Bridge TRADITIONS

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DRESSED IN TRADITION

Turning glass into magic Christmas decorations

hen visiting Ozdoba CZ, a family-run business in Dvůr Králové nad Labem, to write an article for Bridge magazine, we were curious not only about the history of the company and the **assortment**¹ of their Christmas decorations, but also the traditional process of making these shiny **gems**² for Christmas trees. And the more we saw, the more we wanted to know – and share with our readers.

The company still uses traditional techniques to create completely handmade decorations, where every piece is an original.



1 The birth of a Christmas decoration starts when a glassblower selects a glass tube³ that fits the size of the future ball. The glassblower⁴ heats the long tube over a gas burner⁵ and separates a short piece from it (called "odtažek" in Czech).



Then the glassblower blows a ball from that piece. They must be able to blow up balls of exactly the same size.

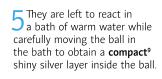




With the help of **clay moulds**⁶, glassblowers can create other shapes, not just balls, by keeping the soft heated glass in the mould while blowing it.



The transparent glass balls or other shapes of future Christmas decorations are then silvered-by pouring a chemical mixture containing silver nitrate⁷ and a reactant⁸ into them.



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Silver balls are then dipped¹⁰ into paint. While the silvering mixture is applied from the inside, the paint is applied from the outside.



8 Glitter¹⁴ and other materials can be put on the balls, too. For example, feathers are used for the tails of birds, cloth is used for the wings of dragonflies15 or for the fins 16 of fish.



When the coloured balls dry, they can be I further decorated. Painters use a piece of glass, or a bag similar to the one used for decorating cakes, except instead of icing11 the bag contains paint. Only one colour can by applied at a time – the ball always needs to dry before another colour can be added. So when, for example, working on a $pattern^{12}$ of five colours, the painter must handle¹³ the ball at least five times.



The whole time, the balls and other decorations remain on a glass **stem**17, which is actually the original tube they were blown from. People can hold them by that stem when handling them. Finally, the stem is cut away and the decorated balls are fitted with little metal caps and loops18.

Only now can they be packed and set out on their way to Christmas trees.

A MATTER OF TASTE

What are the most popular shapes in the Czech Republic? Snowmen and birds have serious competition from the pig! According to Martin Jukl of Ozdoba CZ,



it is probably because the pig is said to bring good luck. "I call the one with flowers a 'hippie pig'!" he smiled.



What do Brits like to hang on their trees? Obviously, they are patriotic as Ozdoba CZ makes balls with the design of the UK flag for them.

This big angel was made for the American market. "Once, Americans ordered balls with pictures of cow heads!" added Martin Jukl.





For a 'yummy' Christmas tree, there are decorations shaped like apples, pears, oranges, kiwi, and carrots.



GLASS EASTER

New designs and collections are prepared every year, but not only for Christmas. There are also special collections for Easter. With the help of clay moulds, glass balls are formed into the shape of eggs and are then painted just like real egg shells. There are other Easter decorations as well - rabbits and chickens to name some. They are equipped with tiny pieces of wood with ribbons instead of metal caps with loops.

VOCABULARY

- assortment [ə'səxtm(ə)nt] sortiment
- gem [dʒem] klenot
- glass tube skleněná trubice
- glassblower [glaːsˈbləʊə] foukač skla
- gas burner [gæs ˈbəːnə] plynový hořák
- clay mould [kler məʊld] keramická forma silver nitrate ['nartreɪt] – dusičnan stříbrný
- ⁸ reactant [rɪˈækt(ə)nt] reaktant, reagující látka¹³ to handle zacházet s
- compact [kəmˈpækt] celistvý
- ¹⁰ **to dip** ponořit
- ¹¹ icing [ˈaɪsɪŋ] poleva
- 12 pattern ['pæt(ə)n] – vzor
- ¹⁴ **glitter** třpytivý prach
- ¹⁵ **dragonfly** vážka
- ¹⁶ **fin** ploutev
- 17 **stem** stopka
- ¹⁸ **loop** [luːp] očko