

LIGHT BOXES

Unexploited Market for Commercial Stained Glass

by Carl J. Iverson



This 1904 window by Joseph Evan MacKay, MacKay Studios, depicts the San Francisco Bay as seen from Tiburon, California. Built originally for Catherine and Maurice Casey in San Francisco, the window today is in the Minnesota Marine Art Museum in Winona, MN.

Looking for a new market for your stained glass windows? At Reinarts Stained Glass Studios of Winona, Minnesota, we have seen an increased demand for stained glass windows set in light boxes. Light boxes provide many

options to display stained glass windows when natural light is not an option. Another bonus of a light box is that the weather doesn't influence the installation.

Since light boxes have their own light source, the stained glass panels are

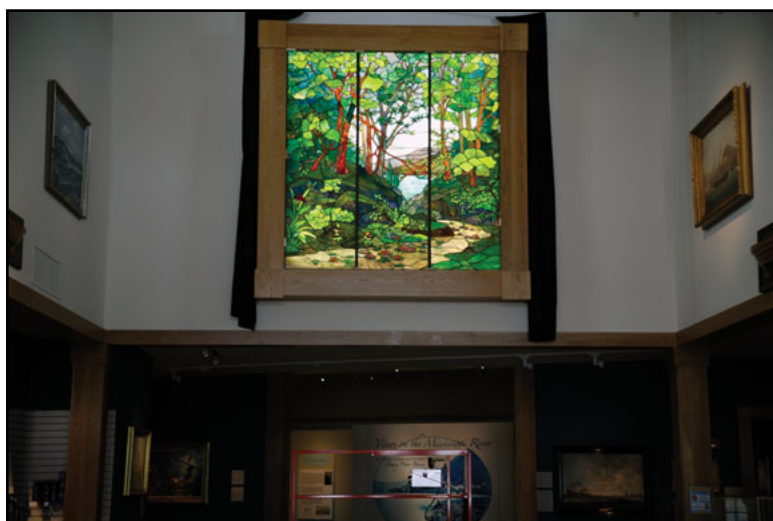
not restricted to window locations. Light boxes can be used as freestanding units to create a designated area such as a baptistery, or they can be used in or as freestanding interior walls acting as dividers, for example, in a smaller

chapel within a larger church. They can also be used as a focal point on any interior wall.

A stained glass light box contains the stained glass panel, the light diffuser and the light source. An excellent economical light source is cool fluorescent natural light or white tubular light bulbs. LED lights hold promise for the future but are not an economical alternative at the present time. The box itself must provide heat ventilation while restricting escaped light. The bulbs must be accessible for replacement.

The beauty of stained glass is all about light. To further concentrate and reflect the light, the inside of the light box is usually painted white. Aluminum-coated panels or coverings are alternative reflectors. The light diffuser is required to mask the light bulbs so that the bulbs' outline is not seen when viewing the stained glass panel. As such, the diffuser becomes a critical component. Acrylic or plastic panels may seem like good choices, but they restrict too much light and make the stained glass panel look dull. A sheer, less-combustible fabric seems to be the best choice. Light box corners are the most difficult area to light. Keep this in mind when designing the stained glass window's background and borders.

