Raspberry Delight by Rich Dillon.

The pendant shown is a fine silver replica of real raspberry leaves with a dark red piece of dichroic art glass representing the king raspberry. The leaves are finished with a brushed silver finish to maintain the look and feel of the natural leaf. It was created using natural raspberry leaves because of the highly textured surface that can be shown using PMC+ paste. High-quality leaves are chosen that have no damage and a good shape. It is easier to separate the leaves and paint them individually rather than as a group. The leaves are painted with PMC+ paste a minimum of 12 times or roughly 1 mm thick. Make sure to let each coat dry. The leaves with the PMC+ paste on them are then fired for 10 minutes at 1650° F. Once the leaves have cooled, they can be reassembled together with the rest of the components. Fashion a bail out of a small piece of fine silver wire with a "tail" about half-an-inch long for connecting to the leaf. Place the center leaf face down on your work surface. Use PMC+ paste and paint down the center of the back of the leaf. Place the bail wire down the back of the leaf and place the clay over the wire with the extra clay sticking out the bottom of the leaf. This paste acts as the glue between the silver leaf, the wire and the clay placed over top. Carefully flatten out the clay being sure not to dislodge the bail or break the leaf. Flip the leaf over and take the remainder of the clay sticking out and ball it up at the base of the main leaf. Insert the two side leaves into this small ball of clay making sure that you painted that part of side leaves with paste that will be stuck into the clay. (Caution: Do not use too much paste or you will lose the detail on the leaves.) Position the three leaves together and place a small circle of PMC+ syringe where the dichroic piece is to be placed on the leaves. The inside of the circle should be slightly smaller than the diameter of the dichroic piece. Carefully drop the dichroic piece onto the syringe material and press down gently so that the syringe material comes up the side of the glass. When the glass melts, this acts like a bowl to hold the glass in place. Using a small tool, press and shape the syringe material around the glass as desired for a pattern. Fire the piece again for 10 minutes at 1650° F and let cool slowly because the glass must anneal or it will crack or shatter. To do this, once the firing is done, cool the kiln to about 1350° F by opening the kiln door. Close the door and let the kiln cool down lower than 500° F before reopening the door. For very small pieces of glass and silver, the piece can air cool the rest of the way with the door open. The piece is now ready for finishing. There are several choices: leave it in its white crystalline form, polish it, patina it or use a combination. Kiln(S): Evenheat Rapid Fire 6 or Hotbox.

Richard Dillon - Nature's Creations, Ltd. - www.dichroic.biz

Rich Dillon is a rock hound at heart and has been collecting and mining semi-precious and precious rocks for over 20 years throughout the West. He's even mined for opals in Australia. Dillon is a self-taught lapidary and has been making custom jewelry for more than 10 years in silver and gold. He learned many of his metalsmithing skills at William Holland School of Lapidary Arts in Young Harris, Georgia.

Three years ago, while taking an advanced silver class, his wife took a glass fusing class. They both fell in love with the variations and brightness of color obtained with dichroic glass. Captivated by the beauty and color aspects of dichroic, he has used the light-reflecting and filtering capabilities to fuse unique pieces of glass that are used in his jewelry.

While in Georgia, Dillon heard about a certification class for PMC available in his area. He thought it was an excellent opportunity to learn how to combine this material with his silver fabrication skills and glass to create three-dimensional pieces that would normally have to be cast.

After taking the level 1 certification with PMC Connection, he took a local class that used ACS to gain some additional experience and learn other techniques. Early this year, he took the level 2 certification class with PMC Connection.

Says Dillon, "While I use both brands, I see very little difference in what you can do between the two brands of silver clay. My preference is PMC+, even though PMC3 fires at a lower temperature. Since PMC+ comes in four types — clay, paste, sheet and syringe — the combinations for creating three-dimensional pieces become much easier. The versatility of the silver allowed me to shape, manipulate and fire in a kiln in a relatively short time frame. If the same piece had to be created in wax and cast, that would involve a lot more time and effort. By using the silver clay I can make components that can be soldered immediately into my fabricated pieces."

His company's name is Nature's Creations, and Dillon can now take items out of nature, — leaves, for example — coat them with the PMC paste form and fire them to get a replica of the original in silver. One can also create a mold to use that favorite object (twig, sea horse or star fish) over and over. Once the mold is made, all one has to do is place the silver clay in it, let dry, remove from the mold and fire the dried piece. The fact that you can fuse glass in the same firing as part of the natural piece allows a unique presentation of form and color.

Dillon worked for major corporations in computers and computer networking from 1975 until 2002, when he dropped out of the corporate world to pursue his own business in rocks, jewelry and glass. Nature's Creations, Ltd, a business he created with wife Linda, was incorporated in 1993. Soon they will be opening a shop that will have semi-precious rocks, dichroic glass, fusible glass, Moretti rods and sheet glass, tools and supplies. They currently supply dichroic cabochons and fused dichroic beads to designers.

Dillon is level 2 certified with PMC Connection. He is teaching glass fusing for jewelry at The Fine Line Creative Arts Center in St. Charles, Illinois, and will be teaching glass fusing and PMC at the Galena Art Center in western Illinois this summer.

He says, "While many people taking the PMC classes have never worked with any silver, it is extremely versatile for those who have. It seems that the focus of the certification classes are toward these non-silver people, and the projects attempted show that many types of jewelry can be made with the silver clay. As a silversmith, I believe that silver clay is an extremely wonderful addition to my tool kit. I use it on the more creative pieces. As a beader, I love making one-of-a-kind hollow silver beads to go with fused dichroic beads."