

## Ina Peebles



I followed instructions from the Swift River Glass Facebook page to arrive at Ina Peebles' home studio in the wild and friendly woods of Wendell, Mass. Ina creates her fused glass jewelry here in the quiet of this small rural community of less than 1000 residents, affectionately, (and somewhat sarcastically), known locally as The Cosmic Center of the Universe. Ina was among one of the early waves of homesteading, hippie settlers, drawn there by the availability of cheap acreage in the early 1980s. She and her former husband obtained 15 acres of land with owner financed payments under 200 a month, and commenced to log the land and then build a home and raise five children on it.

Ina has always engaged in craft work, always made things with her hands while raising her family, including homeschooling the children when they were little. She has engaged herself in basket weaving, leatherwork, quilting, and for a while even ran a professional sewing business fabricating

costumes for historical re-enactments “back in the day.”



She is still busy cooking, gardening and helping care for kids and grandkids, all of whom live within the Happy Valley. One of her sons is still recovering from a severe car vs bicycle incident that happened this past winter. The close-knit community of Wendell is, to her, a much more populated place these days, but still, there were no houses visible for several miles on one of the roads in, leading me to believe that I might have taken a wrong turn before finding her road.



In the basement, Ina opened the lid of her kiln to reveal the glowing glass tiles she baked in time for our interview. Made up of several layers, these squares contain a layer of dichroic glass that shimmers and reflects a different hue as it is turned in the light, giving a sense of something alive and elusive trapped within the gem-like square. Dichroic glass grew out of the space industry; one of its uses originally was to make interference filters. It is composed of layers of glass and micro-layers of metals or oxides which give the glass shifting colors depending on the angle of view. It is now widely used and highly prized in the decorative arts and crafts; one of those substances that people like to call “eye candy.”

Ina has been fusing glass for about 15 years or more. It is something she picked up on after taking a workshop at the Worcester Craft center. She was a stained-glass artist prior to that, and still at times will solder glass together for jewelry items, but it is not a method she devotes much of her time to anymore. When she first started fusing glass, she made larger items such as plates and bowls. Observing what sold best at local craft fairs taught her that jewelry would be far more lucrative a craft

to devote her time to, as well as be much easier to lug around to set up at shows.



The processes Ina has in her basement studio are the dirtier ones: cutting, shaping, grinding and kiln firing are all done down here. The larger tiles are cut with a tile saw or ring saw into smaller pieces for earrings and pendants. Thin strips are sawed for her earring studs, and then she cuts and snaps tiny squares which will be re-fired into perfect round blobs to glue on earring backs. The other cuts get re-fired as well, to smooth the edges again, and also this will stretch the dichroic layer slightly to show the background glass beneath more. After the second firing, she grinds a groove around the pieces that will hold the silver wire she uses to finish the pendants and drop earrings

In a small upstairs room she composes her creations, matching up earrings with wires and putting her stock on cards ready for resale. One table holds her molds and stamps for working with metal clay. She also uses a paper punch on thin sheets of specially conditioned clay, to create intaglio designs that she then backfills with colored resin after firing. Sometimes she combines a special low-fire, low-shrinkage metal clay with fused glass. She showed me a fun, wacky ring with a three story house on it that stuck out about an inch, an early project in 3d design she did just for the fun of it.



Ina has many outlets selling her wares and does about 7 shows a year, including the Ashfield Fall Festival, Wendell Old Home Days, and other events. Shelburne Artisans Cooperative is one of her top venues for sales, as is the New Salem General Store on Route 202. Whole Foods in Hadley once bought \$7,000 a year from her, but then disappointingly switched to selling cheaper imported jewelry.

Ina has no plans to retire — even if she could, “I would still be making things,” she confessed. A life of self sufficiency up in Wendell has given her much satisfaction, and it was fascinating to see the gems she fuses tighter emerge from her woodland kiln.