



**Gary Elshoff**  
**Glass with Flying Colors**  
By Natalie B. David

“My byline is ‘You can turn a plain window into a plane window.’ It’s literally what I do,” says Gary Elshoff, a self-taught stained glass artist who crafts his passion for aviation subjects into intricate works of stained glass.

In 2002, Elshoff transformed his more than 30-year-long hobby into Flying Colors Glass, LLC. Flying Colors Glass puts Elshoff’s skills and artistry to use by making customized stained glass panels that feature aviation themes to enhance windows, refresh table tops or to decorate walls. Since beginning his business, Elshoff has created well over 350 pieces that now decorate homes, offices, hangars, restaurants, schools and various non-traditional applications.

“Everyone that owns a plane has pictures of their plane. They’ve got prints. They’ve got electronic images. They’ve got models, and they’ve got all kinds of doodads,” says Elshoff. “But they don’t have a stained glass window or similar glass art of their airplane. Glass is a medium that will last the longest of all of those. When the prints have turned to dust, the photographs have faded, and the electronic images get corrupted, the everlasting image of that particular airplane will still be on the stained glass window.”

While his focus on airplanes stems more recently from his son, a recent graduate of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Arizona, Elshoff’s passion for aircraft was also entrenched in his Milwaukee, Wisconsin youth. “Our home was essentially right under the main glide path to Mitchell Field, and I remember in the late 50s watching this parade of planes pass right in front of my eyes: the Wisconsin National Guard had F-89 Scorpions, Capitol Airlines was flying Constellations and Central Airlines had DC-3s; it’s these images that are burned in my memory,” recalls Elshoff. “Many of those planes showed up in some of the early window designs that I made.”

Elshoff’s success is equally attributed to his talent and skill as well as to the uniqueness and presentation of his medium and subject. “Since I have a medium that is rather new to the aviation art community, people don’t know what to expect when they contemplate a composition,” says Elshoff. “When I finish a window I feel great when the customer says, ‘Yeah! That’s my plane!’ because many people have some uncertain anticipation about the way their plane will look. They see what I’ve done and they can’t wrap their mind around their plane in a window because it hasn’t been done very often.”

Elshoff got his start with stained glass from a chance find in his grandfather’s basement. “One day I noticed an old stained glass lamp standing in the corner of my grandfather’s basement. When I asked if I could have the lamp, he said, ‘Take that old ugly thing!’” remembers Elshoff. “I just looked at it and thought, ‘I wonder if I can do something like that?’ I still have that lamp hanging in my office.”

To create his pieces, Elshoff follows one of two techniques. While many large format stained glass pieces can be assembled with lead came channel, Elshoff utilizes the Tiffany foil technique, which allows him to create more detail in each window. The Tiffany technique involves wrapping copper foil around the edges of the individual pieces of glass. The pieces are then butted together and soldered.

“I foil my glass for two reasons,” explains Elshoff. “One, it is structurally stronger than the lead came technique, and there is more structural integrity to a foiled piece of glass. And two, because the seam is so much smaller, it allows me to adapt it to the types of compositions I make because airplanes have a lot of detail in them. If I used the lead process, the seams would dominate and overwhelm the impression I’m trying to create.”

To add further detail, Elshoff employs the ancient technique of vitreous paint, which is made from extremely fine ground glass that is then mixed with different oxides to create different colors. Once the detailing is painted, the pieces are kiln-fired and the paint then fuses to the glass. “It’s the same basic technique, if not the technology, that gives my work that special three-dimensional look,” elaborates Elshoff.

But Elshoff’s craft is more than just technical skill. “I’ve been blessed with a special skill-set that gives purpose to my life’s passion,” says Elshoff. “The Lord has blessed me with a gift and I am using that to do what I’m doing.” ■

*For more information, visit [www.flyingcolorsglass.com](http://www.flyingcolorsglass.com) or call 262-377-5505.*