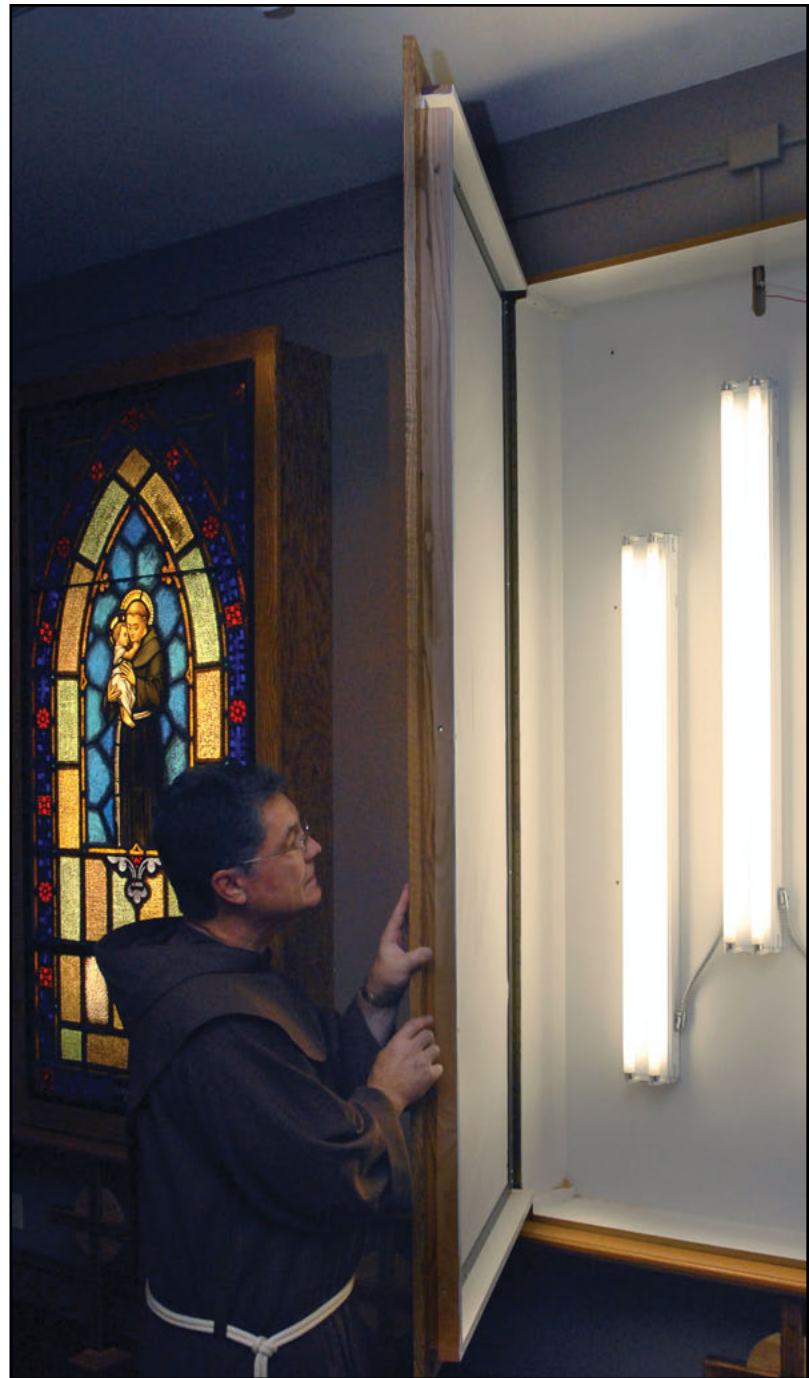
Artificially displaying stained glass has been around for some time. I remember seeing a stained glass panel in the basement of a church in eastern Wisconsin that was built in the early part of the 1900s. The stained glass panels were contained within 2x4s that went from floor to ceiling. The lights themselves were within a separate 2x4 frame construction. There was no box structure. The most remarkable component was the light diffuser consisting of a cheese cloth hanging between the two frames. This combination of stained glass, cheese cloth diffuser, and lights worked well.



The light box for the MacKay window features UV covered fluorescent bulbs and access panels with piano hinges on the left and right of the box.



This 3'x0" Reinarts Stained Glass Studios window at St. Anthony's Church, Mewton, ND, is lit by a light box placed in between two naturally lit stained glass panels.



Lourdes Chapel, Cedar Lake



Light boxes for Lourdes Chapel, Cedar Lake, IN. On the left, diffusion fabric has been stretched and attached to the F channel.

Light boxes do not have to be small. In 2008, the Minnesota Marine Art Museum in Winona, Minnesota, installed a large stained glass panel in a light box as the focal point in the museum entrance. The light box measures about 7 ½ feet wide by 8 feet high and is attached to the wall above the patrons. It was designed by museum

Curator Jon Swanson and installed under the supervision of Reinarts Stained Glass Studios.

The stained glass window was created in 1904 by Joseph Evan MacKay, who had worked for Louis Comfort Tiffany and John La Farge. MacKay designed the window depict-



Lourdes Chapel, Cedar Lake

ing the bay view from Tiburon, California, for the home of prominent San Francisco society members Catherine and Maurice Casey. Notice the pictured horizontal bank of lights designed to make the stained glass come alive.

In 2010, Reinarts Stained Glass Studios installed a light box at St. Anthony's Church in Newton, North Dakota, that measured 3 feet wide by 10 foot high. This installation was unusual in that the light box was flanked on

either side with stained glass windows in natural light. As you can see by the photo, the effect is complimentary and eye-catching. See this light box being constructed at our web site: <http://www.reinarts.com/lightbox1.htm>.

