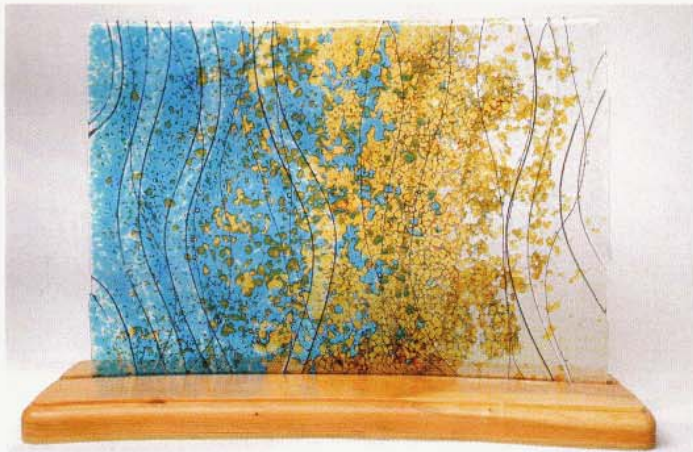


## Looking for Light

Takoma Park artist Nina Falk forges liting glass sculptures that mirror her work as a classical musician

By Tina Coplan

Art Photography by Greg Staley



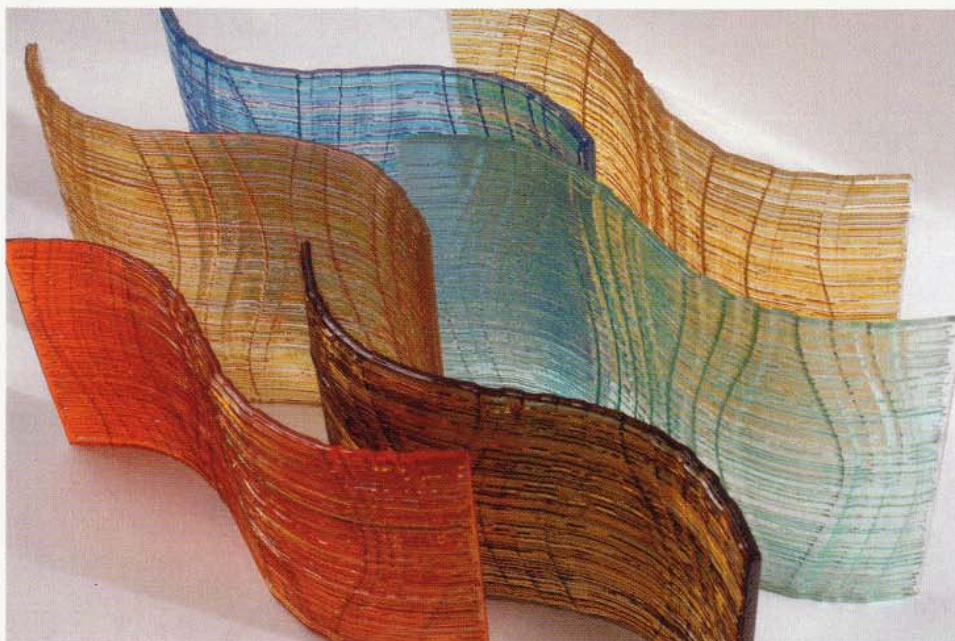
Artist Nina Falk's colorful, liting glassworks dance with grace and light.

If this description seems just as suited to a musical performance, there's a reason. Falk enjoys a parallel career as an acclaimed classical violinist, and the same phrases, used in reviews of her ensemble playing, apply equally to her buoyant glass art. In



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Artist Nina Falk (above) creates *Nested Waves* (below) in her Takoma Park studio, reflecting a universal form seen in nature and also in the rise and fall of a melody. They are textured on both sides. "The idea for these pieces originated from a comment a dear friend made; she said that people who love each other are connected by invisible golden threads," explains Falk. *Looking for Light* (left) incorporates embedded copper and brass wire.



