

# UltraGlas<sup>®</sup> *insights*

Point of View:  
Rob Brennan

News and Information for Architects and Designers

## **Rob Brennan**

architectural **artist** and **builder** —  
shares his **philosophy**  
and **insights** about using  
UltraGlas as a **creative**  
architectural **medium**...





“Nothing comes close to the **versatility** of glass in its ability to affect a design.”

*In addition to art and design, Rob is passionate about sailing, shown here prowling the coves of Laguna Beach, California, on his sailboat 'Julia.' On weekends, he can often be found crewing on the racing yachts of others.*

We recently asked architectural artist, builder and long-time UltraGlas collaborator **Rob Brennan** to share his philosophy as well as insights into using glass as a creative architectural medium. As a 25-year veteran of architectural design and construction — and founder of Southern California design firm Architectural Annex, Rob has a wealth of experiences to draw upon.

To illustrate his unique vision for integrating glass into architectural design, Rob chose to talk about his collaboration with **Brenda Leventhal** of Brenda Leventhal Interiors and her client, **Susan Mann**. The construction was a new 5,400 sq. ft. residence in a 22-story Westwood, California high rise. Here's what Rob had to say about how glass influenced the approach to this project and others...

All images courtesy of Rob Brennan



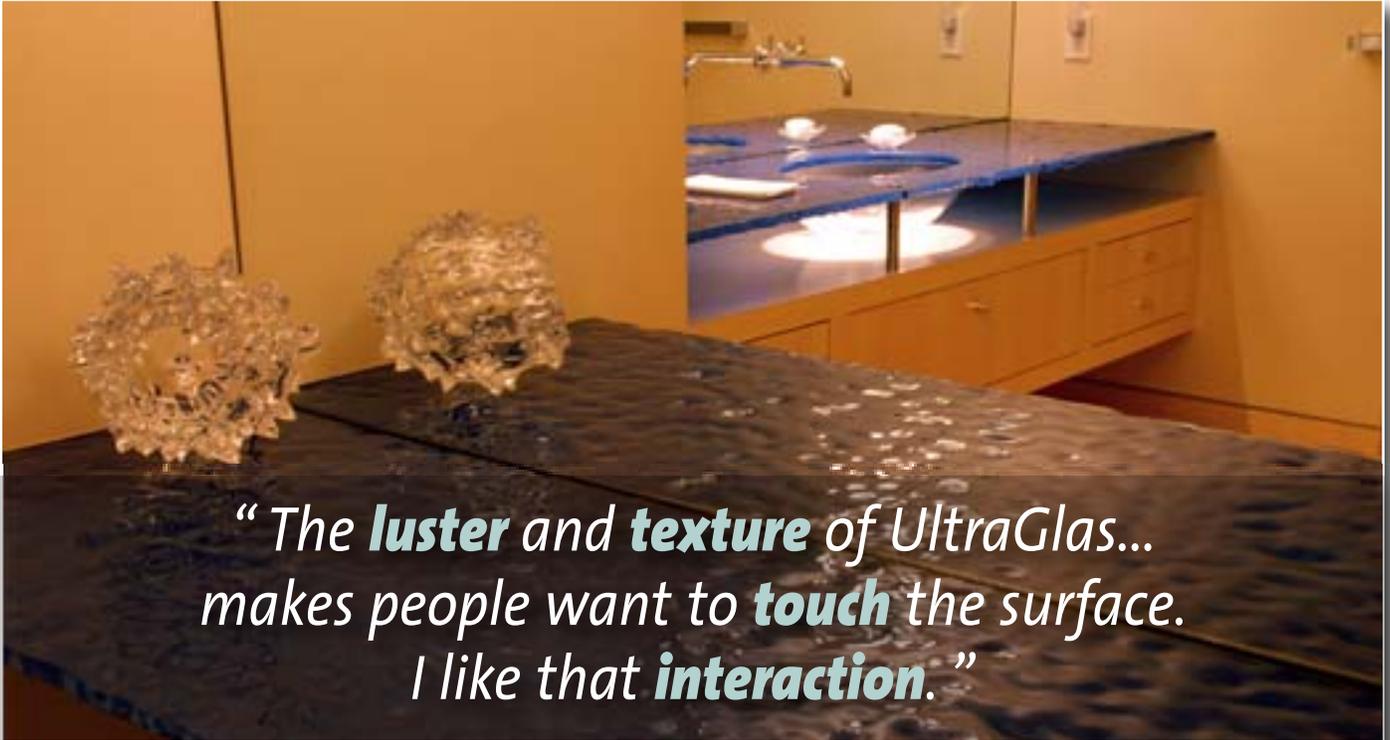
*Two floating counter tops and tub-surround surfacing, in the master bath, incorporate a standard UltraGlas 'UltraMando' texture. All components are in low-iron glass, with the tub surfacing finished in a high-fired coloration.*

