

# GLASS ART

For the Creative Professional Working in Hot, Warm, and Cold Glass

March/April 2015



\$7.00 U.S. \$8.00 Canada  
Volume 30 Number 2



[www.GlassArtMagazine.com](http://www.GlassArtMagazine.com)

# Daniel Maher

## It's All about the Glass

by Shawn Waggoner

Daniel Maher's work serves as a testament to both his diverse aesthetic interests and his firm roots in the traditions of the stained glass craft. As a former employee of Boston-based Connick Studio, he founded Daniel Maher Stained Glass in 1989 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to further explore a variety of design styles. "The seemingly random variety of styles and images in my work are all rooted firmly in my mission to explore the textural movement inherent in glass. Glass is everywhere—reflecting, bending, splitting, and projecting light and patterns."

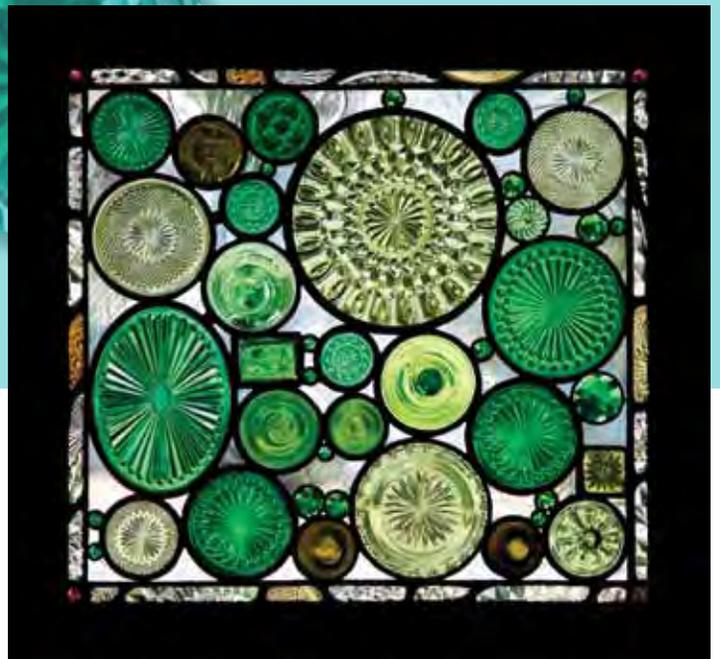
Maher's goal is to accelerate his evolution as an artist and extinguish the notion of stained glass as just a traditional art form. Until two years ago, his studio also restored historically significant windows, ranging from multiple-layer opalescent to Gothic Revival. But his focus now is on new work and commissions that incorporate found objects and his handblown roundels. "The economic downturn in 2007 meant that there weren't as many restoration jobs coming through the pipeline. In some ways that may have been a 'canary in a coal mine' indicator that belts were tightening, and people weren't able to donate as much money to their churches to fund restoration projects."

### Roundel Windows

The reduction in the number of restoration jobs coincided with the exodus of a few of Maher's trusted employees, and thus he began to wind down the studio's restoration commissions. Currently, residential commissions comprise 75 percent of the studio's new work with the remaining 25 percent from commercial or corporate projects.

Maher's most recent commission was completed in November 2014 at a residence on the water in the Massachusetts coastal town of Swampscott. These ocean-themed roundel windows were installed in a moveable frame that acts as a visual screen between the kitchen and dining room for special occasions. Most of the time the windows overlap two double-hung windows in a beautiful bay nook off of the kitchen and serve the dual purpose of blocking the view of the house next door. Paul Vihonsky, Maher's friend and associate for 25 years, lent his talents as a frame maker and woodworker to many difficult and large restoration projects over the years in addition to this recent new work.

Roundel windows are created using a variety of round objects including jewels and handblown roundels, which Maher creates in a variety of colors and techniques. "My philosophical approach to windows is that it's really all about the glass. I like to use beautiful glass, whether it's handblown or prismatic or found objects that I'm cutting up and repurposing."



