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Wu Tang Gong, David Sandidge

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Mickey Mouse Jellybean Jar (Mickey Mouse © Walt Disney Co.)

# Endless new horizons

David Sandidge

By Nate Shelton

SA Managing Editor



Not all artists find their calling at a young age. When they do, though, that first blast of encouragement frequently comes from an older relative or mentor. Sometimes it's a teacher. Other times, perhaps it stems from a parent, grandparent or even a sibling — or, as in the case of glassblower David Sandidge, a parent's sibling. Specifically, his uncle Donald.

"He inspired me at a young age to draw and sculpt with clay," Sandidge recalled. "I knew then that 3-D was more of an attraction to me."

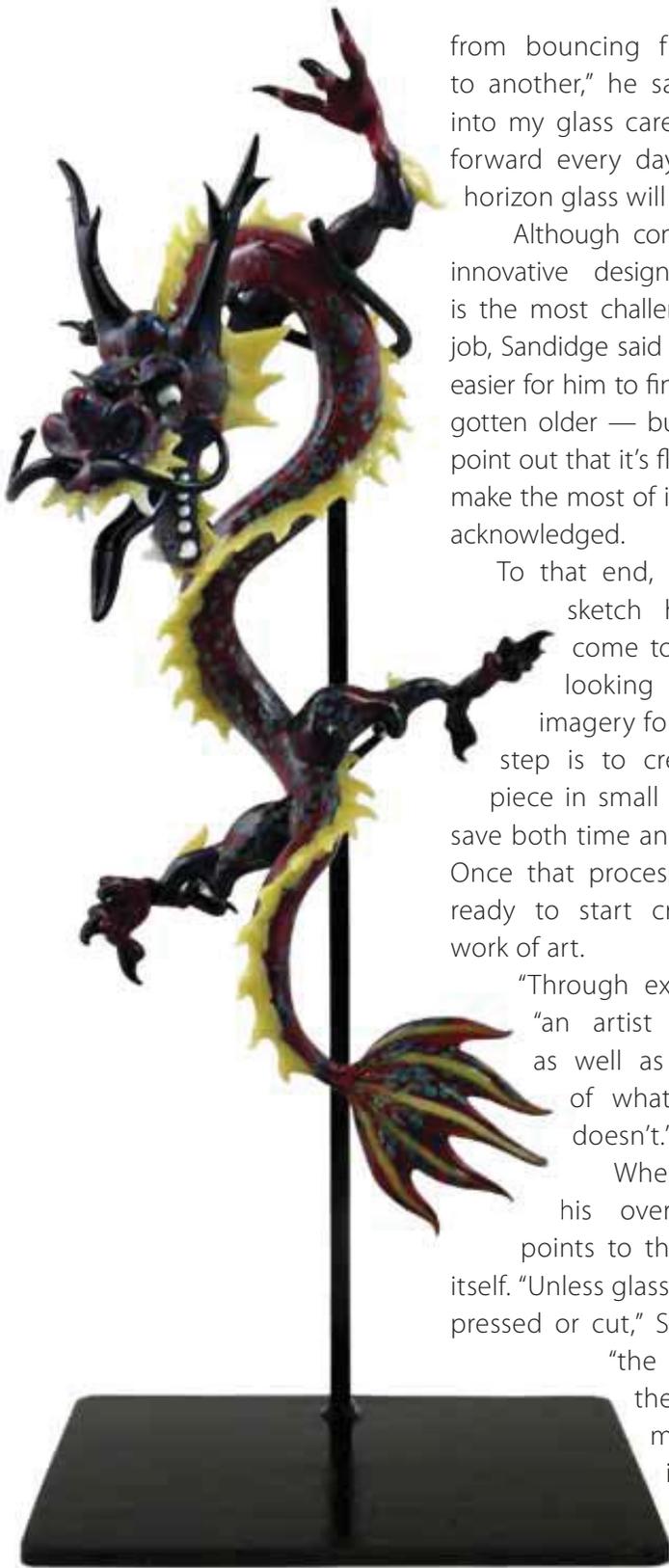
Also serving as heavy — and as you'll soon see, fateful — motivation for him was Walt Disney World. After his family moved to Central Florida from Virginia, Sandidge's father, who was a musician in the U.S. Navy, was part of the Magic Kingdom's opening-day ceremonies. Sandidge and the rest of his family were lucky enough to be there, too, and the young artist became fascinated by a glassblower's demonstration.

At age 15, he got serious about following that muse and found work as an apprentice at a local factory that produced small, lampworked glass figurines. As Sandidge put it, "I got hooked early on."

Upon landing that gig, he worked with glass every day after school, and he's stuck with the medium in the decades since. "I feel fortunate that working with glass all these years saved me



Former First Lady Nancy Reagan receiving Sandidge's Mickey Mouse Jellybean Jar



*Oriental Dragon*

from bouncing from one bad job to another," he said. "Now, 35 years into my glass career, I'm still looking forward every day to the next new horizon glass will bring me to."

