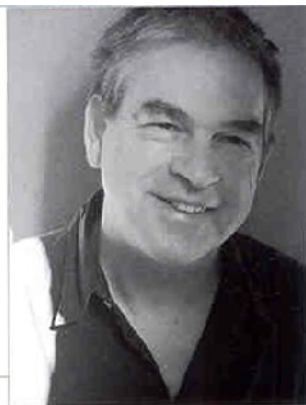




# Udo Zembok



*'It is important to take into account the function of the space and the needs and sensitivities of the client.'*

My original training, in Germany, was as a painter, working mainly in watercolour. However, after moving to France, the discovery of medieval glass, particularly the windows of Chartres Cathedral, inspired me to exchange the pigment colours of paint for the transparent colours of glass, which are close to those of watercolour, and of course open to light. My first designs for coloured windows – layered, fused glass panels for a church in Amsterdam – were carried out in 1976.

It is important to take into account the style of the architecture and the lighting, as well as the function of the space and the needs and sensitivities of the client or users of the building. Usually clients do not have a clear idea of what they want, so the first stage in the design process – finding a way of realising a client's unformulated ideas – is crucial; the initial designs may change radically during discussions with the client. This way of working ensures that every commission is in sympathy with my sensitivity, with the architecture and with the client's own interests. I then choose a glass technique which corresponds best to the design idea, a working method that enables an artist to develop aesthetically and push forward technical boundaries.



Udo Zembok, ING Bank  
Headquarters, Amsterdam, 1987

The ING Bank Headquarters in Amsterdam was an early and important large commission. The form the architecture takes has a profound effect on behaviour and feelings; the design of this building is an outstanding example of organic architecture. Organic spaces with walls at a variety of



Udo Zembok, ING Bank Headquarters,  
Amsterdam, 1987

angles, rather than rectangular spaces and vertical walls, cause the occupants to feel more energised and to work more imaginatively. The spacious light wells at the centre of the ten separate towers maximise the natural daylight. Coloured glass is used in the windows, with large pieces of hand-blown glass laminated onto float glass, and floating shapes which create different moods in different areas, echoing the ethos of the building. Stained glass is redefined, not as a window but as a wall of coloured light; the coloured reflections on the pale stone floor bring this coloured light further into the building by following the sun movement.

My ideas have since developed into thinking more about the material of glass itself. Trapping colour in light, allowing colour to float in a clear space in a similar way to the colour in Rothko's paintings, led me to experiment with colour on float glass. Coloured metal oxides and enamels are sprayed then fired onto sheets of float glass; several sheets of glass can then be fused together. The result is a panel with colour floating inside clear glass, colour floating in an optical space. This technique was used to good effect for 19 windows at the Camaldules Chapel at Chambles, France, in 1990.

Mount Camphill School, at Wadhurst, East Sussex in the UK, is a community college for young people with learning difficulties based on Rudolf Steiner pedagogies. The one-time monastery chapel where my windows are situated is now a hall used for various cultural and social events as well as religious services. Each of the five windows consists of three sheets of glass enamelled and fused in pale colours in an abstract design. The textural reliefs, swirling patterns evocative of ancient megalithic settings, were formed by texturing plaster on the base of the kiln. These soft abstract designs are

calm and contemporary, and harmonise sympathetically with the 19th-century stonework of the chapel. In the evening, when the light levels are low outside, the windows glow with a subtle, greenish tinge. The windows also have a calming effect on the students, some of whom suffer from hyperactivity when they first arrive at the boarding school.



*Above: Udo Zembok, Camaldules Chapel, Chambles, France, 1990*

*Right: Udo Zembok, Mount Camphill School, Wadhurst, East Sussex, UK, 1993*