Falk's dual-career world, one art complements the other in perfect harmony.

"A lot of my glass is an expression of my musical life," she explains. "I don't mull over how to express music in glass, but the experience of music is always running through me, and a great deal of what I've learned about balance, rhythm, texture and form in music is translated into glass."

In her signature sculptures, called *Waves*, each gently billowing piece suggests a sense of movement that can be linked to the flow of music, water or life. "I look for purity and simplicity in design," she says. "It's always about the oneness of life and the beauty of a curve and how the curve is seen in nature and everything that flows."

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# Art Studio

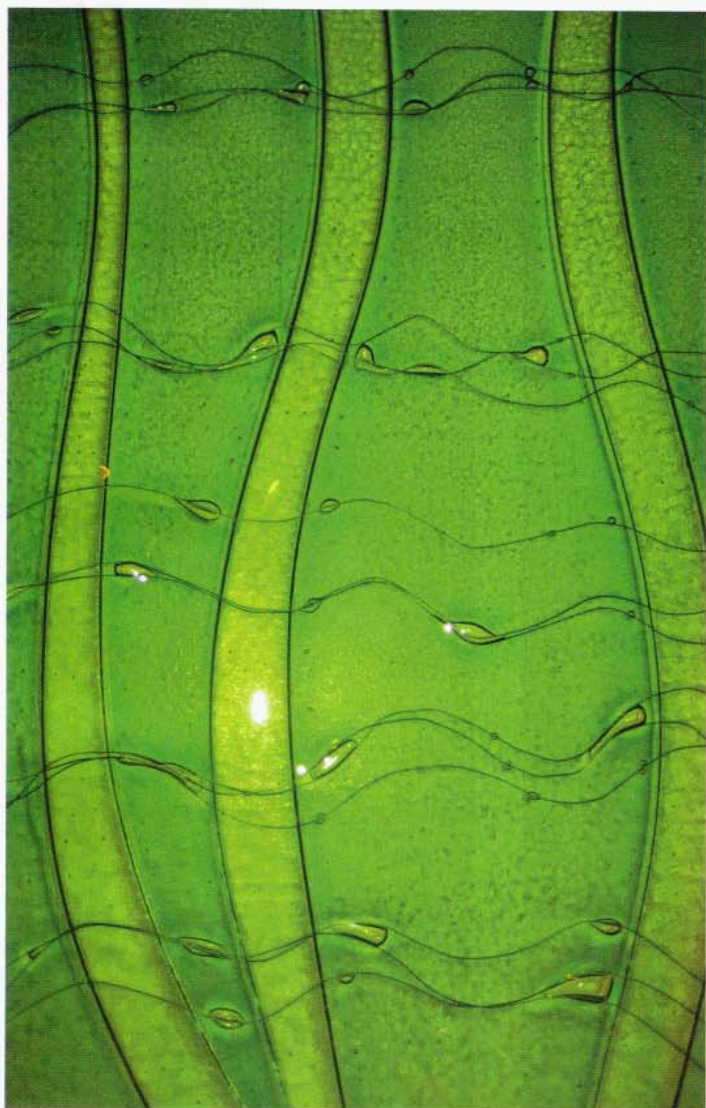
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Falk is fascinated with the play of light on these undulating forms, with their highly textured surfaces, a counterpoint of horizontal threads and vertical grooves on two sides. As light changes throughout the day, the colors also shift. When the pieces are combined in staggered groups, the chromatic interest intensifies, as colors appear differently on single or overlapping sheets of glass.

A recurring leitmotif weaves its way through all her designs: the violin. "Sitting in the orchestra waiting to play, I spent a lot of time focused on my violin," she recalls. "My first violin was beautiful, a child's-size instrument by a very famous maker. I loved to study it."

