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**Creativity And  
Innovation With  
Glass**



# Creativity And Innovation With Glass

By Heather Navarra, *The Write Type*

In business since 1959, Albion Glass Company Limited has forged ahead to become an industry leader in the areas of glass, aluminum and mirror installation. Working with contractors, architects and designers, as well as business and home owners, their reputation is 'the best in the industry'. Located in Toronto, they are known for the quality of the work they produce, especially for intricate and difficult installations. They have earned that reputation through reliability and quality of craftsmanship, and are now gaining momentum internationally.

A family-owned business, Albion Glass was started by Frank Vlahovic. "Our family had been in the glass business in Europe for centuries," says his son Rene Vlahovic, who has run the business since 1986. "After World War II, my father worked for a Toronto glass firm, then started his own company in 1959." Rene worked side-by-side with his father from the 1960s, learning the craft and the 'tricks of the trade' and has continued to expand his skills year after year, attending trade shows and lectures internationally to stay abreast of the latest techniques and materials. Now a speaker at industry events, Rene also shares his knowledge with, and learns from, experts from other industries, such as aircraft designers, engineers and steelworkers.



Working closely with contractors, designers and architects, Albion Glass specializes in curtain walls, skylights, frameless showers, mirrors, structural glass, storefronts, glass floors and aluminum windows, as well as sandblasting designs onto glass. They work with designers and architects to create state-of-the-art results. "Clients often begin with a concept of what the finished project should look like," says Rene. "We help with the engineering, providing the expertise for a wide range of considerations such as the sizes and types of glass to be used, finishes on the glass, and the type and size of aluminum framing required to hold the glass. We can handle the challenges to create an envelope that keeps the water out and minimizes air leakage. Designers and architects often draw on our expertise and recommendations."

A Member of the Architectural Glass and Metal Contractors Association, the company now employs approximately 20 full-time, unionized staff, but that number can balloon to over 70 when demand is at its peak. Rene notes that the experience and dedication of his employees are one of the major contributors to the success of the business.

"Our people are the best at what they do," shares Rene. "We have our own training process, and staff work their way up to become the best in the industry. We know what it takes to get the job done. We also have a good working knowledge of the construction process, so we can ensure the supporting structure is adequate to carry the glass installation, saving our customers time and money in the long run. Our goal is to create a quality finished product that will last."

Rene loves the chance to develop projects that draw on his leading-edge expertise. Clearly a specialist in his field, there's no doubt that he is detail-oriented and focused on being innovative in the industry. As one of the leaders in glass

like a curtain. Many of his residential projects similarly 'bend the envelope', including the creation of a completely glass solarium, with no framing, at a ski chalet. There's no doubt the company has a distinctive talent and flare, providing creative approaches that consistently meet clients' needs and often exceed their expectations.

Known for the difficulty of the work the company undertakes, as well as the quality of the results achieved, Rene has collaborated with every major architect and designer in Toronto, as well as British and Italian architects, and has worked for many of the wealthiest in Toronto to help make their dreams come true. The company serves clients throughout Ontario, and is now branching out internationally, undertaking projects around the world (in Chicago, New York, Florida, Bahamas, Bermuda and Cuba, to name but a few locations), as well as supplying product for installation in other countries such as Iran, India, Russia and Africa. "We help design installations that



flooring, he has even designed and installed a glass stairway, including the treads and balustrades – a spectacular and unique installation that required special consideration for the movement caused by constant foot traffic. Another job that demanded creativity was a location where the glass hangs from three stories down,

are being built in other countries," says Rene.

The products Albion Glass installs have a long life span. They helped in the design of the CN Tower's first glass floor, and most of the innovative storefront designs on high-end Bloor Street shops were





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“We care very much,” notes Rene. “We want our work to last a long, long time. We want our clients to be happy. We are known for taking care of all their needs; once they become our client, they stay our client, whether for small or large jobs. My best client is the client I don’t hear from until they call me for the next project. Then I know they’re happy with the results.”

Customer-oriented and fast-paced, Rene understands the value to clients of being responsive. He has an instinctive comprehension of what could make a job even better, which sets him apart from the competition. He strongly believes that 20 years of experience are absolutely necessary to becoming good at this craft. “Everybody thinks it’s simple,” explains Rene, “but aluminum and glass have a life to them. If you don’t understand it, we’ll be there to repair your work. It’s not easy.”

Rene has experience with the process from beginning to end, including drafting and fabricating through to installation. This company is dynamic and unique because they have built a level of expertise through years of experience. Through countless practical applications, they have demonstrated what can be done.

The company has earned many awards (as many as three each year). For example, for their work at the new home of the National Ballet of Canada, they received the Toronto Construction Association’s ‘Best of the Best’ award, recognizing “a unique adaptation or approach with an onsite process, technology, technique or implementation of a concept.”

“People have ideas, sometimes totally crazy, but they want to see them fulfilled,” says Rene. “We are here to help with that process, through our creativity, expertise and innovative concepts. We are in the business to help our clients’ dreams come true.”

developed and installed by the company; automated teller machine areas and sliding door systems for banks that are even tied into their security systems, or interior partitions for Rogers that allow in the light, providing better visibility. Rogers and Eastern Construction commissioned the company to provide a display for a monument that weighs five tons. As part of a glass wall, the entire structure can move by as much as two inches, and is attached to a floor slab that can also move two inches because of heavy foot traffic. Again, innovative design meant another happy customer. Microsoft, Apple, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the University of Toronto, the Royal Conservatory of Music and the Smithsonian Institute are just some of the well-known clients who call on Albion Glass. The company was onsite at the casino in Rama for over seven years, completing all the glass installations, including those for the hotel.

“The architects, designers and owners we have had the pleasure to collaborate with have put us where we are today,” says Rene. Indeed, almost all of their business comes from repeat and referred clients, leaving little need for the local Yellow Pages ad they run. With such successful word-of-mouth marketing, it’s clear that Albion Glass has clients who are thrilled with the results they see.