

Playing With Fire

Glass blowing remains an art unchanged for centuries

BY KRISTI RITTER • PHOTOS BY PAUL LITMAN

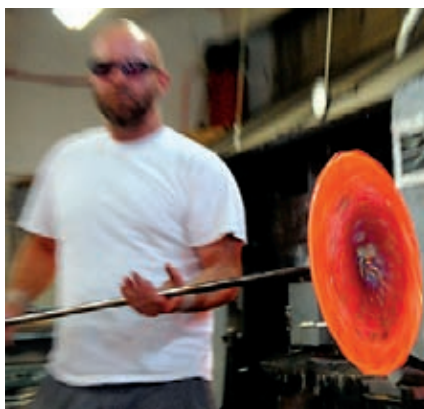
For Angelo Ambrosia, the most fascinating part of glass blowing is the intense element of the fire to create instantaneous art. With everything moving so fast and working with hot molten glass reaching 2,200 degrees, there is no room for error in creating these pieces of art. It's all right now and there is no opportunity to pause and think.

Ambrosia has been a glass blower for the past six years, specializing in the technique that involves inflating the molten glass into a bubble with the aid of a blowpipe. But his experience in the fired arts goes back much further, when he started as a teenager doing wood fire pottery in Phoenix, Ariz. His passion carried him into his own career as a potter, first having his own shop on Lopez Island in Washington and then in Santa Fe, N.M.

By 2003, he took a class in glass blowing and was hired to do production work at a shop in Boulder. But with the shop's closure, Ambrosia embarked on his own adventure and opened his own glass blowing shop, Ambrosia Glass Arts, in 2004 in Longmont.

"Glass blowing was an easy art for me to pick up since I had been a potter," he says. "And working with the round art offered a lot of similarity, both offering the opportunity to work with my hands."

Ambrosia's goal was to get good enough to produce high end glasswork. Now, he offers his work at his own studio, but often displays his work at local galleries, including the Muse Gallery in Longmont, and maintains a high word-



Top: Glassworker Angelo Ambrosia reheats molten glass with a propane torch to keep it from cooling too fast. Middle: Ambrosia layers colored glass on the table for his next project. The glass is added by rolling the hot molten glass over the color crystals. Bottom: Using centrifugal force to shape the molten glass in to a bowl, Ambrosia spins the glass. Opposite page: Ambrosia shapes a piece of molten glass while blowing into it to expand its interior.

of-mouth recommendation garnering him an abundance of custom work. Ambrosia also offers instruction and classes at his shop for people wanting to learn the art of glass blowing.

Learning under Ambrosia's instruction, Dee Crouch has been doing glass blowing for about five years. While Crouch also learned some glass blowing technique in Seattle, he enjoys the serene setting at Ambrosia's shop where they can both really get into their pieces in a quiet environment. "It's such a focused art," he says. "And the timing is just in seconds."

Creating one-of-a-kind martini glasses has been the most recent passion for Crouch, who has about 56 at home and another 44 to make to achieve his goal. But before he moves onto another glass style, he hopes to take the martini glasses and make them into a chandelier.

With Crouch and Ambrosia working together as a team, some of the creations they make absolutely mystify those watching.

"Once people see how the glass comes together and how it's made, it makes them feel completely different about the art," Ambrosia says.

A lot of Ambrosia's inspiration comes from the 16th century Italian glass workers who were perfectionists in the art of blowing glass and creating beautiful pieces. "It's a very ancient art in which we still use the old tools they did centuries ago," he says.

Working with the glass allows Ambrosia to bring his visions to fruition as he molds and shapes the fluid glass that drips like honey when





Angelo Ambrosia, with the assistance of Dee Crouch, shapes the opening of an art piece before going on to the next step.

it's not in movement, always being aware to keep it above the 1,000 degree mark to avoid cracking. "There is no pausing. There's always a demand to keep going," he explains. "But when you really look at a piece and notice its special features, you know it's done right."

While learning how to blow glass takes some dexterity, this handmade art is definitely a form of therapy for some. Ambrosia says some people come in to learn just to escape their daily lives. And if they break something, it's almost as if they are excited about the feeling it gives them. Other artists come to the shop to get inspired, work with the glass and practice their skills.

"We're a very willing community to help each other out," he says. "It's such a team sport."



Angelo Ambrosia's art on display at his studio and shop in Longmont.



Check out Angelo Ambrosia's Art Show

Currently on display at the Muse Gallery in Longmont through Dec. 24. "Radiant Reflections" is Ambrosia's hand-blown glass sculptures created from the inspiration of Suzanne Frazier's cloud paintings. And don't miss the opportunity to see Ambrosia in action. He's happy to offer demonstrations and classes. Check out his website at www.ambrosiaglassart.com for more details.