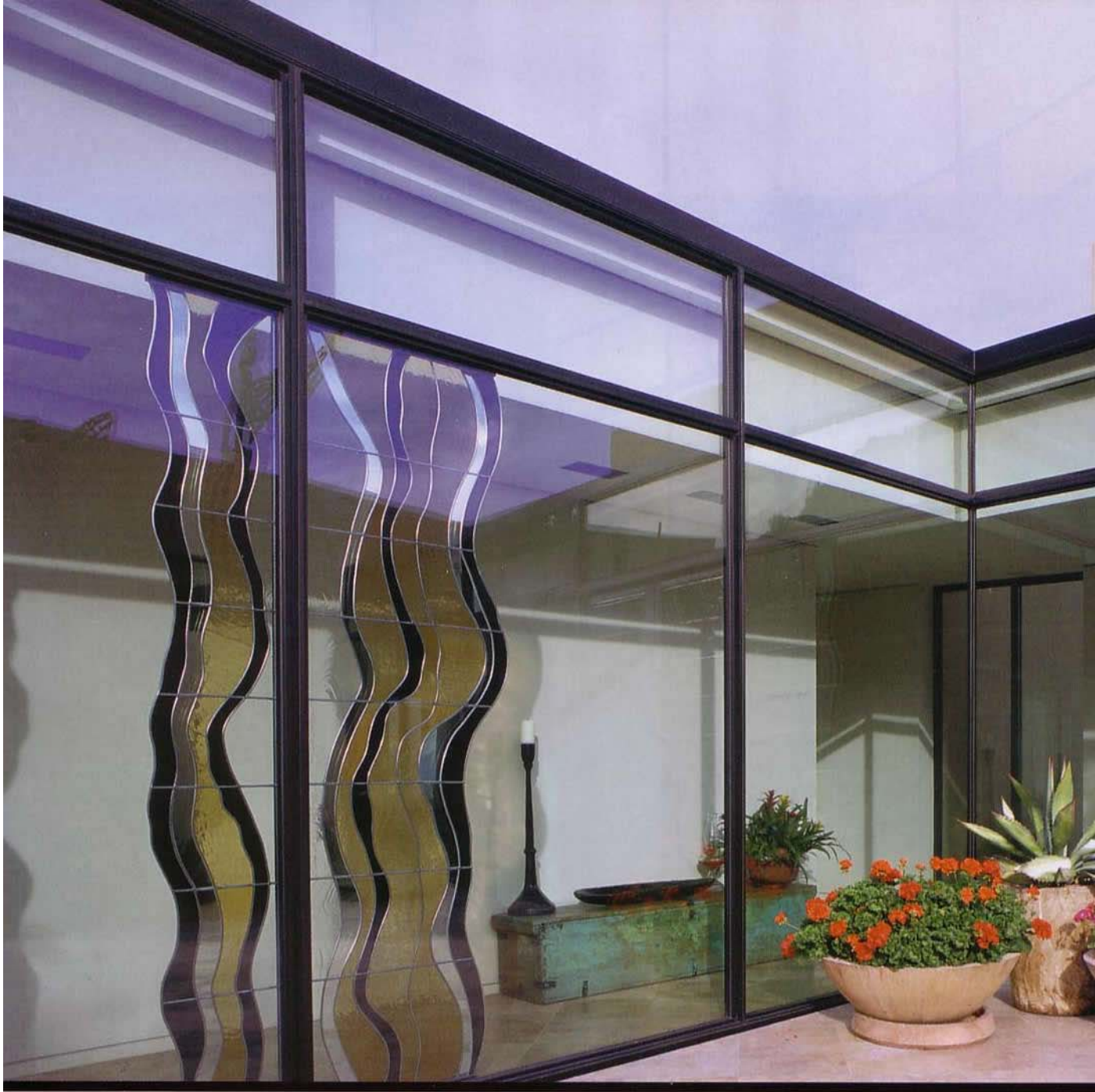
"It's a collaboration because Lee draws the designs and I look over his shoulder and tell him if they're any good," she says. "But when it comes to making the windows, it's fifty-fifty."

