

# Stunning Second Acts



**BY CINDY SCHWEICH HANDLER**

Photos by Anne-Marie Caruso

**B**efore they became fine artists, these creative individuals had successful careers in other fields. Now members of the non-profit Studio Montclair, they produce images and artworks that are regularly featured at the Academy Square building downtown, often using skills honed in their past professions. ■



## OUT-OF-THE-BOX THINKING

LISA WESTHEIMER

Because her brother was a painter and architect, Lisa Westheimer knew she'd have to ultimately find work in another field. "My parents sold their house to send me to college, so it was tacitly understood that there's a one-artist-maximum in our household," she says. While working her way through New York University as a receptionist in an architectural office, she learned about building code inspections. She launched her own company, The Manhattan Expedition, Inc., in 1983, and served as a New York City building code and zoning consultant specializing in loft conversions for artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, Jeff Koons and April Gornik. A project at Spring Street and West Broadway led to a personal conversion, from single to married status: future husband Bill Westheimer was president of the coop at that location.

It was he who encouraged Westheimer to create pottery to de-stress from her job. She learned different methods of firing pottery, including the use of propane-fueled raku tanks, from esteemed professor Mikhail Zakin, and earned a Masters in Studio Art studying with local artist Bill McCreath at Montclair State University. Five years ago, she sold her business to devote herself to producing ceramics, sculpture and glasswork.

"My former job was primarily about fire safety, and now I work with 2000-degree heat," she says with a laugh. "I was also accustomed to thinking outside the box, trying to get the city to use unusual spaces like the Nomadic Museum, which was made of shipping containers and recycled materials." Among other projects, the West Orange resident now creates glass sculptures from reclaimed glass using fire safety technology so they don't shatter. "The fire and the chemicals in the glazes determine the outcomes, and I have a high failure rate," she says. "But the less I try to control things, the happier I am with the results." ➤

