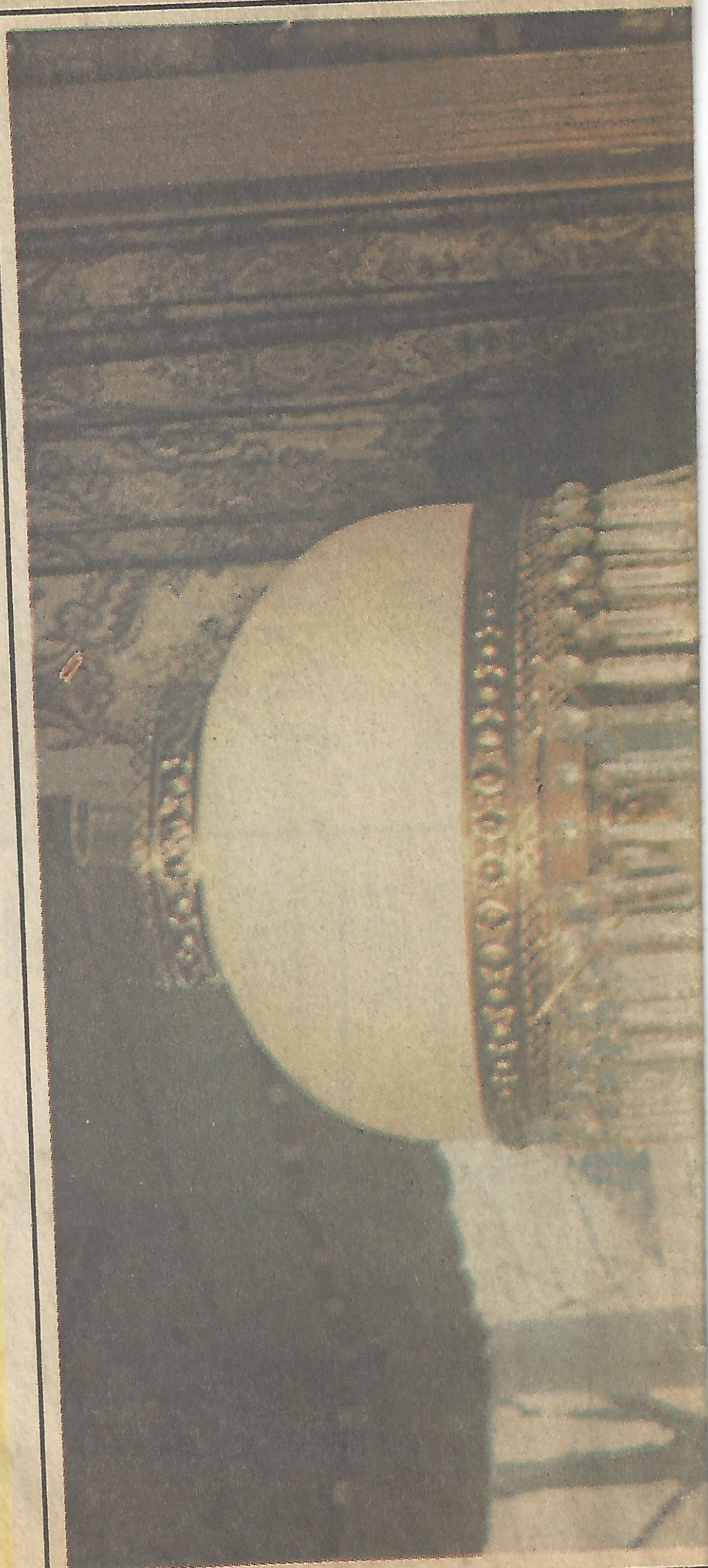


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SOUTH BEND
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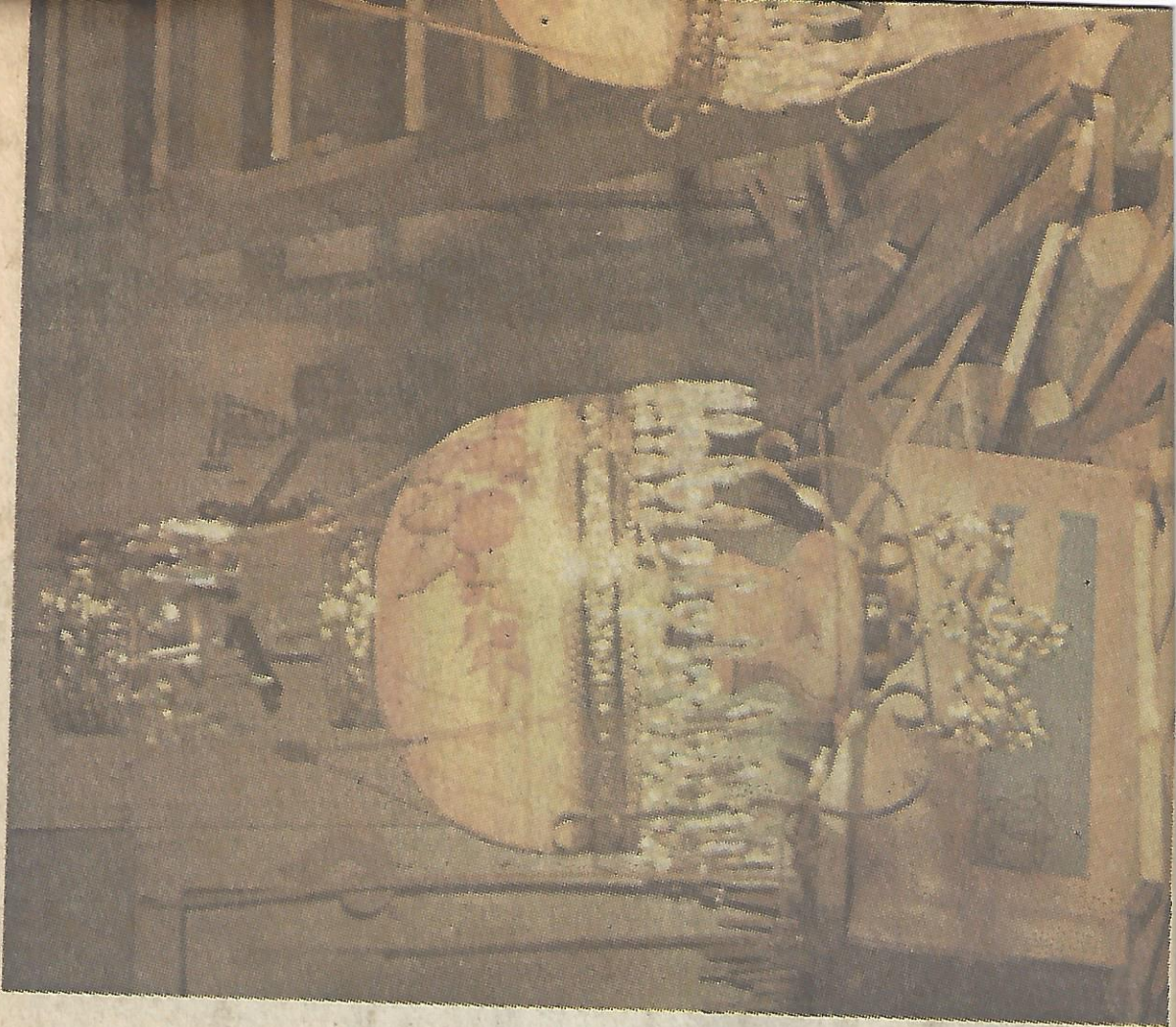
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Mentone lamp man - - - page 12





HIS FACE ILLUMINATED with light from one of the

by the author
pumpkin seed ruby, according to Ray Smith.

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created, Ray Smith adds finishing touches to a lamp decorated with one of his favorite flowers—the Cherokee rose.

By Ann Kindig Sheetz

ROY SMITH has so many lamps he could use a different one every day for the next 17 months without lighting the same one twice.

"I've always liked beautiful lamps," he says by way of explaining the more than 500 lamps that crowd his Mentone, Ind., home and workshop. "My grandmother had some lovely old French lamps and when I was a boy I used to like to visit her so I could look at them. I was pretty young when I decided that someday I would have a lamp in every window of my home if I had to make them myself."

Smith's house, the oldest in Mentone, posed no problem for his plans. Built nearly a century ago, the house is said to have nine gables. In reality, these are a series of sharply pointed dormers, one for each window on the second floor. Windows on the lower floor are large, providing perfect settings for the lamps. Ray Smith builds in his workshop back of his home, because, true to his word, he makes all the lamps himself.

Now retired, Smith spent nearly 40 years crisscrossing the country for an area church furniture firm. It was during the course of these travels, especially in the glass-producing regions of West Virginia and southern Ohio, that he began buying the art glass, crystal and etched brass that have become synonymous

with his work. "Brand new collectors' items" might be a better way of describing the lamps because some of them, perhaps assembled only yesterday, have glass shades or fonts that are 35 to 40 years old.

