

# JOHN GECI: GLASSMAKER, DREAM CHASER

by DEBORAH R. MEYER

John Geci has a dream. “I think I’d be a very happy man to just wake up, walk down to my studio, and make glass,” Geci said. “To have the freedom to play and explore subtlety.”

This glass artist, who just turned thirty-three, is on his way to achieving this dream. Geci just bought and moved into his first home, which sits on thirteen acres of mostly wooded land on the side of a mountain in Bakersville in western North Carolina. The view from Geci’s front porch, when the fog is not thick and sitting low, is of the Black Mountains, the highest in the Appalachian Range. The more immediate view from the porch is of the remains of the former owner’s trailer that burned to the ground. From this charred foundation will soon arise Geci’s two-story glassblowing studio, which he’ll start building himself this winter. If the weather cooperates, by spring Geci should have a ten-second commute to work.

The area where Geci has settled is home to the largest concentration of glassmakers per capita in the country, with twenty-five studios within a twenty-mile radius. Geci got here after graduating from Hartwick College in upstate New York—he had set off in the fall of 1994 to find his way in the world and discover a place to call home.

“My degree was in philosophy but what I really wanted to do was be a glassblower,” Geci said. “I had no idea of how to do that. So I

drove around the country, stopping in at glass shops. One of the first places I stopped was Penland—it was the first place I thought I’d like to live.”

Founded in 1929, Penland School of Crafts is located in Penland in the Blue Ridge Mountains



near the town of Spruce Pine, North Carolina, and is a national center for craft education, offering classes in clay, glass, books and paper, wood, drawing, photography, iron, metals, printmaking, and textiles. Geci was accepted to a glassblowing class at Penland in 1995; it’s a testament to the region’s beauty and the artisans’ talent and support that he never left.

Though Geci hadn’t thought

upon going to college that he would wend his way through life as an artist, he was already deeply entrenched in the arts. His father and mother, a high school teacher and children’s librarian respectively, have always encouraged his interests, especially cultural ones. Geci attended high school in Litchfield, Connecticut, where his father taught. When Barbara Salinger, a new ceramics teacher, arrived, something about the way she taught compelled Geci’s father to encourage him to take her class. “I started working in clay and loved it. I loved manipulating it,” Geci said. “A lot of days after sports I would go home and sit in the den and sculpt.” He knew he wanted his college education to further his clay artistry and chose Hartwick for its strong ceramics program. “When I went to college, ceramics was my primary dalliance. I didn’t think it was something I could do for a living but it was something I really enjoyed,” Geci said. It just so happened that the ceramics studio overlooked the glassblowing studio. Geci would gaze longingly at those immersed in creating works of glass. In the spring of his junior year, he jumped studios, landing in his idea of bliss.

*(End of excerpt)*