

# Leo Pitassi's Work In Stained Glass Is Inspired By Music

*In an age of mass production, high power machines and gigantic factories there still are men whose skilled fingers continue the craft work started centuries ago. The stories of these master craftsmen and their technique are told in a series of articles of which this is the first.*

"The man who does no work" relaxed in his chair and closed his eyes as the phonograph at the far end of the room softly played Brahms' "Lullaby."

The recording ended and the man rose to his feet.

"Now you see why my friends call me 'the man who does no work,'" he said. "But this is my shop, and if I work better and get ideas faster when music is playing I don't see that I deserve that nickname, do you? Besides, I get a lot of work done, even if I don't look busy."

As he talked he pointed out his drawing tables and his office, lined with art books, classics and row after row of record albums.

Leo Pitassi is no ordinary worker. A master craftsman in the making of stained glass windows, he has fixed ideas on the art of designing and constructing of windows.

\* \* \*

## Remains a Craftsman

To high-g geared methods of turning out mass production, to efficiency talks and high-powered sales systems he turns a deaf ear.

When friends ask him why he doesn't turn manager because "you have a business here which could be developed into something big," Leo Pitassi listens politely, turns on one of his symphonies and closes his eyes.

He prefers to remain a craftsman rather than a business executive and a worker instead of a boss. This embodies his favorite theory on the making of stained glass windows—it can't be an art when one man does the designing, another man the next step until the finished product is unrecognizable to the first worker.

To be a work of art, Mr. Pitassi says, the artist must begin the work, see it through and be responsible for the finished product.

That's exactly what Leo Pitassi does . . . he originates the design, selects the glass to be used for the picture and makes the trips to the churches to see the window installed.

\* \* \*

## Began As Office Boy

Born in Italy, Mr. Pitassi came to this country in his early teens. An art student in Italy, he looked for work here and began as an office boy in the decorating firm of Leake-Green, at Smithfield St. and Sixth Ave.

As an office boy he had oppor-

tunity to watch artists and draftsmen at work. In the evenings when work was done he used to copy their sketches and try his hand on his own designs.

One of the artists noticed his work and when he left the company he persuaded young Pitassi to go with him. The two went to another glass company which made ornamental glass and windows for homes.

As the years passed little by little Mr. Pitassi was learning the art of making stained glass windows.

He attended Carnegie Tech Art School at night, learning to couple art technique with the commercial knowledge of glass and construction he learned during the day.

In addition to the Bible, he read histories and biographies and the lives of Saints to give him subject material for window designs.

\* \* \*

## Opens Own Shop

He was given more responsibility at the company. Now he was able to submit drawings for windows. He could combine glass colors and oversee the metal framework.

He opened his own shop and today occupies a quaint red brick building at 5345 Penn Ave. Decorated with handsome grill work and stained glass windows in the front, the building has two rooms.

One room, taking two-thirds of the building, is filled with long wooden tables and wooden cabinets, containing rolls of drawings and construction plans.

In the second room Mr. Pitassi creates his drawings for windows as he listens to symphonies played on the phonograph. Long easy chairs fill the room. Wine and small cakes are kept in the cabinet over the bookshelves.

Mr. Pitassi maintains he works better with the music playing.

"My pencil seems to move in the

PITASSI, LEO



Pictures in glass for light to beautify are the products of Leo Pitassi's craftwork. He is shown above selecting glass for the pieces which will form the window. He uses the master drawing for a guide. The finished window will cost anywhere from \$40 to \$100 a square foot, depending on

the number of pieces of glass. At right are the drawings which are used for guides in selecting glass colors, in determining the number of pieces and their position. In the process of completing the window each section of the drawing will be cut and reproduced in glass.

same smooth rhythm as the music," he said. "If I try to draw a head, analyze shoulders and draw scientifically, I'm no good."

First step in getting a stained glass window is a conference with Mr. Pitassi. Usually a minister, priest or committee of the church comes to visit him.

With an architect they plan the height of the windows, how many are necessary and the subject matter.

"The church history long has been the most popular theme for church windows," he said. "Lives of various Saints come next and Biblical stories next."

So far he has made no windows with a modern theme or characters. Next step is the drawing. Mr. Pitassi makes rough sketches, larger drawings and finally the finished window drawing.

When the sketches have been approved by the church authorities Mr. Pitassi makes full sized draw-

ings. The window now looks on paper what it will be like in glass.

In a large room the master drawings are laid on long tables, cut into the separate pieces, forming paper patterns for the glass. Some windows have as many as five thousand pieces.

\* \* \*

#### 60 Different Shades

Each piece of glass is selected by Mr. Pitassi with utmost care. As many as 50 or 60 different color shades sometimes are combined in a single window.

The lead holds the glass pieces together and cement in the crevices completes the process. On a large piece of glass with a thin coating of wax the pieces are fitted and the window formed. For this work he has assistants who work with him.

Stain is used to give shading. The finished product is glazed and cemented so the window won't rattle.

When asked how long it takes to complete a window, Mr. Pitassi pointed to the full size drawing hanging on the side of the room.

\* \* \*

#### Must Be Just So

"See that drawing? I've been working on windows for that particular church since 1927," he said. "That's the way I like to work."

He likes to design a window, complete it and then set it in place to see how it looks. If it has too much light, too much darkness or doesn't give the effect he wants he makes it over.

Mr. Pitassi has made windows for churches in Chicago and other cities. In Pittsburgh he has designed many of the leading church windows, and at present is working on St. Bernard's Church in Mt. Lebanon.

He also studies astronomy and music and reads the classics for diversion.