

# LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

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## *Orange Mirror and Glass* etches excellence in all they do

by Ralph Fuller



At *Orange Mirror and Glass* (Orange Mirror), customer orders can range from installing outsized storefront windows in hefty buildings to replacing small, broken windowpanes in cozy bungalows. At Orange Mirror, these jobs are all important to the customer and therefore important to the company.

“We believe there’s no such thing as a small job,” says Manager Angel Tabares, who signed on as one of Orange Mirror’s first employees soon after its establishment in 1985. “Ali Darugar, our Founder, had a saying: ‘It takes months to get a customer and seconds to lose one.’ So

giving every customer our best every time is ingrained in us.”

Based in Orange, California, Orange Mirror has grown from a mom-and-pop business into a company of 21 skilled glaziers whose expertise covers windows great and small, patio doors, mirrored wardrobe doors, storefront and curtain wall systems and glass shelves, display cases, railings, shower doors and wine cellar doors.

Understandably in high demand during this summer of COVID-19 pandemic: protective glass COVID screens for office spaces and checkout lines (tempered glass replacing



For tenant improvements to the Regal Cinemas complex in Irvine, CA, Orange Mirror and Glass installed a storefront curtain wall system with insulated glass and all-glass doors.

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the acrylic screens they initially supplied until high demand put acrylic in short supply).

Unexpectedly in demand: mirrored walls in garages and spare rooms as gym-deprived fitness buffs create reflective workout rooms at home, just like at the health club.

“Whatever the job, we do it all,” says Fareeda Zakir, who took over as Co-Owner with her mother, Nafisa Darugar, following Ali’s death from aggressive kidney cancer in April. “We have machines that cut, bevel and polish glass, and staff who are truly experts in their fields.



Ali Darugar founded Orange Mirror and Glass in the 1980s and served as its President and CEO until his passing earlier this year.



**Pictured (from left): Orange Mirror and Glass Estimators/Project Managers David Voltaire and Ramil Sanguyu and Managers Mike Gonzalez and Angel Tabares.**

“Many of them have been with us for decades, so they know their craft inside and out. We’re proud that we can do the full range of custom fabricating for any project on-site, right in our workshop.”

## FRAMES, NEW DIRECTIONS AND MACHINES THAT BEVEL

Ali and Nafisa Darugar came to the United States from their native Kenya in 1984. “My father always wanted to come to the U.S. for a better life,” Fareeda says. “He chose Southern California because the climate was the most like Kenya’s.”

She adds, “My mother’s family worked in the glass business in Kenya, and my father came from a family of entrepreneurs.” Fareeda, born in Kenya, was just 4 months old when the family arrived. Today, she works in the same office where she once napped as a toddler.

Initially, the business operated as “Fareeda’s Frame Mart and African Gallery,” whose wares included picture and mirror frames and African handbags, statuettes and other artwork from Kenya. Some five years later, the frame and art business had disappeared as the company evolved into “Orange Mirror and Screen”

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Angel Tabares, Manager, Orange Mirror and Glass

(the screen part was mesh window screens) and then into “Orange Mirror and Glass.” Ali was the operational face of the business; Nafisa worked behind the scenes. Today, she still serves as the company’s bookkeeper.

“I joined the company a few months after it was started,” Angel notes. “I was young, and Ali trained me. We were the installers. And we were all like family. I used to push Fareeda around in her stroller.” As the glass business grew, the company expanded its service offerings. “We had a wholesale side for a while, providing glass to other glass shops, framers and furniture makers. We still sell to framers and to custom cabinet and furniture makers.”

Ali had a knack for anticipating future business trends, Angel says. Several years after starting the business, he imported glass polishing and beveling machines from Italy. The new equipment gave Orange Mirror an



For an addition to the Coyote Entertainment Center at Tachi Palace Casino Resort in Lemoore, CA, Orange Mirror and Glass installed an expansive Vistawall curtain wall and storefront system.



In the Orange Mirror and Glass workshop, Glazier Francisco Ortiz (left) and Glazier/Workshop Manager Noe Tapia (center) work with Estimator/Project Manager Ramil Sanguyu to start fabrication of a custom mirror.

edge over the competition, but the large devices required more space, prompting the company to move to its current location on North Lime Street.