**UG: What specifically were you trying to achieve by incorporating glass into your collaborative designs for the Mann Residence project?**

**RB:** Brenda Leventhal first contacted me because she and her client wanted a glass water-wall in the entry. Susan, the client, happens to be quite a collector of art glass. So, when we looked around the residence, we

started realizing how well UltraGlas would work to unite Susan's glass collection with the design concepts Brenda and she had envisioned for the rest of the space. The project grew from there to include glass in a major portion of the residence. The goal was to use glass as functional art and as a unifying theme.

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“The **luster** and **texture** of UltraGlas... makes people want to **touch** the surface. I like that **interaction**.”

*In the powder bath, surfaces are in a dimensional ‘UltraSquiggle’ texture — color and texture were applied to the #2 surfaces, leaving the top surfaces relatively smooth.*



*The water-wall features a standard UltraGlas ‘Corduroy’ texture, on ‘aqua’ tinted glass. Glass tile was used to bridge between wood and tile flooring.*

**UG:** Can you give an example of one application in this project you thought was particularly effective?

**RB:** In the master bath, we used 3/4” UltraGlas for counters and tub deck. At the counters, we floated the glass above the base cabinet, with the UltraGlas ‘UltraMando’ texture side down (leaving the top surface very smooth) in low-iron glass — which has that nice aqua-colored edge we were looking for, to match the overall color scheme. Then, for the tub deck surround and steps, we used a back-finished UltraGlas ‘LightStraw’ color, which in the 3/4” slab has a nice depth of color. Then we applied the same ‘UltraMando’ texture, this time with the texture side up, to provide an effective slip-resistant surface at the tub – more so than some tile or granite would offer in the same application.

**UG:** Why did you choose to use glass in the floor?

**RB:** This is a good example of glass used as a unifying theme. By bringing it into the floor, we felt we would give the glass motif continuity from

one room to the next. And it proved to be an interesting transition between the wood and tile flooring.

**UG:** Glass seems to be a dominant element in many of your designs. Why?

**RB:** Nothing comes close to the versatility of glass in its ability to affect a design. Floors, showers, countertops, walls, table tops, sculpture — what other material can be applied in so many ways? The luster and texture of UltraGlas are what works so well in so many applications. It makes people want to touch the surface. I like that interaction.

**UG:** How do you think your background as an artist influences your choice of media?

**RB:** Being an artist helps me recognize the effectiveness of materials other people might overlook. I work with many different media, from rusted, found-object steel to refined contemporary stainless, to designed glass. The choice allows me freedom

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*Tub surround surfacing features the textured side of the glass on the exposed side, providing a slip resistant surface, with color fired into the #2 surface. The textured side of the floating counter tops, in low-iron glass, is the bottom surface — which, in 3/4" glass, leaves the exposed top surface very smooth and flat.*

in the application of materials. I try to apply the most texture or mixture to a design or installation as the conditions will allow. Glass is one of the best media for this.

