BUILDING THE FIRST GLASS STUDIO

THE HOMOSOTE HUT

***Bill Boysen**, who designed the first glass studio, wrote this reminiscence in 1987. He is now a Professor in the School of Art and Design at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Bill returned to Penland in 1977 at Bill Brown's invitation to teach the first summer session in the second studio, which had been completed that spring.*

Looking back on the events of that summer of 1965, I still feel fortunate to have been asked to design the first glass studio at the school. In retrospect, it is probably a classic example of being in the right place at the right time. I had just finished my first year at the University of Wisconsin/ Madison and I felt honored that Harvey Littleton had enough confidence in my technical ability to recommend me to Bill Brown for what was an historic occasion.

As a native of the west coast, I knew little of Penland, North Carolina, let alone a crafts school located somewhere near there. I can remember the long drive up the hill, twisting through what seemed to be an endless series of switchbacks and hairpin curves. I can remember, too, the tremendous feeling of accomplishment breaking into the opening and seeing the Lily Loom House and the dining room nestled in the lush green of the mountainside. In addition to the almost picture book environment, one of the things that first impressed me about Penland was the open and friendly atmosphere: a genuine zeal for the sanctity of each others' artistic pursuits and an overall sense of good-natured cooperation amongst ego-free artists and teachers.

A good deal of the credit for the success of the first glassblowing studio must go to Harvey's program at Madison, Wisconsin. Much of what was learned there technically was acquired first-hand, by doing, with modifications when necessary to correct an obvious miscalculation. We were encouraged to be problem solvers, to make adjustments and alterations in direct response to an observed phenomenon.

Anyway, back to the challenge at Penland. Following the social formalities of introduction to those already on the hill, we walked up behind the ceramic studio and kiln. **Bill Brown** pointed to what was little more than an open air shelter enclosed to some degree by sheets of homosote building panels. The floor was loose dirt and required cement blocks for the foundation of the furnace and the annealers. Everything was built on the spot and problems were creatively solved using local resources and talent.

As the studio began taking shape, feelings of excitement and anticipation were expressed by those visiting the site. I built a "one brick" day tank capable of producing 75-80 pounds of molten glass. I brought three or four hundred pounds of 475 marble cullet with me, the same composition we were using at Madison. The glory hole was a refractory-lined metal drum mounted on stacked cement blocks. Both were top-fired with venturi burners 'a la Labino and carved burner blocks. The three top-loading annealers were controlled by electric range switches according to recorded pyrometer readings.

THE FIRST DEMONSTRATION

Bill suggested we schedule an evening demonstration to officially open the studio, and I must admit to a good case of stage fright as we climbed the hill toward the infant studio that seemed to spring up overnight. After all, I *was* the glass person; I built the studio, surely I knew all there was to know about blowing, right? Wrong! My only comfort was I knew more than most of the spectators.

To this day I can remember my own amazement when, following the transfer, I decided to open a rather ordinary bowl form into a roundel to conclude the first piece with a clumsy description of "crown glass." The punty stick was right on center and as I rotated the rod in the glory hole cavity, I tried to comment on the crown glass procedure. The bowl form began to open faster than anticipated and as I withdrew the rod and piece from the hole, the rim nearly caught the edge of the roundel, so close I thought I was going to lose the piece. But, no, the roundel flattened so beautifully that the crowd sensed a little of the magic that fascinates us all. Applause and cheers filled the night's recesses and I handed a blow pipe to Bill Brown for the second piece of the evening.

-Bill Boysen

Construction of the annealer in the first glass studio in 1965

First GAS Conference at Penland in 1971

A Living Treasure in Our Midst

Pioneer artist in the studio glass movement, Penland Trustee, neighbor and friend, **Harvey Littleton**, was chosen as the 1993 North Carolina Living Treasure by the Institute for Human Potential at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW).

Harvey is recognized as the originator of vitreographs, prints made from sandblasted designs on glass plates. He has "taught everyone else" in studio glass—including Dale Chihuly, the 1992 recipient of the National Living Treasure Award—said Dr. Gerald Shinn, professor of philosophy and religion at UNCW and director of the Institute, in the announcement of the award.

"The purpose of the living treasure is to recognize talent and master craftsmanship in North Carolina," said Shinn. This is the seventh year the award has been presented. The Living Treasure Award was presented to Harvey at a banquet in the University Center Ballroom in Wilmington on October 29.

Harvey's most recent honors also include a Diploma of Honors from the Glas Museum of Frauenau, Germany, an election to the Western North Carolina Creative Arts Hall of Fame, the Distinguished Alumnus Award of the University of Michigan School of Art, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Glass Art Society.

The Littleton Studio is a short distance from the Penland campus and students have always been welcome. In fact, a field trip to his studio is often a part of glass classes. Considered the father of the studio glass movement in America, Harvey developed a glass program at the University of Wisconsin/Madison. At Bill Brown's request, he sent one of his first students, Bill Boysen, to design Penland's first glass studio in 1965. He has been one of the driving forces in the recent decision by the Board of Trustees to build a new glass studio.