"You can't buy lamps like these in stores," Smith says with a bit of pride touched with sadness as he attaches prisms of aurora borealis to a lamp made of scarce Burmese. "Good glass will soon become a thing of the past. The art of glassmaking is dying out. Most glass companies no longer can afford to use the gold necessary to get good red and green glass. The trend is to stained glass that is thinner, the colors less perfect than the old glass."

SOME OF SMITH'S lamps are truly collectors' items in that they have had special touches added by other artisans. For instance, more than 60 of his lamps have been etched or cut by Jackson T. Dobbins of Warsaw Cut Glass Co. Of these, a Bristol glass creation is believed to be the only freehand cut Bristol in the country. Others, assembled of plainer glass, are decorated with Currier and Ives' four seasons, transferred from prints by craftsmen according to Smith's specifications.

Cut glass, crystal or aurora borealis prisms are standard features on most of Smith's lamps, but he fears the supply of these, too, is running out. "You can't even buy decent prisms anymore," he

THE COVER

Bristol glass lamp is among Ray Smith's many one-of-a-kind lamps. The glass was cut for him by Warsaw Cut Glass Co.

says. "Not like these. Everyone is switching to plastic, and it's a shame. Everything is mass-produced nowadays."

But mass production is not for Ray Smith, and he continues assembling lamps "the way I want them made" with glass "the way they used to make it."

He sells some of the lamps, but most of them crowd his home and shop. The windows of the house were filled years ago, but he and his wife Iris enjoy rotating lamps from window to window and from room to room, often placing them on tables loaded with glass collectibles purchased on their travels.

"Good glass, whether it is a lamp or a cruet or a vase, is always a good investment" Smith says. "Even the glass you buy today is a good investment if you buy pieces from old-line companies that haven't compromised their quality. There aren't many of these left and in a few years they may all be gone, but the value of their glass should continue to increase."

Is his a hobby or a preservation of a dying art form? "I don't know," he says. "All I know is that it is certainly rewarding to use good glass and see it become something that is both utilitarian and decorative, something that will be a thing of beauty forever."

CRANBERRY 1,000 EYE lamp is made of glass pulled during manufacture so each light spot appears to have 1,000 eyes

A lamp for every window

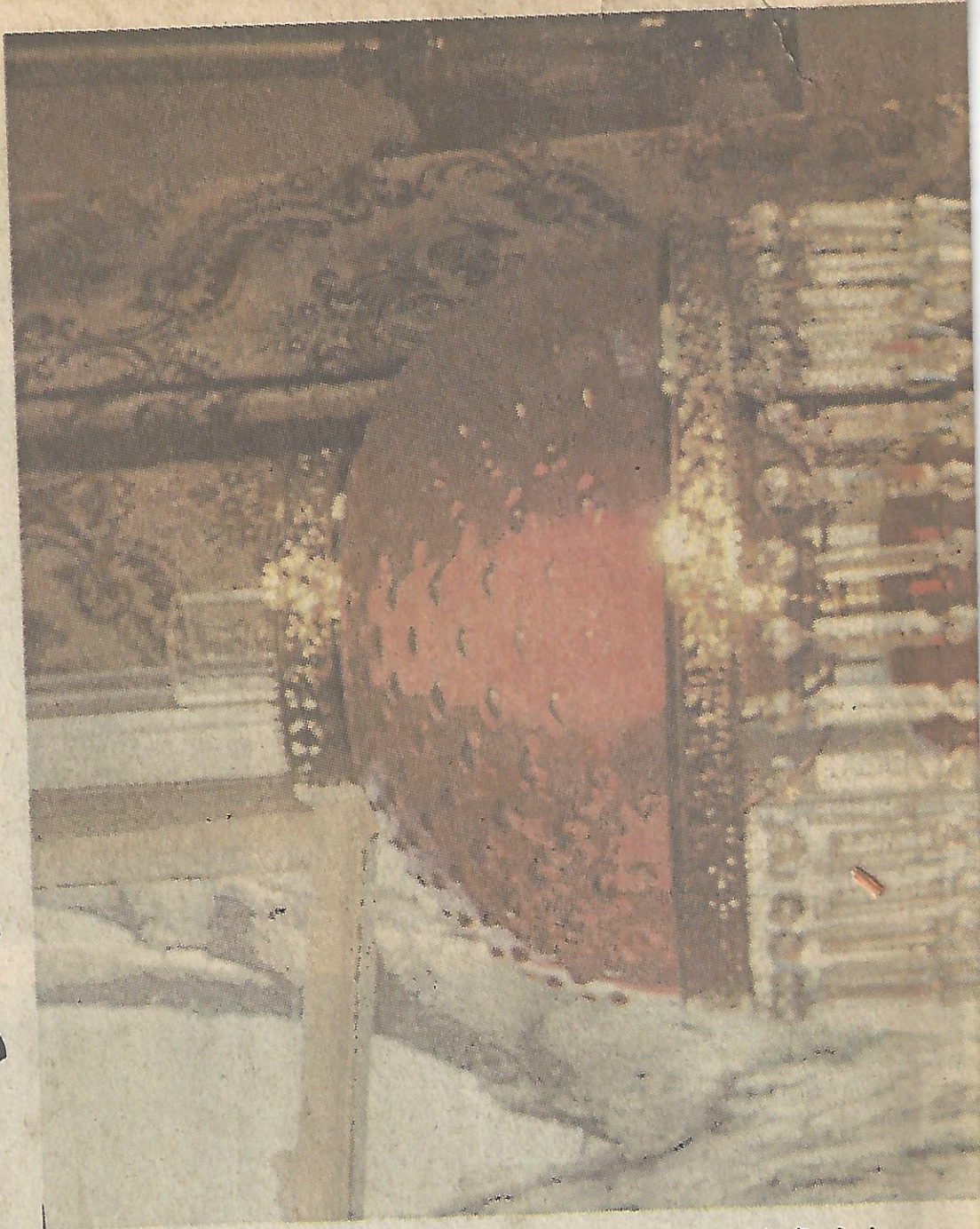
AT LEFT, lamps of every description crowd Ray Smith's workshop. Floral lamp is Burmese; the other a Tiffany type. Both have aurora borealis prisms.