*Daniel Maher, the Green Bottom Windows are the most popular of his "found object" Housewares Graveyard Series.*

Since 2010, Maher has made roundel windows as a way of incorporating one of the most beautiful glass objects in his stained glass windows. A photograph of a roundel window in the book *Great Glass in American Architecture* by H. Weber Wilson inspired Maher's initial interest in working with these circles of colored light. Because none of the commercial makers of roundels produced anything Maher thought was remotely as interesting, he decided to learn how to make his own and enrolled in a glassblowing course taught by Jesse Rasid at NOCA Glassblowing School in Cambridge. "Glassblowing provided a whole different set of colors, textures, and patterns I could create in roundel form. Learning to make them resulted in an awakening of creative ideas."

Maher's largest roundel window was commissioned by Barbara and Ted Alford for the Alford Inn in Winter Park, Florida. The couple became aware of the artist's work through his lectures on American opalescent stained glass windows at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Winter Park is the home of the Morse Museum of Tiffany Glass. The Alfords wanted a piece for their inn that would speak to the beauty of the ponds, lakes, and gardens of their city while referencing Tiffany's legacy in a unique way. The roundel window was a simple solution. Its center references flowers and plant patterns surrounded by representations of the water and gardens in blue and green glass. Four small medallions, one in each corner, represent the Four Seasons theme in homage to the snowbirds who come from New England to Florida to escape winter's cold.

In a previous three-window residential commission, Maher created a Gothic pattern beginning as a geometric layout for a decorative, ornamental Tudor revival house in Brookline, Massachusetts. The resulting windows combined Craftsman style with handblown glass roundels made by Maher. "Roundels are the oldest and crudest form of flat glass. That's how they made glass for the European cathedrals. In the late 1800s as glass technology advanced, machine rolled and cylinder glass were produced, and you start seeing glass with fewer lumps, bumps, and striations. But that's what excites me. I don't want optically clear glass, but rather something that has a prismatic effect so the light jumps and dances when you look at the glass. That's what roundels do."



*Daniel Maher, roundel window commissioned for the Alford Inn, Winter Park, Florida.*

