



Elaine talks to Sue MacGillivray

Elaine: So Sue, good to have a chance to catch up with you. Can you remind us when did your glass workshop first open?

Sue: Well, it first opened in March 2014, which is when I registered. We'd done a bit of renovation so that I could start working, and we moved over here definitively then as well so it was a good opportunity to just go for it.

Elaine: And can you also explain, there's often a bit of confusion here, the difference between glass blowing and what you do which is glass fusion?

Sue: So glass blowing is when you have a furnace and it runs depending on the kind of glass you're using about 1100 degrees celsius, so it's very very hot and it runs all the time and you mount the glass in the evening for example and the next day it's ready to use, and you take it out with a long pipe and you shape it by hand and it's a kind of centrifugal thing but horizontal. A bit like pottery but on the horizontal and but you can't touch the glass, so you're shaping with tools and things. You're actually manipulating the glass and you blow it, blow bubbles and everything starts from a round shape and the furnace has to run 24/7 so you have to make then sell, make and sell, make and sell.

Elaine: And with glass fusion?

Sue: Glass fusion or fusing.

Elaine: fusing

Sue: Is umm, you start with mainly flat pieces of glass, so sheets of glass in fact, and you can cut it up, assemble it, and then you put it in a kiln and you close the kiln, turn the programmer on, turn the kiln on and it will heat up and cool down and then it will be fused. So it's not so hands on in the hot stage and you have to leave it and see what happens. So even if you know roughly what you're doing there's always the chance for some surprises and usually they're nice ones. Although sometimes things can happen like you might find that there's a crack. There's usually a reason for it, so you have to find out why.

Elaine: So tell us about the courses that you run. Does the length depend on the piece being made?

Sue: To a certain degree. I mainly run courses of an afternoon where people come and have a go at making something and I usually suggest coasters because they're an excellent vehicle for learning the cutting techniques, learning about the glass, learning about decorating, designing and what I find is that some people come here saying that they aren't artistic and they haven't got, you

know, they haven't got those sort of skills but actually this is a really good way of creating something yourself which comes out really effective. So, umm, and you can use it, you can take them home or you can give them away and you can take them home and use them, put your cup of tea or a glass of wine on and it's great fun. And I've done I don't know how many coasters classes and I'm still not bored, because they're all different, all the outcomes are different.

Elaine: So, it could be like an afternoon, or it could be ...

Sue: Yeah, there's umm... If somebody wanted to make for example a panel or something to put on the wall, that's a bit larger then I can do that over a period of days. I did one a few years ago for 2 people over 3 days, and they also managed to get some bits and bobs in. I can't really have more than 2 people doing larger pieces because of the size of the kiln and also sometimes you fire the piece once and then you re-fire it so you can keep firing it until you've got the effect that you want, so ...

Elaine: So what's the maximum number of people that you could?

Sue: Well I have actually done some courses for groups of 8 kids so I can just described the workshop I've got like a central crate with plants on and then 4 tables around that crate and I can have 2 people at each bench if they're smallish. And if they have a teacher with them but normally it's 4 people is the maximum and you know, that's for an afternoon but it could be for 3 or 4 days if they were making smaller pieces or we kind of rotate it. When people come in I always start off with a kind of health and safety induction because there are certain things that plainly obvious that you shouldn't do but it's just useful to have that reminder. And one thing is like trying to sweep the work surface with your hand. Sweeping the work surface with your hand when you've got little bits of glass is not a good idea. So I have dustpans and brushes all around. And we have, we occasionally have when people have taken things to the kiln, you know, they got them carefully balanced on a sheet of glass and whoops!! But you know there's always a way, way around it.

Elaine: And what about with children? Do you run a course for children?

Sue: Not specifically, but children can come from the age of ...

Elaine: Cos you mentioned that you had little groups?

Sue: Yeah, I can do that and usually that's for, by special request by some kind of association or education establishment that has children, who they are organising activities for children so so I have done that.

Elaine: I think we probably talked about this before because I asked you I think its from the age of 8?

Sue: Yes.

Elaine: A little bit more ...

Sue: Yeah, when they're a little bit stronger, a bit taller. Like I was saying I can raise and lower the height of the desks and the other thing is the attention span so a long afternoon for a very small child is not ideal. But, umm, I do have glass paints for younger children but I can gear things specifically around them. I actually did some work with a school in Caurel a few years ago when they had the tap, so I used to go in and help create madness and mayhem with glass paints over there. And they all came here and did a project as well so mainly it's adults and young teenagers or kids from 10 years old.

Elaine: Excellent. So when with all this going on do you have time to create your own pieces?

Sue: Well, the winter's quieter, so January, February, March is a good time to do it, although actually that is one time when we sometimes go away so can't do anything but yeah and in between various projects I have things that I know sell well, so I remake stock of those, and if I get a particular idea that I want to try out I might stick that in with something else that's doing so all year round really.

Elaine: And you work on commissions I believe?

Sue: Yes. I've done a few larger scale projects. The last one was a door which was for a customer in St Ives in Cornwall, but I've done recently I've got a few commissions on at the moment. I did a number of plates for a local café-bar and also I've got a wedding present to do and some large coasters for a bedside table.

Elaine: So that's good because that keeps the income.

Sue: Yeah it keeps the income and it also, I quite like having had some experience of working as a designer in a glass factory I quite like having the constraints of say, particularly for these plates, umm, they've got to be for food so you got to think about the surface, staying smooth, the glass the price is a thing so you can't make them too expensive, texture, all sorts of things that come in ...

Elaine: Rein you in a little bit?

Sue: Yeah, rein you in, but I quite like working within those boundaries, yeah.

- Elaine: I believe also now you've diversified in that you've opened up rooms here for chambres d'hôtes.
- Sue: Yes, that's correct.
- Elaine: And how did that come about?
- Sue: Well, it came about partly as a sort of idea of having accommodation for people who can do courses and partly as an idea it's a good means of creating an income and bringing people to the village. So we started that in 2015 properly and then with just 1 room, and then that was at a time when the lake was emptied so that was quite interesting, and after that we added another room, having created a shower room and done extensive renovations. A lot of people with houses in Brittany will know that there's a lot of thick walls and things like that to negotiate when you are trying to put piping in all sorts of things in. That was a challenge but it was also a really nice project. It's a lovely shower room so people have got a lovely room
- Elaine: I believe that's Ian's particular business.
- Sue: Yeah it's his business, so he deals with a lot of that. I help with the housework and kind of like front of house on breakfast. But we're doing table d'hôte a lot more now, so particularly since the Covid pandemic, people want, well, it's difficult to find restaurants and people wanted to kind of stay where they were staying and eat so that's carried on.
- Elaine: I have to say, whatever Ian was making last time I called round it smelled absolutely delicious.
- Sue: Yes, he's a very good cook which is great, not so good for my waist-line but we have lots of cyclists and walkers and so they really, well most people really enjoy what he makes.
- Elaine: Where do they, your clientele for that predominantly come from? Are they French?
- Sue: Usually.
- Elaine: Right.
- Sue: But we have others. There's another company that does bike tours so we get some of their people who are often British or American, but we mainly have French people. But we've had Irish, German, recently Belgian, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, you know all European.
- Elaine: That's very international.



Sue: So it is very international.

Elaine: Brilliant.

Sue: So it's fascinating and they like to take souvenirs home with them which is also great for me. It works really well.

Elaine: So that's very good. Well, thank you very much for your time and it's brilliant that you are working in tandem together. You got your team worked out.

Sue: We have, yeah. It works really well.

Elaine: Thank you Sue for your time.

Sue: Thank you.