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# Get Blown Away

## Nicholson Blown Glass

BY LEEANN DICKSON



Take the beautiful country drive out to the Auburn studio and shop of Nicholson Blown Glass, and you will not be disappointed.

The lovely, quiet, quaint cottage conceals some real fun and beauty inside. Glass of all shapes, sizes and colors tantalize your eyes, while the heat from the numerous furnaces envelops the room and the scent of burning wet paper fills your nose. It is truly a one-of-a-kind experience where you can get a very intimate view of the wonder, art and action of glassblowing.

During their 31-year marriage and collaboration, Janet and Rick Nicholson have built a vibrant business and lovely family creating art. "Doing art has been my life," Rick says. Janet does not create the pieces; rather, she handles the business and design side of the glassblowing enterprise. "I do the color and design and Rick does the physical blowing," Janet says. "We make a great team."

Master glassblower Rick and his young assistant Matt Eaton perform a delicate and precise ballet handling the five-foot

stainless steel blowing tubes with white-hot molten glass on the tip. To work in front of the furnace with its searing heat of nearly 2,200 degrees, they shield themselves with a corrugated steel screen and sunglasses. Layers of colored glass and minerals are added to the blob of clear glass. It is then heated in the blasting hot oven and hand shaped with scraps of newspaper soaked in water. Although the stack of paper is dripping wet, it burns, steams and sizzles when wrapped around the soft, glowing mass. As Eaton spins the glass, Rick shapes the piece with scorched wooden paddles and other metal instruments that look downright primeval.

Glassblowing is defined as creating glass pieces by shaping the glass while in a viscid (thick) state with traditional hand and breath processes. The art has been around since the Phoenicians invented it in about 50 BC. "The only thing changed in modern glassblowing," Rick says, "is the fuel."

When you see the process in action you will be impressed. It truly embodies what playwright Wilson Mizner once said: "Art is science made clear." Rick and Matt team up to make many pieces a day. Depending on the size, form or purpose of the piece, it can take minutes to hours to create. Rick explains his love of glass, "It is a little bit of chemistry and physics," he says, "an interesting blend of technology and science."

Just around the corner, Christmas is a very special time for the Nicholson's. Their unique, beautifully crafted ornaments graced the Clinton White House holiday trees in 1995 and 1997, and the California governor's tree in 1999. Every year at their Holiday Open Studio event, there is an extraordinary and stunning selection of distinctive handcrafted bells, balls, icicles and more that are available.

***For more information and details about the Holiday Open Studio schedule, visit [nicholsonblownglass.com](http://nicholsonblownglass.com).***