**UG: In what way?**

**RB:** UltraGlas offers a great mix of light transmission, texture, obscurity and durability you don't find in any other medium, yet it's very strong. It has structural integrity. Plus it can take on any design or pattern, which is really exciting to an artist.

**UG: Are your clients always receptive to the idea of using glass in such unconventional ways?**

**RB:** Sometimes. But often, when I present the initial concept, clients need a little help visualizing glass used in different ways, other than just windows. Most people think of glass as being too fragile, but in reality, glass in 3/8", 1/2", or 3/4" is as strong or stronger than a stone product of the same thickness. Once they understand that, and they find out that the cost is comparable to a quality marble, they only need to see samples of the texture and color that UltraGlas can provide, to understand the versatility of this medium.

**UG: What advice would you give to architects and designers who are considering using glass in their designs for the first time?**

**RB:** Glass is more than a window lite. The strength of annealed or tempered glass allows for many different uses. Glass is a green product, with recycled content. It is low maintenance, and with UltraGlas, even lower maintenance, due to the way its surface texture hides scratches, fingerprints, etc. UltraGlas can be used as flooring with great depth of color and slip resistance and to divide or define space that offers full light transmission and privacy at the same time. Design professionals should think of glass as a material for any surface: floors, walls, counters, lighting, ceilings, windows and door lites — anywhere they want light, color, texture, strength and durability.

**UG: You've been collaborating with UltraGlas for almost 15 years. After such a long relationship, do you think UltraGlas solutions have begun to influence your designs?**

**RB:** Yes, absolutely.

**UG: In what ways?**

**RB:** Over the years, the more I worked with the UltraGlas staff, the more I found different ways of using glass. The more you understand the possibilities and limitations of a material, the better you are at applying it to designs. A lot of my designs are the result of knowing how materials can be integrated into different applications, to create something new and unique, not just the same old thing.

**UG: You specialize in water features. How often do you choose UltraGlas for these applications?**

**RB:** Quite often. UltraGlas is an excellent material applied to water. The texture offers great movement of the water as it flows down the panel, and the texture is fire polished, so dirt and sediment can be easily cleaned. Glass is completely waterproof, unlike tile, stone or granite, so water incursion is not an issue. Glass water walls are great for dividing a space: with only one wet side, they look identical on both sides, so two spaces can benefit from a single element.



*A standard UltraGlas texture called 'UltraCrinkle' is used in these bar area counter components. Both the texture and a standard fired-in coloration have been applied to the unexposed #2 surface, leaving the exposed surfaces very smooth.*



*An 'UltraCrinkle' texture, in clear glass, is used in this round table top and adjacent shelving.*

**UG:** *You've said the key to your unique designs is "integrated fabrication." What is this and why is it so important to what you do?*

**RB:** *It's knowing the possibilities of a variety of materials and how they can complement one another. To me,*

*this is the cornerstone of architectural design. When I finally tired of trying to find one fabricator who could successfully integrate many different materials into one element, I started doing it myself. By hands-on work with a wide range of media, I'm constantly stretching the familiar limits of possibility.*

**UG:** *You have a very interesting story about how you first discovered your artistic talents. Would you share that with us?*

**RB:** *I live in Laguna Beach, California. In 1993, we had a firestorm that burned over 400 homes, including my own neighborhood. I stayed to protect my home, and was able to save it. But, what I saw that day was surreal and life changing for me. In the aftermath – in the days and months that followed – I began to create found object sculpture from*

*the debris of my neighborhood. They were the scraps and pieces of my neighbors' lives, many times the only pieces that were left of their homes. So, the creations that came out of this had a lot of meaning. Through the sale of my works, I raised thousands of dollars for survivors of the fire. I had been working in high-end residential construction prior to the fire, but after this tragedy, more opportunities to create sculptural architectural elements kept coming my way, leading me into a whole new expression of my art.*

**Architectural Annex**, located in Laguna Beach, California, provides complete art services, from concept and design through fabrication and installation — for hospitality, custom residential and corporate applications, worldwide.

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