

**CARL RADKE, PHOENIX STUDIOS**, by Jim

If you are a frequent visitor to the eBay auctions, I suspect you have noticed the hand crafted art glass candle lamps by Carl Radke, Phoenix Studios.<sup>1</sup>

Carl Radke participated in the renaissance of American luster art glass in the early 1970s. Luster glass was patented by Louis C. Tiffany in 1881<sup>2</sup> and was popular during the early part of the twentieth century.

The United States patent for luster glass was primarily developed to enhance the visual quality of stained glass windows. The patent reads in part:

*"This invention relates to the introduction of a new character of glass in colored glass windows.*

*The improvement consists in a metallic luster being given to one surface of pieces of glass and the insertion of such glass among other pieces of colored glass in a window or mosaic. The effect is a highly iridescent one and of pleasing metallic luster, changeable from one to the other, depending upon the direction of the visual ray and the brilliancy or dullness of the light falling upon or passing through the glass. The metallic luster is produced by forming a film of a metal or its oxide, or a compound of a metal, on or in the glass either by exposing it to vapors or gases or by direct application."*

Tiffany, inspired by the natural iridescence of ancient Roman glass, experimented with lustering techniques. Favrite glass,<sup>3</sup> the

trademark for Tiffany handmade glass, resulted from these experiments.<sup>4</sup>

Luster glass had fallen out of favor after 1925 and had practically become a lost art. Because of the silver content in the glass, it has always been one of the most costly forms of glass ever produced.

Not only the specific formulas and high costs, but the experience and technique of maintaining this glass in a usable state has kept the blowing of luster glass in the hands of a few skillful artisans. Carl Radke is one of only a few glassblowers out of thousands in the U.S. who continues to work in this difficult and traditional glass. His skill with glass and glass decoration has allowed him to experiment with this type of glass and to develop this unique collection of art glass.<sup>5</sup>

The following short biography is from Carl's eBay Store.<sup>6</sup>

*"I am an American glass artist and designer. I first touched glass in 1970 while going to art school. I immediately felt called to it; now, 40 years later. My studio, in Harmony California, was open to the public for 20 years. Four years ago, however, I moved my studio to my home. I am now blessed to be able to blow glass in solitude. This solitude has breathed new life into my work. I am essentially a one man studio; however, my wife Stephanie helps me when I need assistance. The art glass colors I use in my work are similar to the Favrite glass made by Tiffany Studios around the turn of the twentieth century, however, personalized by me."*

A visit to Carl's eBay store will quickly illustrate the broad range of designs of his art glass. They are unique in every way and

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<sup>1</sup> [www.phoenixartglass.com](http://www.phoenixartglass.com) or [www.carlradke.com](http://www.carlradke.com)

<sup>2</sup> Patent No. 237,418, February 8, 1881. Louis C. Tiffany, NY, Improvement to colored glass windows

<sup>3</sup> Favrite glass is a type of iridescent art glass. It was patented in 1894 and first produced in 1896. It differs from most iridescent glasses because the color is ingrained in the glass itself, as well as having distinctive coloring. ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org))

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<sup>4</sup> [www.studiosoft.it/antiquetiffany.htm](http://www.studiosoft.it/antiquetiffany.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [www.mendocinostories.com/ART\\_GlassFire2.html](http://www.mendocinostories.com/ART_GlassFire2.html)

<sup>6</sup> [www.stores.ebay.com/Carl-Radke-Art-Glass-and-Gallery](http://www.stores.ebay.com/Carl-Radke-Art-Glass-and-Gallery)

are destined to be the "antiques of tomorrow."

Among the range of designs is a small unique collection of candle lamps. It is probably not appropriate to refer to them as fairy lamps, but they do possess similar characteristics.

When I first came across these candle lamps, I was intrigued by the artistic qualities of the glass and by their unique shapes. I immediately contacted Carl and asked how he got into making candle lamps, did he have any additional designs, and could I have permission to use his photos. He replied in part:

*"Thank you for your interest in my fairy lamps. This is something completely new to me. I have been making glass for forty years and in that time I have made a total of 4 or 5 fairy lamps, all in the past six months.*

*I had a fairy lamp collector contact me and gave me some advice about technical aspects of these little lamps. This information I welcome as I have very little experience in making them. The most recent lamp I made uses some of the advised technical data I received.*

*If there is interest shown in these lamps, I would be happy to make more fairy lamps in the future. Thank you Carl."*

I find it interesting that someone with Carl's artistic talent and technical expertise would focus his skills on candle lamps. I am not surprised, however, since so many glass artisans of the late nineteenth century had the same fascination.

I also find it interesting that one of our fellow collectors valued his work enough to offer some "technical advice" on the construction of fairy lamps. Again, I was not surprised that fairy lamp collectors were generous with their knowledge. Do they see

Carl's work as the "prized fairy lamp of tomorrow?" I suspect so.

Now, a review of Carl's latest designs in candle lamps.



*Gold Aurene Art Glass Optic Fairy Lamp  
6.5" x 4.0" - \$350*



This is indeed an interesting design. Aside from the luster glass, it seems to have the

characteristics of a miniature oil lamp or Glow Light. It does not seem to have some of the "technical aspects" necessary to make a good candle lamp.

You may notice that, in addition to the Phoenix Studio sticker, Carl engraves his work with his signature. As we all know, this will be an important feature fifty years from now.



*Blue Aurene Art Glass Fairy Lamp  
5.5" x 4.0" - \$320*



This design is a little closer to making a good candle lamp. The opening in the base is a little wider making the candle a little easier to maintain. The ribs on the shade

may provide enough air, but improvements in the design are apparently still evolving. In fact, Carl states on his webpage: "*I am playing with ideas for these lamps so they are prototypes.*"



*Gold Aurene Art Glass Optic Fairy Lamp  
4.0" x 3.0" - \$175*



As you can see this lamp is much smaller than the others and has the fundamental design of a fairy lamp. However, the shade has a smooth rim and it is not apparent that the ribs in the base will allow enough air for the candle to burn.



*Gold Aurene Art Glass Optic Fairy Lamp  
on a saucer base*



This design uses the same shade on a saucer base. Again, the shade has a smooth rim. The ribs in the base seem to be adequate to allow enough air for the candle, but it is not certain.



*Amber Trailed Fairy Lamp with Gold Aurene Base  
4.5" x 3.0" - \$75 (small blemish on base)*



This design really got my attention. What Carl refers to as "trailed" is the classic reversed Nailsea-type design. The looping, while not as fine as original designs, seems to be well formed and somewhat uniform. This shade also has a unique heavy rolled edge on the top opening. Only time will tell if this variation in glass thickness will contribute to or diminish the risk of cracking when the candle heats the shade.

The base design has evolved into a more traditional design for the lamp cup, but it remains to be seen if the ribs are sufficient to allow for enough air.

So far, this is the extent of Carl's candle lamp designs and as you can see the designs are still evolving. Perhaps with encouragement from our members and exposure to the glass types and designs prevalent in the 1890s, Carl will add his name to the long list of fairy lamp glass artists that came before him.

Contact information for Carl Radke:

Website: [www.carlradke.com](http://www.carlradke.com)  
 e-Mail: [carl@carlradke.com](mailto:carl@carlradke.com)  
 Phone: 805.462.8893