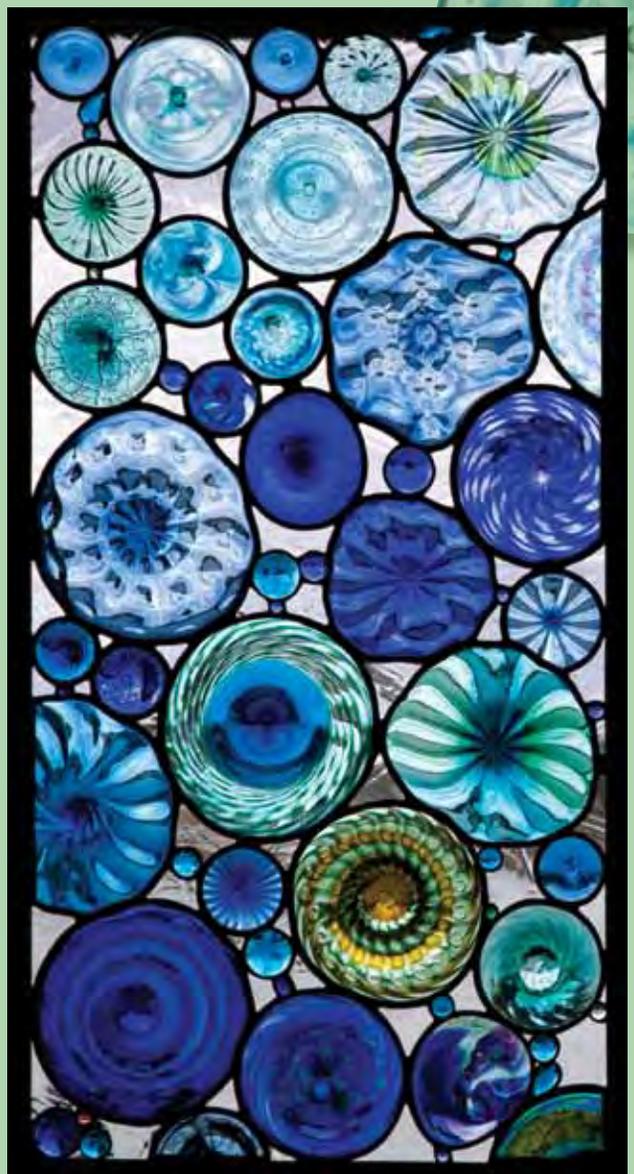
### ***Housewares Graveyard Windows***

Prior to making and incorporating handblown roundels, Maher found other ways to introduce prismatic effects into his stained glass windows. He created the first of his *Housewares Graveyard Windows*, which incorporate found objects, more than 20 years ago. “I was making a window and needed something that looked like a bridge. I ran across this glass candy dish at a consignment shop and decided to try to cut out a bridge form and put it in my window.” It worked beautifully, and the artist found himself collecting all kinds of glass objects for repurposing.

Maher’s *Graveyard* series showcases glass that has been rescued from its ordinary life as serving bowls, platters, goblets, lids, jars, and general household utilitarian objects and made the star of his stained glass symphony. “There aren’t many commercially produced glasses that possess strong prismatic qualities or have images imprinted in them. The texture of glass bends light depending on its irregular or cut surface. Assembling the variety of found objects creates a jewel-like symphony of textural movement. The limited availability of these objects makes each piece unique—a one-of-a-kind work of art.”

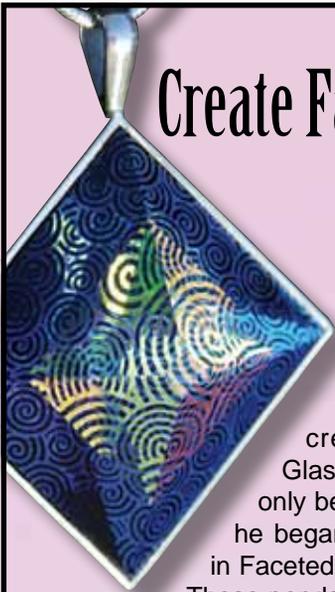
The first windows in the *Housewares Graveyard* series depicted fish. Certain objects containing elements that looked like a fish eye or tail or a clamshell form were cut into workable pieces and flattened in a kiln so they could be incorporated into a traditional stained glass window using a combination of lead and copper foil. Maher has always included stained glass jewels in his work and uses his found object elements as he would the jewels as a way to embellish and bring his designs to life.

Maher’s palette has expanded and provides fuel for myriad thematic ideas. Some panels center around old alcoholic beverage bottles or antique medicine jars, and each creates a unique look. One of Maher’s found object windows was featured in *Martha Stewart Living*’s December 2012 issue. His work, *Pig with Corn*, was made from a number of glass corncob buttering dishes that Maher silver-stained and placed in circumference around the bottom of a giant pig’s foot jar, imprinted with the words “This little pig went to market.” The panel was exhibited at the July 2009 American Glass Guild (AGG) Conference in Buffalo, New York.



*Daniel Maher, latest roundel window project installed in Swampscott, Massachusetts, on the ocean.*

# Create Faceted Dichroic Glass Pendants with Kent Lauer



Kent Lauer has been creating and teaching Art Glass for 40 years, but it has only been the last few years that he began teaching his techniques in Faceted Dichroic Glass Pendants. These pendants look amazing and are unlike anything else in the Art Glass World!

Kent invites you to attend one of his classes to learn his techniques for creating one of the newest, most unique forms of Art Glass yourself.

Kent teaches all over the U.S. and internationally, but most students prefer to come to his studio in North Hollywood, California, just minutes away from Universal Studios and an hour from Coatings By Sandberg!

