

The birth of a spaceship

On a beautiful November day, the New England chapter had the pleasure of touring Josh Simpson's studio in Shelburne Falls, MA. That day, Josh was engaged in one of his more tedious tasks—that of producing the “spaceships” that orbit his glass planets.



Josh rattled a tin containing what appeared to be hard candies. These, however, were a bit harder than that. Pictured looking on are Joan Concannon, Sally Eyring, and Diane Lomas.



Josh demonstrated how he manipulates the canes, taking them from a warming kiln and heating them in a small glory hole.



Once the heated glass is glowing and shaped the way he wants, Josh snips the end off into a bucket. Voila! A spaceship is born, but not launched until a planet is made for it.



The building process actually started a year before. Large rods are imported from Italy and tested for compatibility with the soda glass used in Josh's work. A palette of compatible glasses is selected for the coming year's production.



The original rods are then fired together into large concentric cylinders of millefiori. These are drawn out into the smaller canes shown in the pictures, the patterns miniaturized as the glass is drawn across the studio barn, and often out into the yard next to it. No, it is not a problem for the glass to be drawn out the door on a cold day, as Josh pointed out, "What's another 30 degrees colder with 2000+ degree glass?"

The canes are also used for other elements in the work. Planetary features are shown in close-up below, in an exhibit poster. They show the level of detail that makes Josh's art so intriguing.



Planets are produced at several large furnaces worked by Josh and his highly skilled staff. They are then finished off in an

adjacent coldwork room. Here is an array of finished planets ready to roll.



Josh showed us projects underway, as well as his current production. Here, he cradles a vase in the New Mexico series.



Pictures for the article were taken by Denise Gilbert. The text was written by Nancy Burke. Attendees on the tour were Dave Zaltzberg, Denise Gilbert, Sally Eyring, Elaine Rudnick, Joan Concannon, Maureen Hobin, Nancy Burke, Ebba Andersen, Sandra Harris, Fred Altaffer, Diane Lomas, Diane Frechette, Amy Custis, and Patti Gibbons. Our thanks to Dave Zaltsberg for arranging the tour, and to Josh Simpson for inviting us into his studio and being such a wonderful host.