“I worked on the machines as an operator, learned them all, then moved into the office and showroom,” he says. “We still have those same machines and they still work well.”

## DOUBLE-HUNG WINDOWS, STOREFRONT SYSTEMS, GLASS RAILINGS

Today, Orange Mirror serves customers throughout Southern California, including Orange, Los Angeles, San Bernardino and San Diego counties. Although the company divides the business between residential and commercial divisions, the workshop and field staff tackle both types of jobs.

Orange Mirror, says Manager Mike Gonzalez, does nearly anything that involves glass or mirrors, from windows to sliding doors, shelves and shower doors. On the residential side, services include installing windows in new houses, replacing old windows in old houses and replacing broken windowpanes. About 70% of its work involves renovations or tenant improvements, while 30% is in new construction. For both homes and businesses, team members are available 24/7 to board up broken windows in emergencies.

They don’t compete with window companies, Mike notes. Instead, Orange Mirror is a dealer for a half-dozen manufacturers. They’ll do the installations, removing old windows with aluminum frames and replacing them with new vinyl-framed versions. They may come either fully assembled or “knocked down,” in which case they’re assembled at Orange Mirror. Configurations can include double- or single-hung, horizontal sliding, and energy-efficient dual-paned and low-emissivity.



At the four-story Extra Space Storage facility in North Hollywood, CA, Orange Mirror and Glass installed a Vistawall Series 3000 center glazed storefront system with 1-inch-thick clear tempered insulated glass.

Expanding the company's volume of commercial projects is a significant business goal, but residential work remains just as important, Fareeda says. "Personally, I love working with residential customers," she says. "I love talking with people, helping them with their plans and ideas. It's my favorite part of the job."

She gives particular credit to Ramil Sanguyu and David Voltaire, the company's lead commercial Estimators and Project Managers, for the growth in commercial work.

Commercial projects, of course, come on a larger scale and involve longer timeframes than residential jobs, which may take two to three days if they involve measuring and fabricating, Ramil notes. But typical commercial jobs like storefront windows, curtain walls (window systems for mid- to high-rise buildings) or office buildings with multiple windows, are likely to take months. For one thing, there's the time involved in analyzing jobs and negotiating bids, he says.

Once a project has a start date, the process can involve fabricating frames and other material in the workshop, installing the frames and measuring them for specific glass dimensions, ordering and fitting the glass and, finally, installation.

A major commercial job can include a significant amount of interior glass shelves, mirrors and COVID shields, as well as glass railings, both interior and exterior. Rather than simply bannisters atop a series of posts, glass railings consist of vertical glass panels that form see-through sides

for staircases, balconies and decks. It's a popular feature for both commercial and residential customers.

## A SCHOOL, A FAMILY AND THE NEW ROOSTER

Although Mike and Angel have similar roles, Mike quickly asserts that Angel is "The Manager." Fareeda says that he and Angel have the same position, but Mike doesn't like to admit it.

"Angel has been here a long time," Mike says. "I'm just the 'New Rooster.'" In fact, the New Rooster has been part of Orange Mirror for 22 years. His father worked at the company before him, and after he graduated from high school, he called Ali up and asked for a job.

"Ali started me out on the polishing machine," he says. "Over time I learned the ins and outs of all the machines—cutting, beveling, all of them. From there, I worked in other areas, eventually moving to the showroom and office.

"Ali taught me everything I know. For me, this business has been like a school and a family."

That's a trend at Orange Mirror and one reason the company has flourished. "Turnover is low," Fareeda says. "We have people on staff who have been here for decades. Dad treated everyone like family, and they've all been a huge part of the business. I know Dad was so proud of them."

Ali's passing was relatively sudden, and members of the Orange Mirror family still have difficulty talking about it. "Ali was my buddy, my friend," Angel says. "He was like my dad. He was farsighted, a very good person."

"My father lived the American dream," Fareeda adds. "He built this incredible business from scratch, starting with only a few dollars to his name. He used to say that real wealth is measured by how many people are better off because you lived, and he spent his life helping other people build their lives.

"It's our privilege to carry his values and his legacy forward, and we intend to do just that." 🐓

*Freelance writer Ralph Fuller has more than 30 years' experience explaining topics as diverse as rare tropical diseases, alternative fuels, highway safety technologies and the fishes and critters on coral reefs.*