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## Portrait Windows

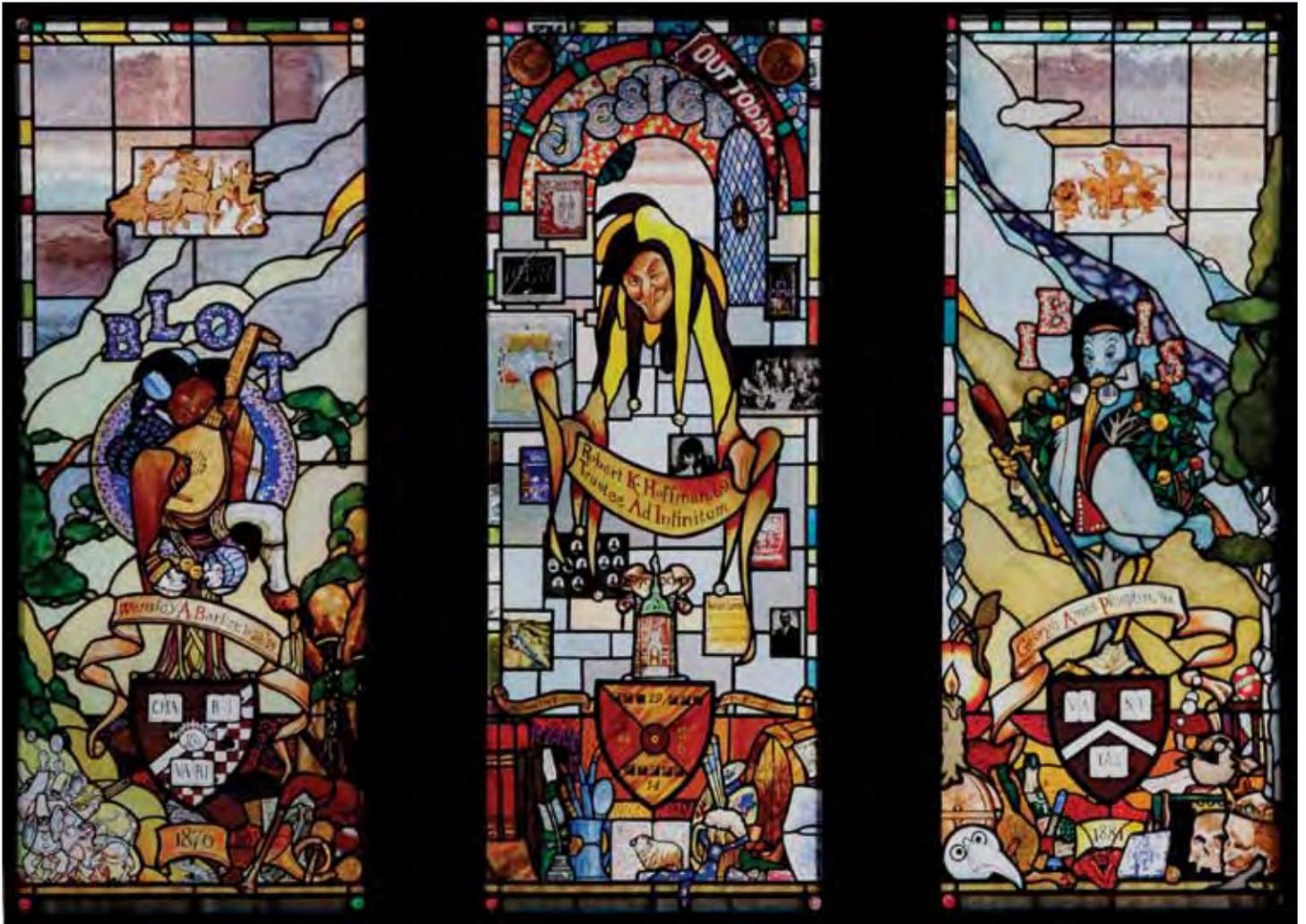
Maheer's *Portrait Windows* are executed in a variety of techniques to celebrate special events. Whether painted and fired in the kiln, etched, or sandblasted, the photographic images become a permanent part of the glass and are constructed in the vivid colors unique to stained glass. "This process allows me to create photographs and highly complex decorative patterns efficiently."

Friend Rufus Seder inspired Maheer's interest in the photographic process with his *Life Tiles*. Seder had been using a photo imaging system that Maheer was able to adapt for use with stained glass following a year of experimentation. "I am not a big fan of glass painting, because you lose a lot of the jewel-like qualities of the glass when you apply paint to its surface. I realized that through photo imaging I would be able to create a highly complex pattern of people's faces and maintain the full color and jewel-like quality of the glass." Photo imaging allows the artist to render images otherwise impossible to create by hand painting, traditional sandblasting, or acid etching techniques. "It's fun and allows me to make a personal window that tells the story of an individual or the person's family."

