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THE **Glass** Artistry OF David Bennett

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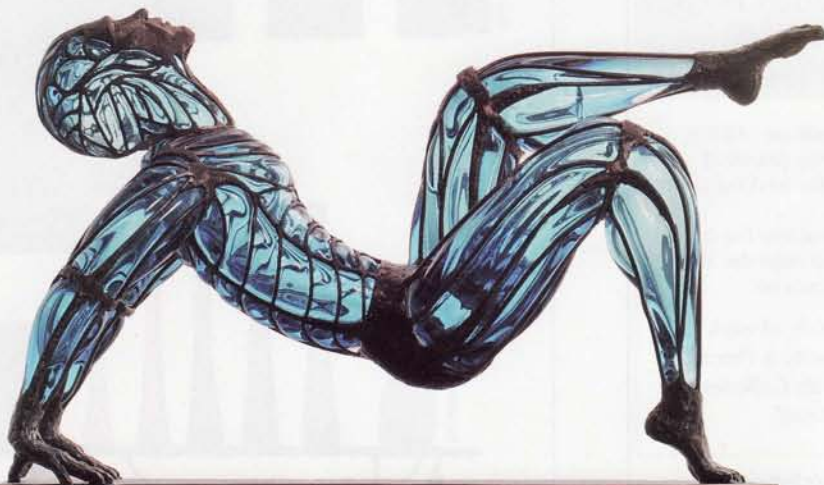
A Treasure of a

Surrounded by the Olympic Mountains and Puget Sound, lawyer-turned-glass-artist David Bennett lives each day 'in a zone of grace'

BY LYNDA MCDANIEL • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL SHEEHAN

It's mid-morning, and work is in full swing

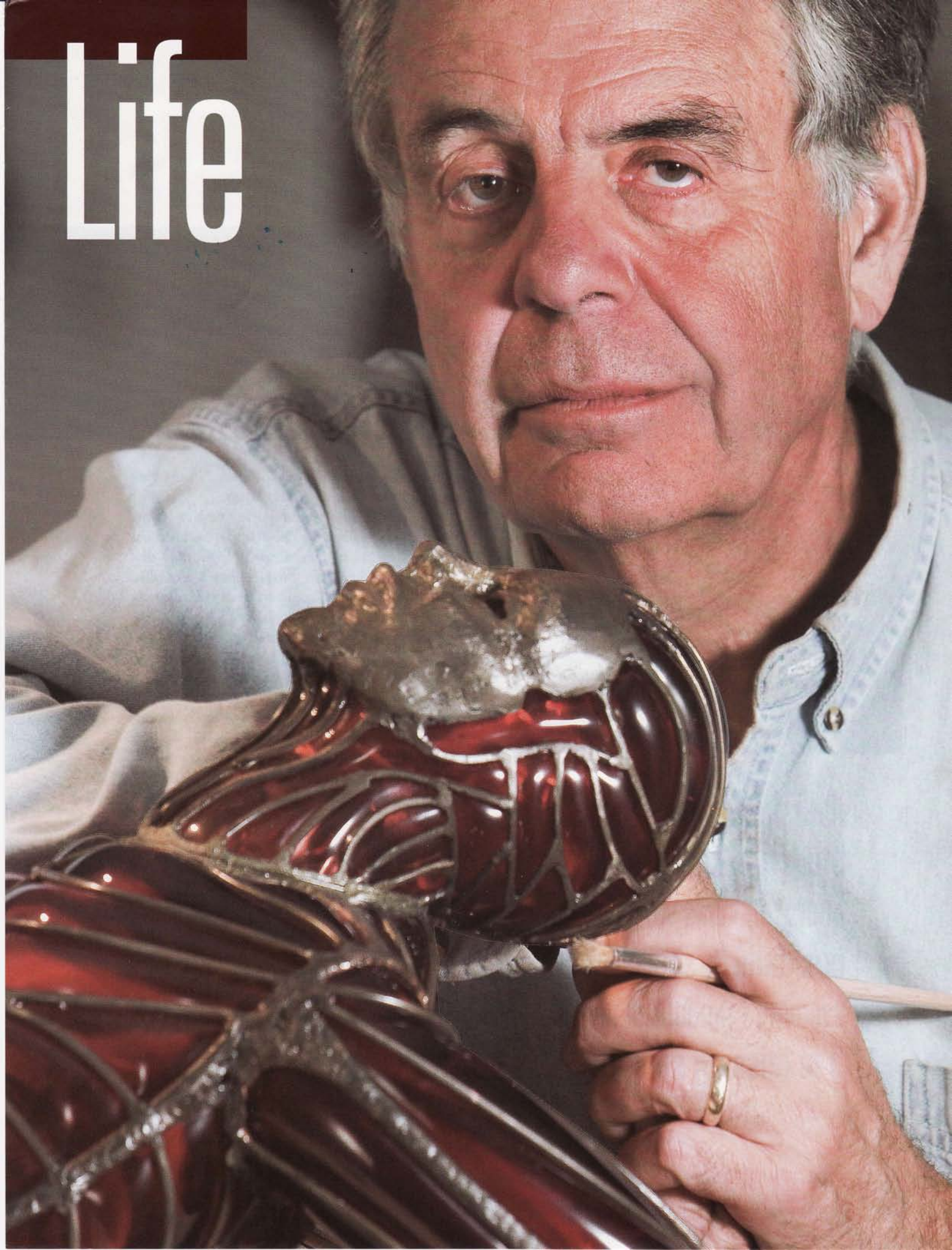
in David Bennett's glass studio. Bennett, his son Drew, and gaffer Bob Park are finishing work on a bronze-and-glass female torso. The atmosphere inside the studio is one of respect—no shouting, no ego bruising, just three professionals creating a vision. When Bennett turns off his torch, Mozart's "Requiem" is audible in the relative quiet. The music and artists seem to merge, choreographed as though by design, both racing toward their coda. More heating, rolling and heating the glass again. A chorus of instructions—Bob to David, David to Drew, back