Theirs is a partnership that began 26 years ago. One day, both Julie and Lee were teaching at a camp in The Ber



Lee Prosser
**GLASS
GURU**

Designed by architect Gordon Rogers and crafted by Lee Prosser (opposite), this 8-foot-tall pivot door welcomes guests at a Desert Mountain home. "It's made with Baroque glass," Prosser says. "It has a



"We had a summer romance," Lee recalls. "After I went back to London to finish my physical education degree, I got a few phone calls from Julie. She came to see me, and we were married six months later in England, in Worcester." From London, it was back to the States for another summer at camp, then out to Arizona.

"Julie's dad had been transferred here, so we came to check it out," Lee continues. "We never left. Now I can't imagine living anywhere else."

Now, too, they likely can't imagine making their living doing anything else. But that wasn't always the case. Lee holds a degree in civil engineering and worked as a structural draftsman for four years. Tired of working in an office environment, he quit to pursue his physical education degree. He also sailed competitively for 18 years. Julie earned bachelor's degrees in theater arts and education.

friend, a ceramicist, up to Pinetop-Lakeside for an art show. As they strolled around, they came across stained-glass windows. They were impressed and surprised, not having realized it was a form that had been revived, according to Lee.

Soon, the couple started "messing with it at the kitchen table," Lee recalls. "It was a hobby. We never took any classes. I just practiced, practice, practice. Throw it away and practice some more."

"We started with sun catchers and autonomous picture frames," he continues. "After that we traveled the South doing the art show circuit for eight years. Our first juried show was the Tempe Festival of the Arts, during its second year. It was a gray line where we moved into strictly doing custom work."

But the turning point may have been when Greg and G.M. Hunt Builders met the couple on Mill Avenue and



Opposite and above: Ribbons of glass frame views of a back courtyard. Each of the 9-foot-tall panels of stained glass is mounted on tracks inside the house and can be removed for cleaning.

ed-glass piece, they said yes, then rushed home to do research.

"There are two ways to produce stained glass: copper foil and leaded," Lee recalls. "We had been producing exclusively copper-foil work, and had never even tried leaded glass. But we never turned down work."

They must have done something right. "I've used Lee exclusively ever since," Hunt says. "He's never let me down in all these years. One of our most recent jobs together was a house in Paradise Valley. The homeowner had purchased old stained-glass doors. She liked the pattern very much, but there wasn't enough glass to go around. Lee went to great lengths and duplicated it to a T."

Architect Gordon Rogers also is a fan. "If there ever was a master at his craft, it's Lee," says Rogers. "He's as good as anyone

cable. He can do anything with glass."

And with other materials as well, according to interior designer Steven Pilkington. "I've asked Lee to make hammered-copper panels as well as specialty glass," Pilkington says. "He is technically good and creative, and he's one of the nicest people I've ever worked with."

Beyond the kind words, perhaps more telling of the respect for Prosser is that all three of these professionals have called on him for work in their own homes. "Lee made a hammered-etched-glass wall and roof for my shower," Rogers says. "I had a window that I wanted, and Lee figured out how to make it happen. It went together like a Chinese puzzle." For Hunt it was an entry door; for Pilkington it was a sandblasted window, art glass in a shower; for Rogers it was a sandblasted window, art glass in a shower, and copper panels on a table top.



Above: The Light Benders crafted this one-of-a-kind table using diamante glass, a high-quality material which, unlike other thick glass, is almost clear, with just a slight tint of green. Table design by Kristine Flood of Gilliam's Center for Creative Design. • **Opposite:** The owners of this Scottsdale residence were so pleased with the side-lights and transom the Prossers created that they had a wood door custom-made to complement the design.

surround and sand-carved glass fireplace screen. "That's all we've had time for so far," Lee explains. Not bad, considering they've only lived in the house for six months. They designed the house together, and Lee served as general contractor. As such, their garage/studio is perfectly suited to their glassworking needs. It features high ceilings, skylights, a sandblasting room with doors at either end, and plenty of room for glass storage, a compressor, kilns, a grinding machine, work tables and a small adjacent office.

Double Diamond after an English beer) they have three children and enjoy trail rides together. Julie sits on the Rio Verde Homeowners Association committee, and Lee is a member of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office search-and-rescue posse. While their backgrounds and interests are varied, The Light Benders consumes much of their time. Although Lee admits the workload is demanding and craftsmanship exacting, his outlook is simple and very positive. One of the reasons for his success: "It's fun." 🌿

