

Dear Readers,

I started making glass in 1973. Working Pyrex with a propane Bernzomatic torch was a pretty slow way to go, but it was what I had. Reject thermometers were my source of glass, capillary tubing that took me three hours to make a two-inch piece. During six months hitchhiking from Paris to Pakistan, I experimented with melting broken wine bottles into figures, and on my return to the States, using a National 3A torch with oxygen was a revelation. I could fly!

Early work included pipes—*Puff, the Magic Dragon*, whose eyes lit up every toke; a kangaroo whose pouch was the bowl and tail was the stem; and *The Frog*, a shot glass with a straw. I grew out of smoking and away from pipes but still did candelabra, goblets, and scent bottles—functional pieces all. My focus, however, became the figurative object and the narrative.

I mixed my own colors by hand with chemicals and had no user friendly kilns with digital controllers. Graphite was expensive, and the choices for torches were limited. The only torch readily available besides the National was the Carlisle, which I still use every day today.

Access to information didn't exist. There were no plethora of classes, books, videos, and demonstrations as there are today. The few flameworkers around took their secrets with them to the grave. My, how things have changed, and I credit most of that to pipes! I think we all know this, and it does not need repeating.

During Operation Pipe Dreams, the Justice Department's misguided effort to curb drug use, I realized that hundreds of pipe makers had been instantly put out of work, hence my book, *Making a Living Without Making Pipes*. Far from being against pipes, I aimed to inform our community of skilled glass artists that there were other outlets for their work, enabling them to continue. If I am against anything, it is bad design.

While some older glassmakers have been in a position to share some of what we knew, I'd like to say that the worm has turned. I've benefited greatly from, and am grateful to, the now-established younger group of makers.

Tim Tate showed me images of Micah Evans' decanters a few years ago. The clean shapes, the liquid flow patterns, and the clear glass showing off the color palette of the distilled spirits all reached out and grabbed me. As I've pursued this direction, the ideas have come a lot faster than the time I have available to make them, and the favorable response from collectors has made my continued development of this series possible. Will McElmurry has been a responsive lathe partner, and the work continues to grow by leaps and bounds.

I am grateful to have a forum within which I can revisit the human figure and a body of work that is challenging me aesthetically as well as technically. For someone my age who's been making glass this long, to be this excited about the possibilities in new work is astounding.

Milon Townsend
Contributing Editor

Milon Townsend,
Howling at the Moon decanter.
Photo by Sarah Sheafe.



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