She traces the dynamic curves in her glasswork to the violin's sinuous shape. The threaded texture of her sculptures echoes the fine lines of a violin's wood grain, strings and hair bow. Even her color preferences—shades of amber and turquoise—relate to the warm hues of violin varnish. "I think of it as honey," she notes, smiling.

Falk grew up in New York and started playing the violin at age eight. She took music lessons in Juilliard's Preparatory Division,  
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Falk has hung a Marimekko fabric wave in her home studio (above), where she fires glass in two kilns. A single firing may take up to 12 hours, allowing the artist to attend a violin concert or rehearsal. A piece commissioned by an architect for his own home (left) contains copper wire fired between layers of glass; small bubbles evoke water. The piece was inspired by Amy Lamb's photos of hostas. Falk's *Nest Wave Platters* (top) blend art and function. When the platters are displayed in pairs, their curves interact; they are used separately as serving pieces.

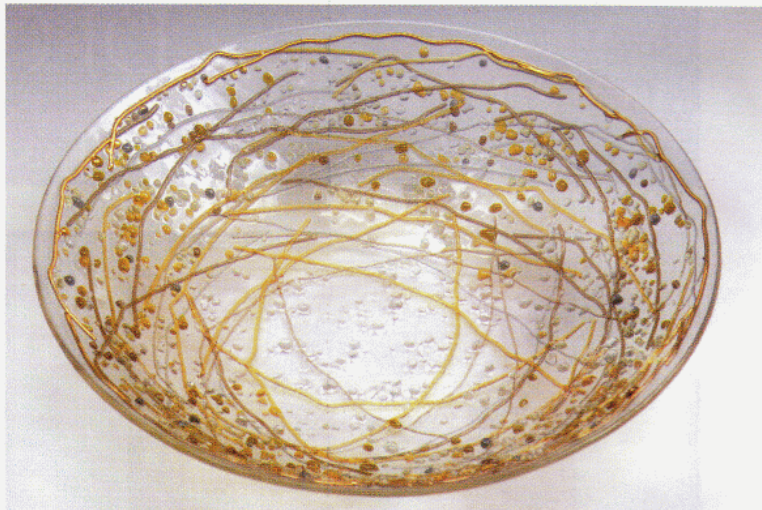
# Art Studio

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**“A lot of my glass is an expression of my musical life,” says Nina Falk. “I don’t mull over how to express music in glass, but the experience of music is always running through me, and a great deal of what I’ve learned about balance, rhythm, texture and form in music is translated into glass.”**

alongside fellow students Pinchas Zukerman and Itzhak Perlman. Graduating from Oberlin Conservatory of Music, she received a Fulbright fellowship to study violin-making in Europe.

Throughout this time, the talented musician was also drawn to art. When she first entered New York’s High School of Music and Art, she seriously considered changing majors, remembering moments when “I looked longingly at art students carrying their portfolios.” In college she took sculpture and painting classes.



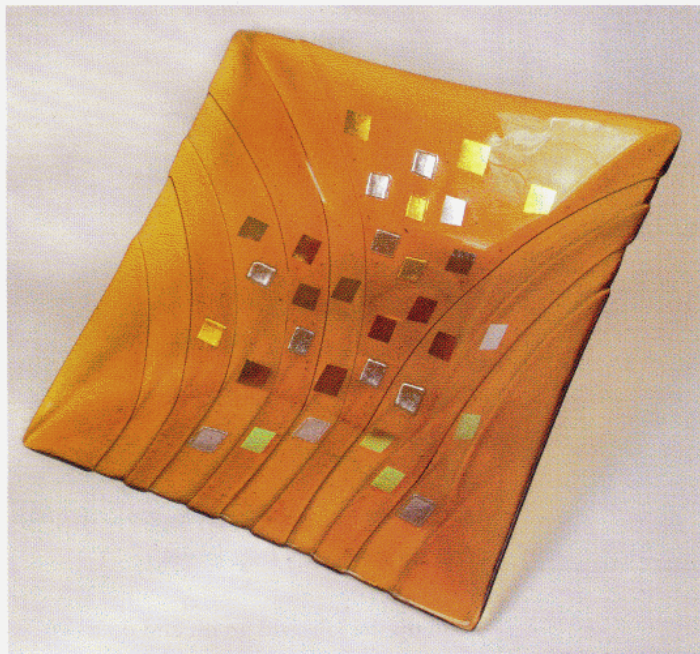
In her *Round Nest Bowl*, Falk set out to show the fragility and strength of a nest. It incorporates elements of fine glass threads in ambers and browns.

