

# HOMEgrown

➤ Virginiana ➤ Spotlight ➤ Natives ➤ Destinations



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## Virginiana

### LIGHT CATCHER

**Richmond conservator Scott Taylor restores Tiffany and other treasured windows.** By Sandra Shelley

When morning breaks in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery, the sun casts the first rays of light through the three stained-glass windows in the mausoleum of Lewis Ginter. These windows were created by the Tiffany Studio, circa 1900. Over the years, however, nature and age have caused them to deteriorate. **Scott Taylor**, the owner and principal conservator of E.S. Taylor Studio, recently restored two of the windows for Friends of Hollywood Cemetery, which supports conservation and other special projects at the historic site.

A visitor peeking through the windowpanes on the mausoleum's bronze front door can see that, as light shifts throughout the day, so do the colors of the windows that surround the marble sarcophagus that hold the remains of the wealthy Gilded Age businessman and philanthropist. The robes of the archangel Gabriel, who is featured in the center window, turn from mostly white to deepening shades of rose and chartreuse as sunlight passes through; his golden-red locks glow.



Christ Resurrection Window (for All Saints Church, Richmond) at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, restored by Scott Taylor. Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company.



“IT’S SURPRISING that you would have that level of stained-glass quality in a mausoleum, until you consider whose mausoleum it is,” says Taylor from his studio in nearby Manchester. While many of the grander mausoleums in the Northeast have such noteworthy windows, he says, they are less common in the mid-Atlantic.

Taylor has restored many Tiffany and other historic stained-glass and leaded windows. His clients over his 30-plus year career have included the Smithsonian Institution and the Washington National Cathedral in D.C., the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and St. John’s Episcopal Church in Richmond, and many others. Pattie Tobler, who attends St. John’s, enjoys watching the sunlight come through stained-glass windows restored lovingly by Taylor. “Treasures,” she calls them.

Taylor grew up north of Waynesboro, in Crimora. He got his start making new windows with a production company in Richmond, but felt increasingly drawn to conservation and restoration. After he set out on his own, one early job involved helping a New York firm remove some Tiffany windows that needed repair from Blandford Church in Petersburg.

“The owner of the company, Jack Cushen, and I got along very well right off the bat. When we finished the removal of a few of the windows, he said, ‘Would you like to come to New York and work on these?’ I said, ‘Well, you’ll have to follow me out of the door.’” Taylor spent the next few years working on projects throughout the Northeast and learning the trade from Cushen, his mentor and an acclaimed Tiffany restorer. Today, Taylor is part of a small community of historic glass conservators in the U.S.

The first challenge with any window is removing it. “They’ve been in these settings for maybe 100 years, so you don’t just walk up and take it out,” says Taylor. “It’s a fair amount of planning as to how you do it, and once it goes into action, it is literally a choreography to maneuver the window out



Scott at work in his studio. Below: The Lewis Ginter mausoleum. Left: The restored Archangel Gabriel in the mausoleum.



of the opening and into a safe place.”

Back in the studio, Taylor and his assistants, Jen Garcia and Mary Lu Winger, photograph the window front and back, and do a full-sized rubbing to provide a diagram for later reconstruction. Then, he reviews the window for damage and the stability of its matrix—the leaded framework that connects the individual panes. “Some windows are disassembled and completely re-leaded. The matrix has suffered so much fatigue that it’s no longer viable,” he says.

*“It is literally a choreography to maneuver the window out of the opening and into a safe place.”*

—Scott Taylor

Once taken apart, each piece of glass is cleaned and repaired—an especially arduous process with Tiffany windows. Explains Taylor, Louis Comfort Tiffany and John LaFarge created textures and colors by adding glass in layers. Some parts of the window may have one piece of glass, others, two or three. This creates a subtle color palette that changes with the light.

Every step Taylor takes is in accordance with principles set forth by the American Institute of Conservation and other standards. The process is necessarily slow and meticulous, but clients are patient. “The detail of his work is outstanding, and the results are a clear indication that he loves and takes great pride in what he does,” says David Giliham, general manager of Hollywood Cemetery.

A few years ago, Taylor got a call from Richmond’s All Saints Episcopal Church. “One of the parishioners called me and said, ‘We think we have some more Tiffany windows in our basement.’ The number of times I’ve been contacted about Tiffany windows in someone’s basement...

It usually hasn’t panned out. But in this case, it did,” says Taylor. The church was relocated in the 1950s and some of the windows didn’t fit into the new architectural plan. In the stacks of windows from the old church, he discovered two large Tiffany-made triptychs, *The Resurrection of Christ* and *Christ Blessing the Children*.

“These are truly exemplary works of the Tiffany studio, really showcasing all the different techniques that the studio employed in stained-glass production,” says Stephen Bonadies, senior deputy director for conservation and collections for the VMFA, which acquired the triptychs and hired Taylor to restore them. Taylor has “an excellent reputation. ... He has a very small shop and he gives extraordinary, individualized attention to the particular project that he is working on.”

Following Taylor’s cleaning and conservation, the Resurrection triptych is now on display in a second-story window overlooking Arthur Ashe Boulevard. (The Blessing triptych will be rotated in once Taylor completes it.) Bonadies recommends driving by at night to see the illuminated work, which is visible from the street. “We were just overwhelmed by the beauty,” he says. “It was a remarkable transformation.” *ESTaylorStudio.com*

