

ODDBALL TANK

by HORST GERBER

Well, Elliot, you did it this time! Your article in the July 2006 issue of Modern Aquarium regarding a modern art tank caught my attention. Your visit to the Museum of Modern Art, and your artistic vision in incorporating the style of Kandinsky and Picasso into the decorating of fish tanks, is a novel and appreciated idea. I personally feel that Kandinsky's cubism art form would certainly work well in a contemporary design.

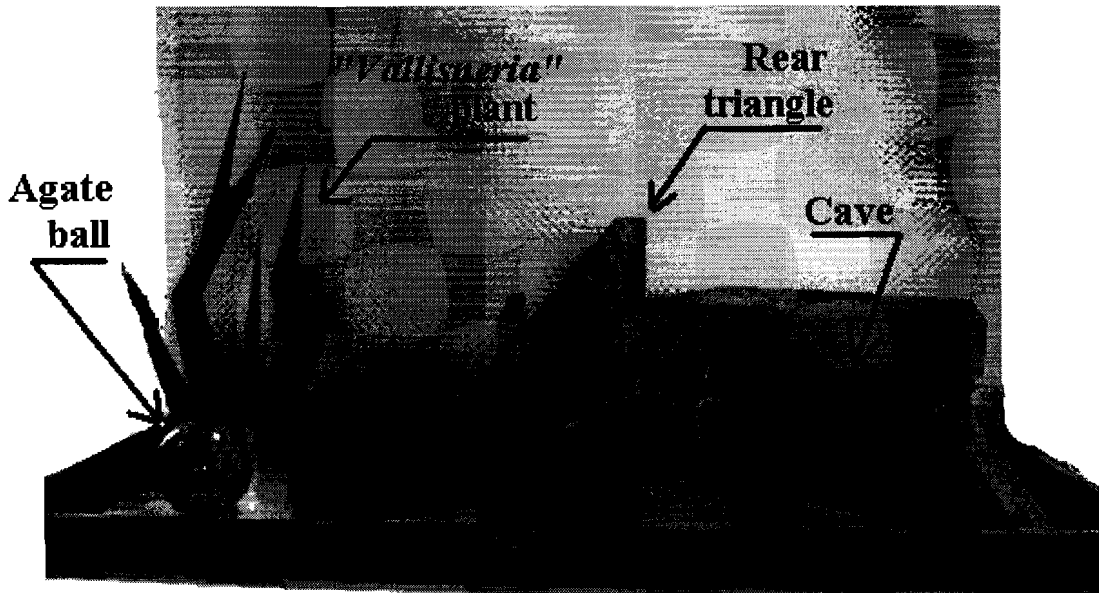
My concern was how to put this idea into reality without totally sacrificing my standard of creating an aquascape that looks as natural as possible. With this in mind, my grey matter started to work overtime. My background as a strained (and I mean strained) glass artist led me to the possibility of creating a modernistic background with colored stained glass.

The next step was finding the right design for the background and the inside of the tank. To get ideas for the creation of a modern aquarium I browsed through art books and looked at various modernistic sculptures. The research paid off—it helped produce the final design. But, what kind of material should be used in the decor of the tank? This eluded me. It had to be colorful and workable and I had to be able to cut it into desired shapes. The light bulb went on in my head one morning while my coffee was brewing on the granite kitchen counter top.

"Granite" is aquarium safe and comes in many subdued natural colors from deep reds and greens to sparkling black galaxy, with purple being the rarest. It can be purchased in homebuilding supply stores. After some research I discovered that the sales personnel of most countertop manufacturers are more than willing to part with various color samples if you inform them of your intention to redecorate your kitchen or bathroom. The samples usually range from 4x4 to 6x6 inch squares. Truth be told, and consistent with my eccentric personality, I had to go the extra mile, and actually engaged a salesman in a conversation about, "fishkeeping and decorating of aquariums."

After a half hour or so (either to get rid of me or possibly because I generated some interest) the salesman allowed me to rummage through the company's dumpster. I did so, hoping to procure some broken pieces or small cut-offs. Luckily, this proved to be quite successful. I found a number of pieces suited for my project that were larger than the initial samples given to me.

Approximately three years ago I actually did renovate my kitchen, and purchased a wet saw to cut the granite floor tiles. This proved to be a very useful purchase. I was able to utilize this machine for my artwork, cutting granite into shapes out of the norm. I had found that the use of granite in this design would work well. The only problem encountered was the difficulty in "rounding" granite, which is extremely time



A Horst Gerber original

consuming. Therefore, I opted for straight lines with natural black gravel. In the end, to balance my concept, I could not resist the idea of throwing in a round ball, Dali style, without the Sense Man (grim reaper - Dali's trademark). (We don't want to jinx the fish!)

Now, you might ask, where did the design idea come from? Does the idea come out of the blue sky or from dreams? Most of my ideas are triggered by looking at nature, but in this case it came from looking at art books and abstract sculptures.

I got the idea to do a cave, or hiding place, for the fish in a cubist style. I didn't want to do the cave all in squares, so to give it some depth I added a triangle under the overhanging square. Some of this is hard to explain, but let's just say that it looked right. Next, I had to decide on the color combination. A mixture of bright colors would look gaudy and out of place in a fish tank, but I needed contrast to make it look interesting. I chose red and green because they complement each other in an eye-pleasing contrast. The actual trade names for the granite I used are Fire Verde (which has speckles of real gold in it), Red Dakota, and Forest Green.

Next, I decided that a real plant in an abstract decor would look out of place. I thought I might use petrified algae that has been shaped into a ball and polished. My wife convinced me

otherwise. And that's when I opted for an agate seafoam ball. The "abstract version" of a "plant" behind the agate ball was designed to resemble the common *Vallisneria* plant. It was cut from dark green floor tiles.

The left back area needed something to balance the design. So, I placed a triangle of granite there. I turned it this way and that way until I achieved the look I wanted (very subjective). I certainly did not want to place it on top of the "cave," as that would make it look like the roof of a house, which was not a design element I wanted to project.

I used some additional pieces to create as many shapes as possible in the limited space of a ten gallon tank. As for the background, I composed that in light green and yellow to tie the scene together. The inspiration for the background came from a picture of a modern-style quilt. But, this is certainly a project in which you can let your imagination run wild, or draw all of your inspiration from works of art.

P.S. If we ever have a competition in "modern aquariums," somebody might go as far "out" as to decorate with colored plastic cubes to create an ultra-modern fish tank. I will personally stick with natural products.