HARLEY SOLTES

"Posing Man" is an example of David Bennett's new work, which depicts figures in motion. Bennett poses with the same form in red, opposite.

Life





You can't help but become inspired after stepping onto Bennett's wraparound porch overlooking the Hood Canal. Some of his experimental pieces, such as this steel horse, below, find their way into the gardens. Inside, Bennett remodeled an old brass chandelier with 24 new blown glass globes that move your eyes upward as you step into the entryway.



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—David Bennett

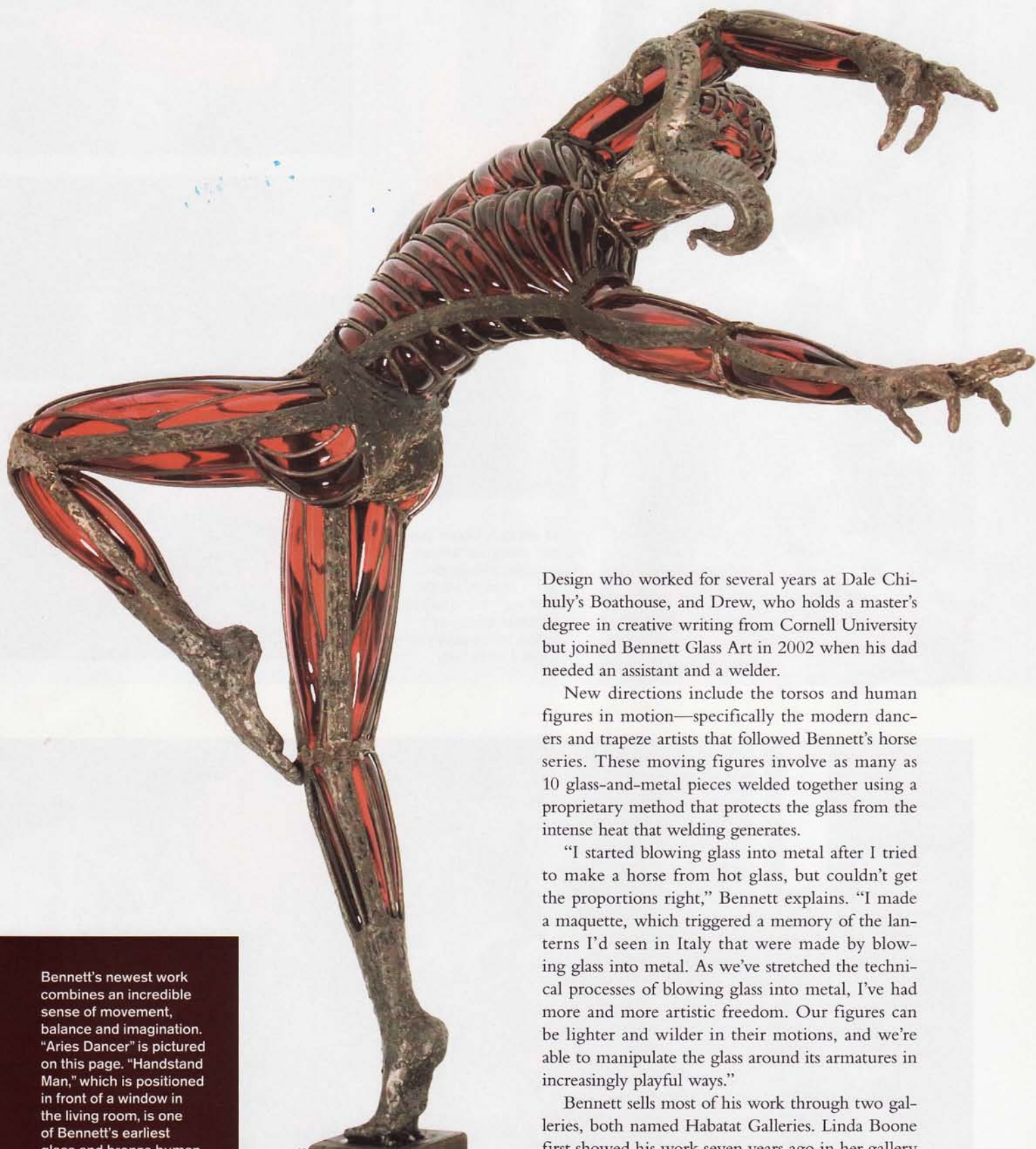
to Bob—accentuate the choral finale. Finally, glass thrust into the waiting vessel. Amen.

