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LIFE FROM EVERY ANGLE

Deep in the Art of L.A.

In their workshops and ateliers, five Angelenos are transforming glass, wood, and clay into works of art—and Los Angeles into a major center of gallery-quality crafts. *by Lisa Rosen*

IN A TOWN too quickly stereotyped for its gilded impermanence, it is actually quite easy to find work that's built to last. Hand built, in fact. Tucked away in unassuming corners of Los Angeles, artisans toil and grind and sand away at their creations, from hand-blown crystal chandeliers and reclaimed-wood furniture to silk-screened wallpaper and sculptural pottery. Each embodies a unique combination of talents—the creative vision of an artist and the extraordinary skill required of a craft. Individually commissioned pieces are available at prices that can rival those of fine art, while lines sold through design stores and galleries are more affordable.

Why such a bounty in L.A.? Is there something about southern California that nurtures this hands-on approach to art? Maybe it's a congenial climate that encourages a robust, tactile approach to all things. Or a trick of the light—a crystalline California sunshine that bathes the senses more than 300 days a year and makes everything fresh and new. Whatever it is, L.A. is gaining an international reputation as a center for artisans.



LIGHT FANTASTIC

Alison Berger

An inverted lead crystal bell hangs from the ceiling; tight lines of etching circle the globe, adding a delicate texture to the slick surface. Flip the light switch, though, and you're engulfed in a world of words, shadows cast onto the walls by the etchings. The text is drawn from the sketchbooks of two masters, Leonardo da Vinci and the creator of the chandelier, Alison Berger. Glass and light and shadow are the raw materials Berger has been molding into art for 25 years, as she pushed the ancient craft of glassblowing into new sculptural realms. Her creations have been shown at New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Triennial.

Berger has a studio in West Hollywood but creates her pieces in a gritty glassworks in Compton. The work is painstaking; some commissioned

chandeliers can take two years to complete and cost well into six figures. But she also sells hand-blown objects in the \$1,000 range through design stores in Los Angeles. Whether it's commissioned or made-to-order for the stores, the work is always signed by the artist. Etched, that is. alisonbergerglassworks.com



OUT OF THIS WORLD

Adam Silverman

Adam Silverman's large studio, in the working-class neighborhood of Atwater Village, is dominated by three potting wheels and two kilns. Pottery thick with texture and glaze lines the walls in what could be a display of extraterrestrial rock samples. Earth-colored, irregular in shape, pocked and nubbly, his pieces draw you closer, urging you to run your fingers over the surfaces. Tiny bud vases seem to erupt with lava, striations of color drain through large smooth platters. "Each piece has been

fired in some sort of elaborate way that leaves all kinds of scars on it," Silverman says. "I do a lot of post-firing, grinding, sanding."

Silverman was educated at the Rhode Island School of Design, is a licensed architect and, as cofounder of the highly successful X-Large, was seasoned in the rough-and-tumble world of ultra-trendy fashion design.

Now, after about six years at his newest enterprise, Atwater Pottery, he's creating a lot of buzz again. In addition to working on commission (prices start around \$1,000) and for design stores (prices start at \$250), he is also preparing pieces for exhibition at Art Basel in Switzerland (gallery pieces range up to \$3,000). And though his studio is unmarked, interested customers still find their way to his door. Well, the intrepid ones. "They usually call for directions a few times," he says. "I talk them in." atwaterpottery.com

Otherworldly delights (clockwise from upper left): gemlike decanters handblown by Joe Cariati; shadowy words cast by an Alison Berger chandelier; wallpaper whimsy from Geoff McFetridge; Adam Silverman's extraterrestrial pottery.