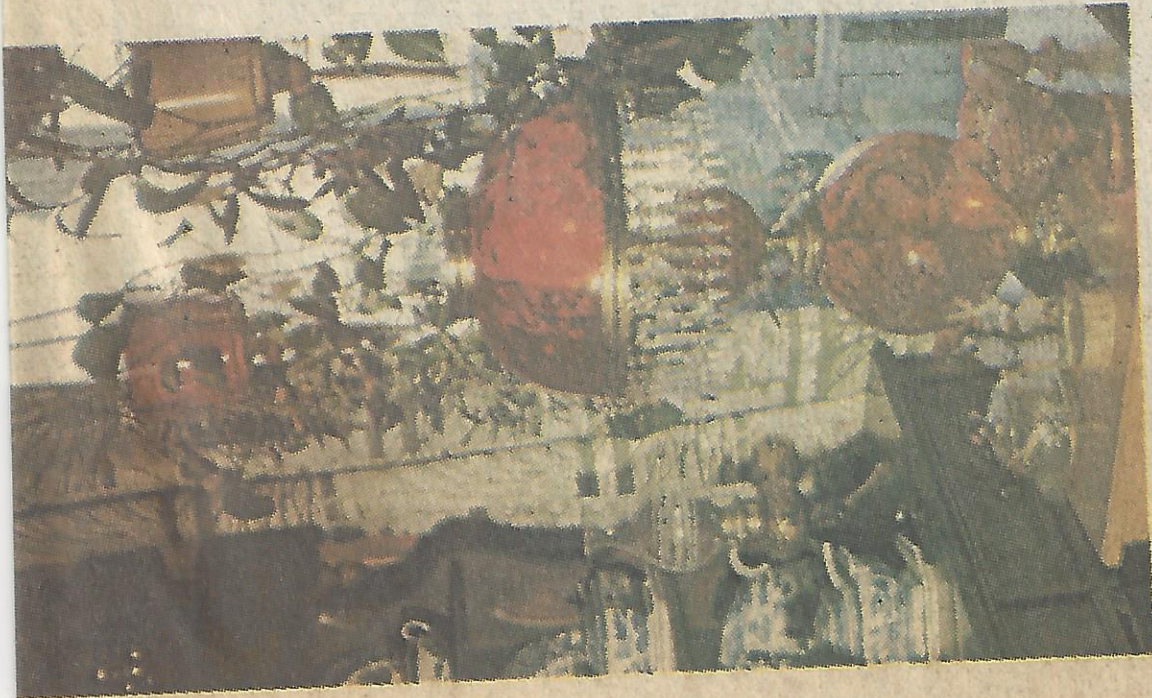


photographs
by the author



AT RIGHT, ruby hobnail lamp is one of Ray Smith's ingenious creations. Most red and green glass currently made is poorer quality than that made years ago, Smith says.





RUBY THUMB-PRINT lamp signed and numbered by the Warsaw Cut Glass Co. is often called pumpkin seed ruby, according to Ray Smith.

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THIRTEEN