

A Fuser's Approach to Glassblowing

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Ever since I read the heart of glass is found working in hot glass, I've wanted to do it. Understanding the dedication it demands, I decided to postpone this desire until my youngest daughter turned eighteen (to focus on being a good father). Then it happened.

The girls grew up and there was my dream. Warm glass had become my passion, and I'd heard about the roll-up technique. After taking a Corning week-long roll-up workshop in 2006, I really got into preparing wonderful thick fused pickups, ready to go. Before long I had a dozen of them, but still hadn't found a way to the hot shop. Friends got tired of me talking about it and said, "Just do it already!" I wanted to, but where do you start? What's worse, I didn't have a lot of money to spend, let alone all this new equipment needed to blow glass.

I remembered an old lesson: Don't be afraid to ask, and don't be disappointed if the answer is 'no'. Using male intuition, I called a friendly hot shop and asked to work part-time doing chores in return for a gaffer blowing out a few of my nicer pieces. It worked and I was able to be the 'helper' gaining as much as you can by watching real close. Hey, it looks so easy (but we all know better than that). My first solo attempt ended up with the piece on the floor! Then there's fussing with the seam of the roll-up...yikes! We wondered out loud if a cylinder could be made in the kiln. That notion changed my life.

I began the cylinder quest. After three weeks, I had a prototype. Now, after four years of research and development, I'm able to achieve predictable results obtaining wonderful thick-walled kiln formed cylinders designed to pick up warm (from the kiln) on a collared blowpipe and brought to the glory hole then blown into a vessel. I'm finally blowing glass in my fusing studio! No need for a crucible furnace, just a kiln and a glory hole. The 'fix it' experience gained from working at the hot shop enabled me to make or alter equipment at a price and pace I could afford. It's working out, and I'm doing it my way!