

## **A DREAM COME TRUE Jim Browns' Meteoric Rise to Fame**

**By Nancy Alfano**

**How many of us have dreamed of changing course in mid stream, of fulfilling our inner most desires to allow our creativity to come bursting out and of expressing ourselves in ways never before imagined. For most of us this is just a pleasant thought, just a daydream. But Jim Brown took this dream and made it a reality.**

**Jim Brown and his beautiful paperweights are turning the paperweight-collecting world upside down. In a very short time, Jim has caught the attention of collectors throughout the United States as well as abroad.**

**Jim was born on January 7, 1949 in Detroit, Michigan and grew up there. As a young man he joined the U.S. Navy as a seaman recruit where he attended Machinist school and quickly became a petty officer qualifying for the nuclear power program. Through the Navy, Jim applied for and was accepted into the scholarship program. He attended Vanderbilt University in the engineering program and graduated in 1976 with a BSME degree.**

**On the day of graduation, Jim accepted a commission as a Navel Officer. While attached to the U.S.S. Hassayampa as Operations Officer he traveled to many ports of call around the Pacific and Indian Oceans; Kenya, Thailand, Japan, Australia, Pakistan, Bahrain, Philippines, Malaysia and was home-ported at Pearl Harbor on Oahu. Jim feels that through this extensive traveling he gained a deep respect for the people of other cultures and learned to appreciate their art and architecture. As his paperweight career he expects that influence to show up from time to time in his work.**

**In 1981, he was honorably discharged and began years of employment doing what he was trained for, mechanical engineering. But the desire to allow his artistic side come alive was growing stronger with each passing year. In the mid 90's Jim discovered paperweights with his first purchase and that quickly escalated to a collection of paperweights with a strong emphasis on antique millefiori. It was in 1999 that Jim became a member of PCA.**

**Collecting paperweight was not enough for Jim; he needed to create them. In 2000 he enrolled in the glass department at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, TN. It was there that he was able to get the technical knowledge to work with glass. But where could he learn about creating millefiori canes for all those paperweights that were in his mind. That was something that no one could help him with. As with many great paperweight artists before him he taught himself. He spent endless hours working, trying, redoing, experimenting and learning, always**

learning.

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**“ The first weight that I made was horrible,” says Jim and he still has it. He calls it a “swirly thing.” And he goes on to say the second was not much better. But all this hard work jump-started his imagination to the endless possibilities with millefiori. With his engineering background he has been able to master the technical side of glass although he is the first to admit he is still learning and trying to improve in this difficult medium.**

**It was at the Corning PCA convention in May 2001 that a few lucky collectors got a glimpse of early Brown paperweights. Even then, just a few short years ago, there was an air of sophistication and complexity to his work. From that point on Jim Brown has been like a shooting star dazzling paperweight collectors with carpet grounds, concentrics, up to eleven rows, close packs of beautiful and intricate designs.**

**A well known East Coast collector, Patty Mowatt, with a good eye to what is really good, had this to say about Jim Brown’s paperweights: “A serendipitous harmony of color and texture is what struck me when first viewing a display of Jim Brown’s paperweights... millefiori canes that are Bacchus-like, but yet Jim’s own. Of course I wanted one! (Or two, or four?) Jim had mentioned that he wanted to create beautiful glass weights whose millefiori canes could be appreciated with the naked eye...not just with a loupe or magnifier, and he has surely achieved this. But for THIS millefiori lover, the loupe revealed even more beauty in the details within some of the canes. It is hard to believe he has been at it for such a short time. My “Brown” weights are glorious. I gaze at them every day with pleasure and, to me, that is the mark of a successful acquisition...to enjoy it each time you see it, and always pause for a closer look.”**

**She has expressed the sentiment of many collectors who are flabbergasted at what Jim has accomplished in such a short time.**

**During the past year Jim and his biggest fan, his wife Denise have been visiting regional collecting groups, speaking and showing off millefiori paperweights. In September of 2002, Jim and Denise traveled to the U.K., where he was the guest speaker at the Cambridge Paperweight Circle 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary dinner. According to the author of “Old English Paperweights” Robert Hall “Jim made a great impression of dealers and the public alike and we cannot wait to see his next creation. Jim has a new army of fans.” He arrived in England with many beautiful paperweights to show off and came home without a one.**

**The first year Jim’s paperweights were scratch signed and then they were scratch**

signed and the year was added. In 2001 a "B" cane was embedded in the weight. By 2002 Jim developed and was using three different complex signature canes, two red and one blue with a black "B" in a white surround. Future signature canes are planned for coming years.

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**Jim is passionate about paperweights and it shows in his work. "I try to make my weights as well crafted and as artistic as possible. Sometimes the craft inhibits what I'm able to accomplish artistically. Hopefully, as my skills improve this will become less of a problem. Glass is a very difficult medium to master and one NEVER stops learning and improving. The antique weights evoke a sense of wonder and esthetic bliss in me that no modern weigh has ever been able to do, though the modern weights are frequently "better crafted." They are vital; they have a life that modern weights lack. This "feeling" is the impact I want my work to have on those who view it. When you look at an antique St. Louis concentric or Clichy color ground or Baccarat carpet ground or Bacchus concentric you "feel" that glass is the right medium, the only medium in which this art would work. There is a perfect marriage of delivery and message. I hope that the viewer of my work is not only pleased with the esthetics of the weight but also "feels" the movement, the dynamics of the glass moving when the paperweight was made. That's what I want to see in a weight and I think that's what, perhaps without even knowing it, others want as well."**

**At one point when Jim and Denise and I were having dinner, the night before Jim was to meet with the Indiana Regional Collectors, his fist speaking engagement to a group of collectors; in the greatest humility and in such a calm voice Jim stated that his goal was to make "Masterpieces." I can only say his work speaks for itself.**

**More White Ruffle canes, PLEASE!**