Using Rayzist, a photo-sensitive film, Maheer creates a transparency onto which he places the photo sensitive film and exposes it to ultraviolet light. Black areas of the image block the ultraviolet light and, because they are water soluble, can be washed out. "It's very similar to silk screening on glass, which I've also done." The Rayzist is glued to the surface of the glass and sandblasted. Paints can be pushed into the recessed sandblasted areas to further enhance and define the image. Maheer says the hardest part is pinpointing photos that will work well with the process and determining the best resolution. "With a few tricks, you can produce what looks like a perfect black-and-white photograph."

A combination of glass painting and the photo imaging process can be seen in the three-lancet *Harvard Lampoon Castle Window*, a collaboration with Michael K. Frith. A designer, illustrator, writer, performer, and producer, Frith has been deeply involved in the world of family entertainment for almost 50 years. He joined The Muppets/Jim Henson Productions in 1975 as art director, becoming executive vice president and director of creative sciences. A key member of the creative arts teams that developed many of Henson's greatest successes, Frith conceived and/or designed scores of television's most popular characters, from *Sesame Street* to *The Muppet Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, and myriad other Henson productions. Frith graduated from Harvard University, Cambridge, where he was president of *The Harvard Lampoon*, an undergraduate humor publication founded in 1876 by seven undergraduates at the university. All of the window's imagery references the history of the *Lampoon* and its secret lingo. "I'm not usually interested in projects designed by other artists, but I jumped at the chance to work on these windows out of respect for Frith and because his designs were so incredible and challenging."

The lead and copper foil combo window measures 2 feet by 5 feet, with 450 to 600 pieces in each of the three lancets. Maheer was assisted by Nancy Nicholson, Anna Johannson, Kate Gakenheimer, and his apprentice, Erica Johnson. "The project was a whirlwind with late changes and groundbreaking techniques, but one of the most rewarding projects I have done in my 43 years of stained glass."



Michael K. Frith and Daniel Maher,  
Harvard Lampoon Castle Window,  
Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.



### Suntracker Windows

Maher's *Suntracker Windows* project an image and color into space. Optically clear colored glass and prismatic objects combine to create patterns that change throughout the course of the day or season. A secondary image is created when the sun casts light onto the floor or wall after passing through the glass. Works that include prisms project a tertiary image of overlapping rainbows. "We get that effect strongest at the time of year when the sun tracks the lowest, on the shortest days. Figuring out the spacing of the images so the reflections overlap is part of the fun."

Inspired by the notion of the sun entering prismatic glasses, Maher's *Suntrackers* split sunbeams into long bands of color, rainbows, or arcs of light. The artist has colored glass coated with a dichroic layer to create a different spectrum that will project different colors such as lime green and hot pink.



Daniel Maher, Suntracker Window.  
Projected Suntracker image.

## New and Different Defines Maher's Success

When Maher spoke to *Glass Art* magazine he was finishing two windows for a home in Cambridge, one a roundel window for a front door based on the work shown in H. Weber Wilson's book. The door is a combo of antique roundels, pressed jewels, and some of his handblown roundels. He was also completing William Morris-style quarry tiles for a bathroom window in the same house. On his bench was a roundel window for a wine cellar in Vermont and two more for a California residence.

