

In Fort Greene, Glassblower Andrew Hughes See His Craft Clearly

By Kelly Velocci | Photographs by Doug Young



Madison Avenue flagship. “His aesthetic is clean and simple,” Amy Mellen, the brand’s creative director, says of Hughes’s oeuvre.

Hughes begins each piece by warming the blowpipe to ensure the molten glass will stick. The tip of the rod is then inserted into the bottom of one of UrbanGlass’s furnaces, where Hughes rotates it in a circular motion to collect the liquid glass, a process known as “gathering.” He then moves to a bench and begins shaping the glass by spinning it over the bench’s railing and using a variety of tools including a wet, rounded fruitwood paddle, damp newspaper, and large tweezer-like instruments known as jacks. After the piece begins to take shape, Hughes blows into the other end of the pipe to create the first bubble so that the piece can expand. “You never blow too hard,” he explains. “You want the glass to do the work.”



NESTLED ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF THE HULKING URBANGLASS BUILDING IN FORT GREENE, BROOKLYN, IS A ROW OF FIERY FURNACES WHERE CRUCIBLES BUBBLE WITH LIQUID GLASS.

Craftsman Andrew Hughes, his clothes worn and his arms covered in old gym socks to protect him from the scorching heat, holds a long, hollow steel blowpipe, dips the tool into the molten liquid, and begins his workday. “Glass is a rewarding material,” he says. “But it’s also incredibly frustrating. You need an intimate relationship with it in order not to just walk away.”

A native of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Hughes became captivated by glassblowing while attending a summer arts camp as a teenager, and later studied the craft at Rhode Island School of Design. Now, a decade into his career, he makes tabletop items and furniture, including designs for Calvin Klein Home’s Artisan Collection, pieces of which are sold exclusively at the

Next, Hughes brings the piece to a warmer that’s used to reheat the glass between gathers. (Return trips to the furnace to gather more molten glass are always necessary, even for smaller pieces.) Once enough glass has been collected, Hughes and an assistant will begin the delicate process of removing it from the blowpipe and attaching it to another rod called a punty. The piece is then opened and pulled into shape with the jacks, cut from the punty, and put into an annealer to cool. The finishing touches, such as grinding and polishing, are done in a workspace known as the cold shop.

“Glass takes on so many different forms,” says Hughes. “We interact with the world so often through it, whether it’s part of our phone or the window in our bedroom. Once I found it, I knew I had to pursue it.”

A version of this article appeared in the September 2014 issue of New York Cottages & Gardens with the headline: The Glass Whisperer.



Pieces from the Artisan Collection, including Pinnacle and Bud vases, available at Calvin Klein Home.

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