

Magnificent Obsession Morphs Into a Stained-Glass Museum

Antiques

By EVE M. KAHN JULY 7, 2016



Stained glass glory: A gallery at the Halim Museum of Time and Glass. Credit Halim Museum of Time and Glass

EVANSTON, Ill. — Passageways lined in stained glass snake through a museum in progress on a quiet side street here, and workers are filling the galleries with iridescent mosaics, opalescent glass vases and ornate clocks that contain tiny mechanical birds and acrobats. The collections on view represent a fraction of the holdings of Cameel Halim, a real estate magnate in the Chicago area, and his [Halim Museum of Time and Glass](#), which is scheduled to open early next year.

Mr. Halim specializes in rescuing American windows from the 19th and 20th centuries; some of them had not only been removed from their original settings but even abandoned outdoors. While giving a preview, he recounted how much damage some panes had suffered. (He has commissioned restoration work by [Gilbertson's Stained Glass](#) in Lake Geneva, Wis.) Some purchases arrived as

buckets full of shards, he said, and other windows “were so dirty that you couldn’t see anything.”

In 2010 Mr. Halim paid \$85,000 for a window by Louis Comfort Tiffany’s studio portraying St. John the Divine that was sold off from a Vermont church by a congregation in financial straits. His Tiffany tableau of the Last Supper had belonged to a Japanese museum that closed, and his gridded glass panels designed by the architects Louis Sullivan and George Washington Maher came from buildings that were renovated or razed.

Auction houses and salvage dealers have stocked him with works by Tiffany’s archrival, John La Farge, as well as by designers whom Mr. Halim calls “the forgotten ones,” including [Mary Tillinghast](#), Edward Sperry, [Frederick Wilson](#) and the Payne and Armstrong families. Mr. Halim said that he was saving space on his museum walls for a planned purchase of one of the windows that Frank Lloyd Wright designed for a schoolhouse in Riverside, Ill.; the glass panes, in grid and balloon patterns, can [sell for](#) hundreds of thousands of dollars each.

Mr. Halim has studied how the original artists layered, rippled and painted glass to depict saints and biblical scenes. Religious sayings and names of deceased loved ones are etched and painted on some of the panes; he avoids a practice, common among window dealers and collectors, of removing inscriptions to make the pieces more generic and marketable.

When Mr. Halim walks along the museum corridors under construction, he said, “I discover something every day — beauty has no end.”

Mr. Halim, a Coptic Christian who grew up in Egypt, moved to the United States in 1968 with around \$900 in savings. One of his main motivations for opening the museum, he said, was to give something back to the Chicago area, which welcomed him when he was a poor immigrant.

“I am really indebted to this country so much that I cannot forget that,” he said.

His wife, Hoda, and the couple’s three daughters work in the family business, Wilmette Real Estate & Management Company, which manages about 70 buildings. The company has [come under criticism](#) in recent years for various issues, including building code violations. Asked about the complaints, Mr. Halim wrote in an email that all violations have been corrected “within the time permitted by the city.”

His collections of antiques have filled several buildings as he has continued to buy while readying the museum.

“We don’t try to stop him — we just let him be,” his middle daughter, Nefrette Halim, said while stepping around clocks and windows in one of his storage spaces.