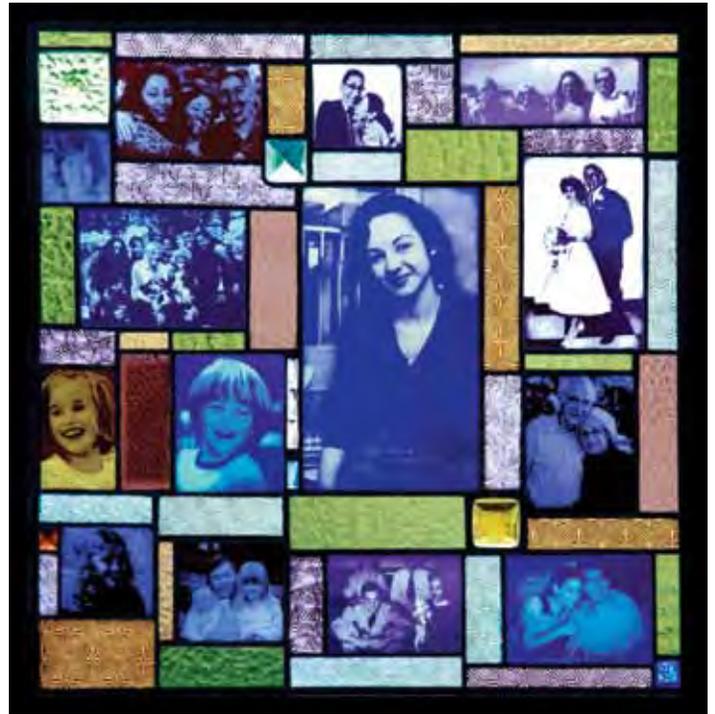
Maher's decision to stop doing restoration and focus entirely on new work was a difficult, but lucrative one. "When I founded my studio in 1989, the economy was in the toilet. When you start out in hard times, you learn how to become lean and mean from a business point of view. I knew I could survive just doing my new work. Even when the economy tanked in 2007, I still had lots of new work lined up. This is because I'm not wed to just one style. I can do a window for an Art Deco, Victorian, or Modern home. My design background is diverse, and that allows me to take and produce more new work."



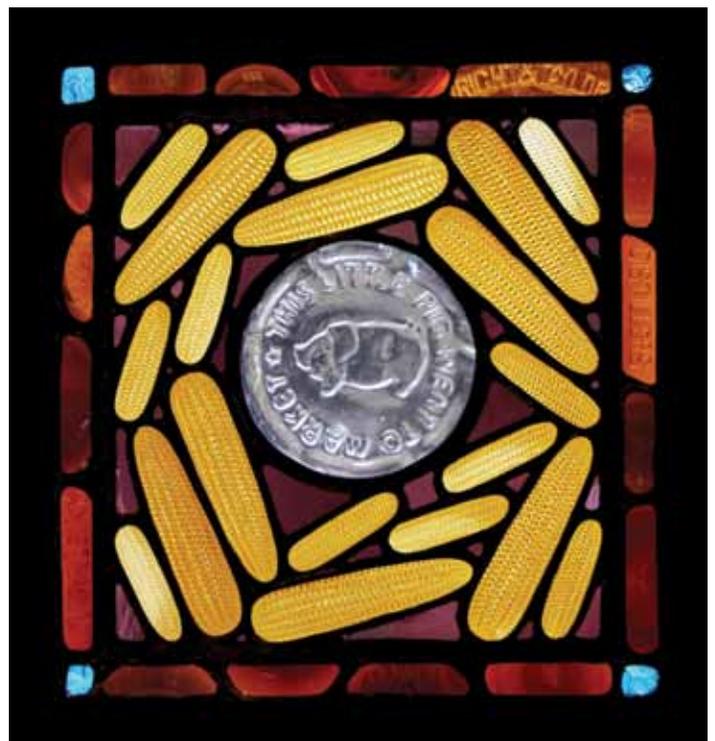
*Daniel Maher, Tetrad Fish, tetradic color formula used in choosing the color combination to work with the red fish. The fishes and the "coral reef" area at the bottom are made from Depression glass plates and serving bowls.*

Before Maher opened his studio, he invited local architects, designers, and other artists to a brainstorming session. Out of that meeting he learned to ask himself the questions: Is your work something new and different? Is it unique to your studio? This reinforced the idea that not only can you produce something new and different in this traditional art form, but you should strive to break the mold. "The greatest compliment I've received is, 'I've never seen windows like these before.'" GA

Look for **Subscriber Benefits** coming to **Subscribers Only** via links in upcoming e-mails from *Glass Art*. This **Bonus Content** will include more information about Daniel Maher's most memorable restoration projects.



*Daniel Maher, photo image window.*



*Daniel Maher, Pig and Corn window.*

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