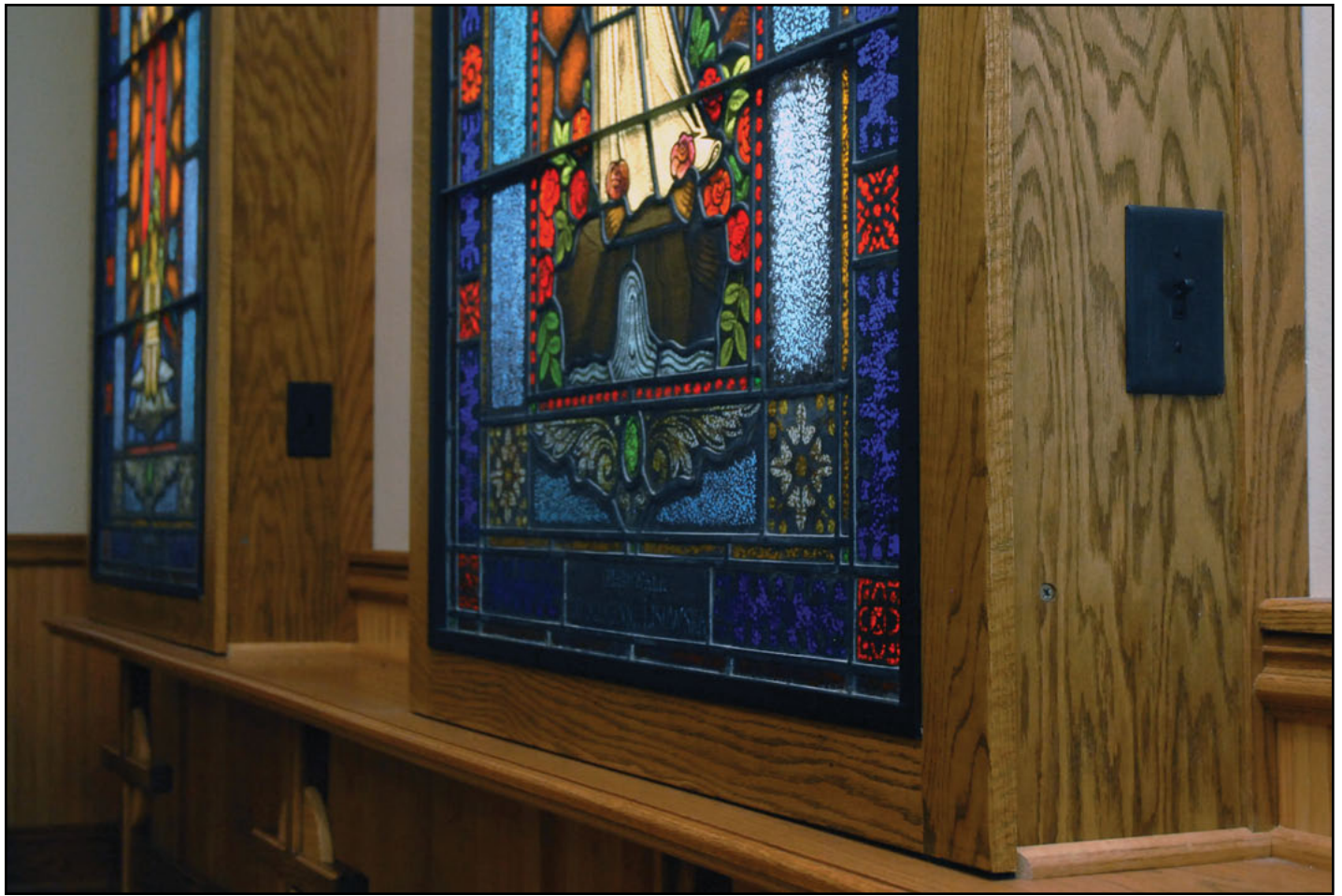
For the project in Cedar Lake, Indiana, six of the light boxes were 42 ½ inches wide by 84 ½ inches high. The stained glass measured 36 inches wide by 78 inches high. For wider light boxes, more thought and attention must be given to its design to ensure that the

light box is sturdy for ease of light bulb maintenance and repeated access won't crack the stained glass. The Cedar Lake light boxes face frame was constructed of solid oak. Oak plywood veneer was used for the remaining construction.

It is unusual to have an entire chapel of stained glass windows in light boxes. In 2011, the Order of Franciscan Friars of Cedar Lake, Indiana, needed to downsize the number of buildings they maintained



Lourdes Chapel, Cedar Lake



Lourdes Chapel, Cedar Lake



on their property. They made the decision to demolish one of their buildings which included their chapel with stained glass windows. This was a very emotional and difficult decision for the entire community. By keeping the stained glass windows, they preserved the memory of old Lourdes Hall, where they had lived and worshiped for more than sixty years. The stained glass windows, probably created in the 1940s, were in good shape and needed only minor glass repairs — the lead came was fine. In late 2011, Reverend Ed Tlucek contacted Reinarts Stained Glass Studios to remove the windows, repair them as necessary, and build light boxes to hold and display the seven windows in a newer building to become the present Lourdes Chapel on the same property. After the new light boxes were installed, Father Ed commented: *The stained glass windows never looked so*

good! In the old Lourdes Chapel, the sun lit up the stained glass for only about an hour in the afternoon — if it was a sunny day. In the new Lourdes Chapel, we keep the lights on all the time because the richness of the stained glass has a calming effect, and the worshiper can better commune with God. We continually receive positive expressions of disbelief from those who see the old windows in light boxes for the first time.

As we've seen in the previous examples and the photographs, properly designed light boxes can display stained glass panels in a very effective way not only to enhance the beauty of the stained glass but also to make its beauty available on demand.