The climax offers a temporary respite, as the work is only halfway finished. Once the torso has cooled, they must remove the bronze mold that has coaxed molten glass into sensuous shapes, then patina bronze embellishments and painstakingly clean, scrape and polish the glass.

Overlooking Puget Sound outside Seattle, Wash., Bennett's studio and home are an hour and a lifetime away from his 25-year career as a litigator in the city. In one of those accidents of fate, Bennett met a glass blower while vacationing in Florida to celebrate his 50th birthday. “He fished every morning, blew glass six to eight hours, and was well into his cocktails by six o'clock each evening,” Bennett recalls. “I thought to myself, ‘I’m missing something.’”

Within two weeks, Bennett began blowing glass at Eastlake Art Glass in Seattle, where he made what he calls “clunky paperweights that looked like a truck ran over a tennis ball.” In 1992, he studied at Pilchuck Glass School with Robert Carlson and Petr Novotny, who helped foster his fascination with marrying metal and glass. Subsequent studies took him to the south of France, back to Pilchuck and over to Murano, Italy, to work with Pino Signoretto, a renowned Italian glass sculptor who guided Bennett's first foray into glass sculpture. By 1997, Bennett had quit his day job, though he still works a full day, sometimes seven days a week.

Bennett surrounds himself with talent: Bob Park, a Rhode Island School of Design graduate with a master's from the Massachusetts College of Art +



Bennett's newest work combines an incredible sense of movement, balance and imagination. "Aries Dancer" is pictured on this page. "Handstand Man," which is positioned in front of a window in the living room, is one of Bennett's earliest glass and bronze human figures. "Aries Portrait" is shown opposite.

EMIL MEEK

Design who worked for several years at Dale Chihuly's Boathouse, and Drew, who holds a master's degree in creative writing from Cornell University but joined Bennett Glass Art in 2002 when his dad needed an assistant and a welder.

New directions include the torsos and human figures in motion—specifically the modern dancers and trapeze artists that followed Bennett's horse series. These moving figures involve as many as 10 glass-and-metal pieces welded together using a proprietary method that protects the glass from the intense heat that welding generates.

"I started blowing glass into metal after I tried to make a horse from hot glass, but couldn't get the proportions right," Bennett explains. "I made a maquette, which triggered a memory of the lanterns I'd seen in Italy that were made by blowing glass into metal. As we've stretched the technical processes of blowing glass into metal, I've had more and more artistic freedom. Our figures can be lighter and wilder in their motions, and we're able to manipulate the glass around its armatures in increasingly playful ways."

Bennett sells most of his work through two galleries, both named Habatat Galleries. Linda Boone first showed his work seven years ago in her gallery in Boca Raton, Fla. Her brother, Ferdinand Hampson, added Bennett's work in 2002 to his gallery in Royal Oak, Mich.



At left, Park lowers glass into a mold as Bennett watches. A close up of this is seen above. At right, from top to bottom, hot glass is shaped, pulled, then placed into a metal leg to cool.

Bennett completes the assembly of "Posing Man" inside his studio.





