

Glass Block Invites the Light And Dazzles Indoors or Out

Glass block in design can build a contemporary wall of solid luminescence, or a retro path to one of several past generations.

In function, glass block is just as cre-

atively versatile. What other building substance invites in the light, while shielding the homeowner's privacy?

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First coming into full architectural view in the 1940s, the several-inches-thick glass block with its trademark wavy undulations has made periodic comebacks using the same pattern. Today, manufacturers such as Pittsburgh Corning have graduated the product to include several patterns – icescapes, grids and prisms. Some of these are designed for maximum privacy.

Italian and German companies also offer superior gems, like the incredibly beautiful liquid pastels and grays of a colored glass line made by Vetroarredo.

Glass block has been built into many other home features besides windows. Contractor Fred P. Michel Jr., a specialist in installation and design of glass block, has recently finished projects in the Long Beach Island, Stafford Township and surrounding mainland area.

“I do a lot of the design myself, and I also work with all of the local architects,” Michel said.

The diffused light and subtle visual distortion make glass block the perfect window next to a hot tub. For that matter, the privacy effect is valuable in many parts of a shore house. “So often, homes at the beach are close to the house right next door,” Michel pointed out. “The glass block lets the light in, and it actually gives a prismatic effect on the inside.”

Glass blocks also build into interesting entertainment centers – imagine the light reflecting through as an extra sensory experience with the music.

“I’ve done a lot of walk-in showers – they’re maintenance-free – also kitchens

and bars, and lately, I’ve been doing a lot of exterior showers and outside bars,” he added. Besides the stunning visual effect, glass block is durable as an outside bar, he said. “Whether it be a concrete, stone or fiberglass top, nothing’s going to blow it away.”

Based in Northfield, Michel is well enough known in the trade that he is called from beyond New Jersey. Soon, he will travel from Maryland to New York to do a job.

“They say we’re good,” the quiet-spoken young man said. His father is an expert mason, but even he leaves the precision of supervising glass block installation to his son when they work alongside each other. Fred Jr. has been in business for himself for 17 years now. “I was born and raised in the masonry trade, and I thought this gave

a little more artistic reward,” he said.

Michel takes one job at a time and stays with it. “It takes patience,” he said. “There is really no quitting time when you start. The cement kind of controls the

day. You can find yourself working from 7 a.m. to 8 or 9 o’clock at night until that cement sets up.”

Once installed correctly, the product is durable, said Michel, who is also called to do repairs on other contractors’ less-solid installations. Each block is vacuum-sealed and very well insulated. The grout is installed using a white, waterproof cement.

The blocks can be designed into more extensive applications than one might think. “It’s pretty self-supporting,” Michel said. “It’s actually anchored in. There is steel reinforcement that is through the glass blocks.”

Fred Michel Jr. Glass Block can be contacted at 646-5056. —M.S.

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