



WALL ART

These Decorative Painters Bring
an Ancient Art Form into the
Twentieth Century

BY LYDIA V. LONGSHORE

Liz and Tom Warnock left media careers—she at the Public Broadcasting Service and he at National Public Radio—to become Washington's premier decorative painting team. It was Liz who, about ten years ago, began to get interested in painting techniques, going so far as to study gilding in Milan, Italy. When she finally launched herself as a decorative painter, word of her expertise spread so fast that in six months, she had more work than she could handle.

On weekends and at night, Tom stepped in to help and turned out to also possess a talent for the craft. He soon quit his day job and

OPPOSITE: Liz and Tom Warnock painted a magnificent stairwell for the 1992 National Symphony Orchestra Decorators' Show House in Washington, D.C.
ABOVE: A harlequin pattern gives a playful accent to the second-floor landing. Photographs by Maxwell MacKenzie. For details, see Sourcebook.



OPPOSITE: Liz and Tom Warnock are masters of elegant decay. The painted walls of this morning room appear to be crumbling ruins.

TOP: A detail of the Warnocks' historically accurate work.

ABOVE: The floor design is based on one from Westminster Abbey.

RIGHT: Heraldic designs on a ceiling. Photographs by Thomas C. Warnock.

devoted himself full-time to decorative painting as well.

The staircase and landing they painted for the 1992 National Symphony Orchestra Decorators' Show House won them acclaim for their ability to fuse good design with top-notch technique. "The harlequin pattern in the upper landing is classic, but we did it in a metallic paint and put a bench in front of it that is a modern interpretation of a classic design," says Tom.

Tom credits their success to flexibility: "We are pretty eclectic in our style," he says. "We try to do a full range of things—faux marble, gilding, and faux bois on floors, ceilings, and windows." Their graining work is remarkable, even replicating the iridescence of some pale woods. For an earlier showhouse, the Warnocks re-created the look of ruins on the walls of a sunny, lofty

morning room. They started by painting blocks of stone, then added water damage and moss. When the building inspector dropped by to check on progress, he was concerned to see what he thought was a terrible leakage problem, complete with moss growing on the walls. "Wall-glazing techniques are getting much more sophisticated," says Liz. "There's less sponging—we're seeing more metallic striés, cross-hatched striés, complicated finishes that require more training to execute."

Besides her extensive training, or perhaps because of it, Liz knows the importance of research in her work. "All of our disposable income goes toward books," she says.

The Warnocks say that there are differences between the tastes of their Southern clients and those of the Northeast or West. "Southerners are enamored of painted finishes," says Liz, predicting that the new Administration may bring a flood of requests for their skills. "I think it will be a boon, with new people moving in and the entrenched ones sprucing up a little."

