

# Loris Dawn Designs

## Attending to the Nuts and Bolts

by Colleen Bryan

Loris Dawn Nygaard makes unusual lighting designs on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. From her small town of Comox, she has begun to reach out to markets in the broader world, some as far away as Dubai and China. Like rural towns everywhere, the issue of taking one's art to outside markets without losing the seclusion, the natural wonder, and small town conviviality that feeds one's work can be a challenge. This task is made easier by the Internet, but it still poses some difficulties that the solitary artist must resolve. Nygaard speaks here about how she is approaching the issues and challenges of stepping into a global market for her handmade designs.

Since her website is the primary tool in marketing to new customers, Nygaard set about upgrading her Web presence to make it more serviceable. For this task, she researched website optimization and plans to incorporate more anchor links and tabs so that Google Links can locate her images more reliably. She also is looking into the use of Facebook and other social networking to market her lights. "I'm not looking for anything overwhelming. No doubt I will move in baby steps, but I'll be enjoying myself all the way."

Nygaard considers the messaging and forms she uses to advertise her glasswork as part of the art itself rather than some necessary but tangential administrative chore. Certainly it is not something she would be comfortable delegating. "I enjoy taking pictures of my artwork. In many ways, the pictures are more valuable to me than the lights themselves right now. After a piece is sold, I would have nothing left but my enthusiasm and verbal description, which doesn't compare to the impression you receive seeing a project for yourself. My website is personal, created by my friend, Michael Balmer (michaelbalmer@remlab.ca) and me, and I take most of the pictures myself. Choosing the colors for my website, designing the little ring rock around the bottom of the page—these choices are personal expressions of my artistic personality and nature, so in a very real sense they, too, are my art."



Above: Loris Dawn Nygaard, 2012, 10" sphere with ruby faceted crystal jewels, stained glass, glass gems, retro chain, shade holder, and ornate base.



Above right: Loris Dawn Nygaard, Gizi Color Lamp, 2009, plum faceted square jewels, stained glass triangles, and glass gems, 22" high to tip of finial.



Loris Dawn Nygaard, Colorful Table Lamp, 2007, colorful glass gems, handmade links with tassels, 21" high to tip of finial.



Loris Dawn Nygaard, Chalice, 2003, 15-1/2" high. Photo by Boomer Jerrit.

### Rebranding

Recently, Nygaard sought to rebrand her product in order to emphasize the energetic, interactive exchange between her lights and the viewer. About seven years ago, Nygaard began to experiment with light as an active energy infused into a room through the lens of various glasses. Not just bright light illuminating other objects, but rather as colors and lines, often lit by flickering candles, with reflections cascading and playing over walls and floors. Nygaard is particularly taken by the emotional energy that light and color add to the personal environment.

Nygaard has lately decided to incorporate this feature of her glass under the slogan, "The Lights that Turn You On." She Googled the phrase to determine that it was not already in use. Then she registered, as a linking Web domain name, thelightsthatturnyouon.com. She has also redesigned business cards and her website home page to focus attention on how her lights interact with and affect the viewer. She is softening the design of the front page so that the slogan moves in behind a pulsing soft energy. Nygaard and her Web designer are also replacing old thumbnail images with a more active scrolling technique. "I'm working to incorporate video that shows movement, use of dimmer switches, and other similar techniques that influence how my lights affect a room. I want people to be entertained with the idea that when they work with me, we work together on the kind of light they want, the colors they feel best surrounded by, and the kind of energy they want a room to emit."

## Making the Pricing Challenge

Determining the right pricing can be quite a puzzle, Nygaard finds, as she produces more lights, takes on more unique projects, and broadens the geographical market for her product. She has been told that she does not correctly price her lights, and she recognizes that pricing may be an area she has to adjust to make a living as a professional artisan. "I write down how many hours I work on a piece, add in the cost of all the supplies and the wages paid out to the copper foil lady who works for me, and charge accordingly. I know that I am still very modest in my pricing." She identified some of the costs that do not make it into her current formula.

The cost of copper, glass, and solder has doubled in the last 15 years, but Nygaard is uncertain about how that change ought to be incorporated into the cost of her finished product. Neither does she include the cost for packing and shipping. "I don't feel justified including the time to prepare objects for shipping, but it can be a real challenge to get a piece safely wrapped and on its way. It is rare that I have a perfect box that fits each piece. It can take a couple of hours to get a box made, not counting the time spent taking it to the courier or waiting for the courier to arrive for pickup. This all takes significant time, and I should learn how to incorporate that in the price."

Perhaps the largest unreimbursed time consideration is that required for the website, e-mails, and computer work, and the time spent shopping for the glass. Finding a way to account for global costs and distribute them to individual projects could go a long way toward making Nygaard's glass art pay for itself.



Loris Dawn Nygaard and Sandy Nygaard, for Hugo's Bar and Grill (Victoria, British Columbia), 2002, clear glass gems, unique filigree work, 33" high. Photo by Gary McKristy.



Loris Dawn Nygaard, Greene and Greene-style chandelier, 2011, woodwork by Ashley Moore influenced by Greene and Greene Brothers (1856-1957). Photo by Boomer Jerrit.



Loris Dawn Nygaard, Contemporary Set of Three, 2007, factrolite glass, frosted white glass interior lamp, 14" x 16", 11-1/4" x 5", and 9" x 5".



Loris Dawn Nygaard, Jewel Box, 2010, colorful faceted crystal jewels, stained glass triangles, and glass gems, 6" x 6" shade, total height with base 9".

Working against Nygaard in her quest for right pricing are the counterarguments that roll around in her head. "I'm probably under-selling myself, because the work is so enjoyable. Also, I am intent on getting each piece out there so the world can see what I do. Other than a couple of wealthy clients, my commissions are for regular people who do not have a lot of money. There are flaws in how I arrive at pricing, but right now this is how I do things."

Nygaard does manage to keep overhead low by working primarily alone. She pays someone to foil her gems and brings in another person to help periodically with her website, but she does not often think of hiring craftspeople to work with her on executing her designs. "I don't know if I could release the control and allow others to work with my ideas."

For now, Nygaard prefers to twirl wire and assemble copper foiled gems into her phantasmagorical designs during each day, then dress up and go off to her job in a restaurant at night. But as she works her way through these basic business issues of pricing and marketing, she moves closer to her goal of marketing to the world beyond her island home.

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