It wasn’t until 2003, when Falk attended an exhibition at Maryland’s Glen Echo Park, that the impetus for her second career began. She fell in love with and bought a large circular glass platter by Jerry Zayde Sleph, who was a founder of the Glass Consortium at Glen Echo. Inspired by the beauty of the piece, she took a class in kiln-formed glass.

She recalls the horror and joy. “The first piece I made was awful. But the teacher said, ‘Don’t take it too seriously; it’s just for technique.’ The second piece was much better. I was so excited. My life as I knew it was over. I’ve been making glass with a vengeance ever since.”

Workshops at the Corning Museum and renowned Pilchuck Glass School near Seattle followed. In 2005 and 2006, Falk became an artist-in-residence at Washington’s Wesley Theological Seminary. She continues to take workshops and interact with the DC area’s supportive glassmaking community.

Falk’s lyrical design direction was inspired by elements in the platter by Sleph that sparked her second career. Her bowls and platters also use multicolored glass threads and frit—particles of crushed glass ranging in size from small chunks to pulverized powder—along with cut-glass squares in confetti shapes.



Falk’s *Amber Bowl* was inspired by a detail in a postcard of the Guggenheim Museum. The lines of the bowl are taken from the building’s curving levels. The dichroic glass fired onto the amber base represents the windows, doors and elements of the building.

Her pieces often incorporate shapely lines of brass, copper or nickel wire embedded between sheets of glass. The grooved surface texture results from cutout forms carved into the glass during firing. Each completed sheet is placed on a commercial mold ready to be slumped into shape in the kiln. The largest piece, a platter, measures 19 inches square.

Falk’s studio, located in the basement of her home in Takoma Park, is a pristine white space outfitted with two kilns, a worktable and shelves studded with more than 100 jars of varied frit. Tubes of glass threads are stacked below. Facing walls are adorned with her favorite art work and motifs: Richard Serra’s surging steel sculptures, Frank Gehry’s curvilinear Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Matisse cutouts, a Calder mobile, a Marimekko fabric wave-pattern in canary yellow and photo details of the ribbed veins on a hosta leaf and peeling bark on an ancient tree.

The process of forming glass in a kiln, rather than by labor-intensive glassblowing, lends itself to a double life. Her two kilns run all day, every day. A single firing may take up to 12 hours to reach a maximum temperature of 1480 degrees, before cooling down to room temperature during the annealing stage. “I can

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Nina Falk also creates glass jewelry inspired by watercolors (top) and contemporary design (above).

load up the kiln and go off and do a concert or get groceries," she says.

After a recent matinee performance with the Washington Bach Consort, Falk headed to her studio. She limits her concert schedule to allow more time for making glass, while continuing to perform with ArcoVoce, the chamber ensemble she co-founded with her husband, Steven Silverman, a pianist, harpsichordist and full-time lawyer.

Reflecting on her dual career passions, she muses, "It took years and years to be able to play well, and then the performance is over quickly. It's satisfying to create glass that will last longer!" ❖

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*Tina Coplan is a writer based in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Greg Staley is a photographer in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

## RESOURCES

Nina Falk's glasswork is available at Arts Afire Glass Gallery in Alexandria, Weisser Glass Studio in Kensington and Amano (jewelry only) in Takoma Park; online through Guild.com; and at select craft shows identified on her Web site: [www.ninafalkglass.com](http://www.ninafalkglass.com).