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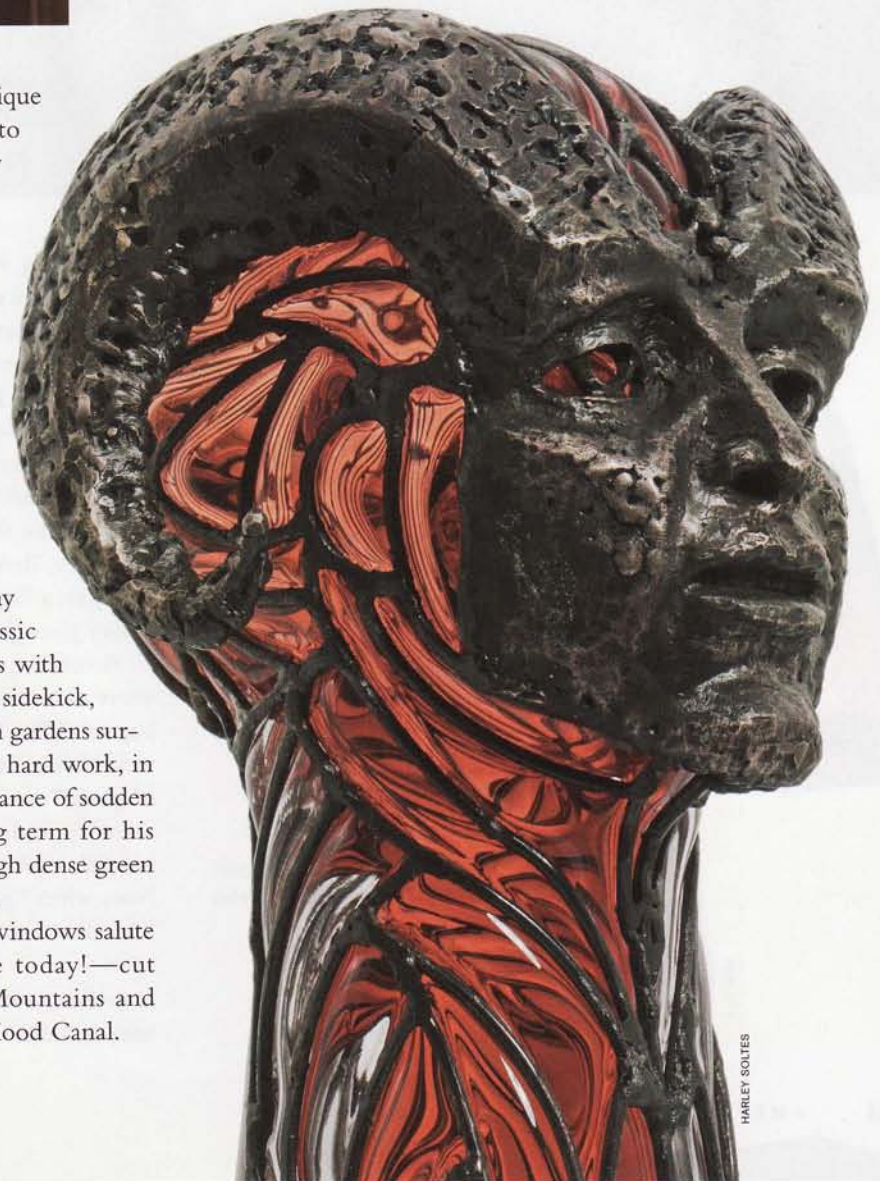
—Ferdinand Hampson, owner, Habatat Galleries

“David has taken an ancient technique in glass and metal and found ways to make it not only large scale, but very human,” Hampson says. “What he does is very technically oriented, yet he has the sensitivity for gestures, movements and even facial expressions.”

Boone notices how her clients respond to Bennett’s creativity. “His work has an energy. The horses have such fire in the eyes, the figures have this wonderful movement,” she says.

Bennett’s studio sits only steps away from the 3,000-square-foot classic Craftsman seaside home he shares with his wife Karen and standard poodle sidekick, Panda (short for Pandemonium). Lush gardens surround both buildings, in part Karen’s hard work, in part nature’s amends for its overabundance of sodden skies. Yard art—Bennett’s mocking term for his sculptural experiments—peeks through dense green shrubs and delicate burgundy foliage.

Once inside the house, walls of windows salute the vast landscape: the sky—blue today!—cut jaggedly in half by the Olympic Mountains and reflected in the calm waters of the Hood Canal.



HARLEY SOLTES



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Working with an architect and friend, Karen created nooks and niches for what has become a personal museum of sorts: Bennett’s first glass-and-copper jar, an early horse, a glass figure sculpted by Novotny. Karen’s work shows well, too—tiles with molded-glass Indian women punctuating the front door and fireplace, 25 stained-glass transom windows and 10 swirled panels the couple created to flank the front door. To illuminate his home’s entryway, Bennett remodeled an old brass chandelier from a Seattle hotel and blew 24 new red-and-amber glass globes.

According to Bennett’s birth certificate, he’s 66 years old, but his unlined face and limber body beg to differ. He jokes about being a re-channeled workaholic, but a happy one. “I’m living in a zone of grace,” he says. “The difference between being a lawyer and an artist is that when I went to see people as their lawyer, they looked at their watch. Now when I go as an artist, they invite their friends. This is a treasure of a life.” ●

Contributing writer **LYNDA MCDANIEL** freelances from her home in Seattle.