Although coming up with fresh, innovative designs and techniques is the most challenging aspect of his job, Sandidge said it's actually become easier for him to find inspiration as he's gotten older — but he's also quick to point out that it's fleeting. "You have to make the most of it when you can," he acknowledged.

To that end, Sandidge tends to sketch his ideas as they come to him. Usually, after looking through other imagery for guidance, his next step is to create the imagined piece in small scale as a study to save both time and material expense. Once that process is complete, he's ready to start crafting his newest work of art.

"Through experience," he said, "an artist builds confidence as well as an understanding of what works and what doesn't."

When asked about his overriding vision, he points to the glories of nature itself. "Unless glass is being molded or pressed or cut," Sandidge explained, "the natural flow of the material in its molten state lends itself perfectly to natural curves and contours."

Perhaps unsurprisingly given his love of the medium, Sandidge said, "I don't think I would work with anything that didn't involve glass." At the same time, he is interested in adding other mediums to the mix — if they share a happy synergy with his chosen material. "Glass and metal go so well together," he teased.

Fittingly, Sandidge's talent and a key source of early inspiration led to what is arguably the brightest highlight of his career: many years spent working with and demonstrating glass in Walt Disney theme parks worldwide, including those in California, Florida, Hong Kong, Paris and Tokyo.

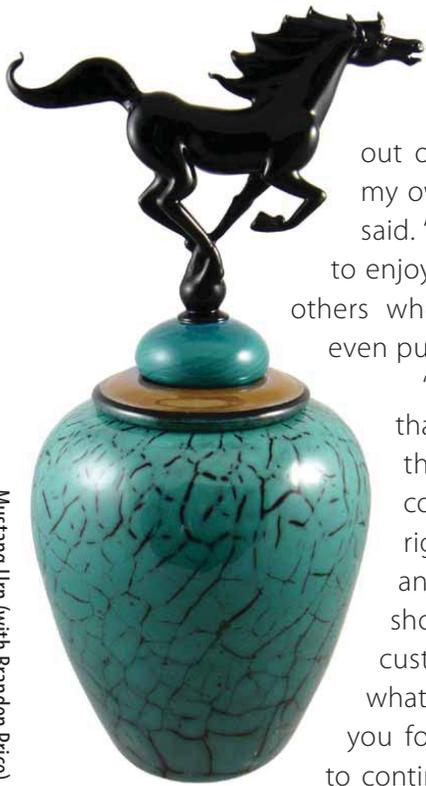
"I made some very special, limited-edition Disney character pieces through the years," he said, "and was honored to make some Disney pieces that were presented to such notables as Michael Eisner, Rosa Parks, Nancy Reagan and many of the retiring Disney executives.

"My Disney pieces have become highly collectible and are sometimes found on the secondary market selling for double or triple the original price."

Not content with crafting commercial — albeit highly artistic — creations for Disney, Sandidge kept working on his own independent designs, too. What's more, he found art festivals to be a perfect vehicle for getting his original work to eager buyers, having done his first event 29 years ago.

"By the time I was 21 years old,

Mustang Urn (with Brandon Price)



I had left the factory to venture out on my own and find my own artistic voice," he said. "That's when I began to enjoy the appreciation of others who complimented or even purchased my art.

"It seemed to me that I must be doing the right thing," he continued. "Being right up front, close and personal with show-goers and customers who like what you do and reward you for it, creates a desire to continue to do more and to experiment and push the boundaries."

Staying true to his Central Florida roots, Sandidge points to the Mount Dora Art Festival as a standout event for him. "The Mount Dora Center for the Arts does such a fantastic job organizing this event, and they make all of the artists feel so welcome," he said. "Sales are always good for me, and the weather is usually perfect."

Regardless of where he's exhibiting, though, he looks forward to meeting the public — particularly when, as is often the case, his work brings them joy. "Most people react with smiles and nods when they come into my booth," said Sandidge. "I see them pointing and commenting to each other.

"It makes me happy that my work brings out smiles. People so often tell me that it appears as if I have a lot of fun making my pieces, and I do."

While Sandidge intends to keep doing

festivals, he also revealed an exciting new venture that he's launching with his partner and fellow glass artist, Brandon Price: a 4,300-square-foot facility at Florida's new Artegon Orlando Marketplace, complete with glassblowing and torch-working studios. The business will also house a large gallery, including work from the founders and other glass artisans.

"We will be teaching up-and-coming glass artists as well as offering visitors a glassblowing experience," he said. "Our walk-in workshops will give people of all ages an opportunity to be paired up with a professional glassblower for a hands-on glassmaking experience."

Though he's obviously accomplished much over the course of his career, it's clear that Sandidge has no plans to start winding down any time soon. And who can blame him? After all, there's an endless supply of horizons for him to cross — and his desire to master them through glass is apparently as inexhaustible as the sand from which his medium is born.

"I'm always so pleased when I do something new that goes over well," he said. "That's what keeps me going."

*More of David Sandidge's work can be found on his website, [www.sandidgeartglass.com](http://www.sandidgeartglass.com).* 🌟



Brave Little Tailor (Mickey Mouse © Walt Disney Co.)