

# DRESSED IN TRADITION

## Turning glass into magic Christmas decorations

When 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**<sup>1</sup> of their Christmas decorations, but also the **traditional** process of making these shiny **gems**<sup>2</sup> 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.



Waiting in a line to choose the right customer?



**1** The birth of a Christmas decoration starts when a glassblower selects a **glass tube**<sup>3</sup> that fits the size of the future ball. The **glassblower**<sup>4</sup> heats the long tube over a **gas burner**<sup>5</sup> and separates a short piece from it (called "odtažek" in Czech).



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



**4** The transparent glass balls or other shapes of future Christmas decorations are then silvered by pouring a chemical mixture containing **silver nitrate**<sup>7</sup> and a **reactant**<sup>8</sup> into them.



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



**5** They are left to react in a bath of warm water while carefully moving the ball in the bath to obtain a **compact**<sup>9</sup> shiny silver layer inside the ball.



**6** Silver balls are then **dipped**<sup>10</sup> into paint. While the silvering mixture is applied from the inside, the paint is applied from the outside.



**7** When the coloured balls dry, they can be further decorated. Painters use a piece of glass, or a bag similar to the one used for decorating cakes, except instead of **icing**<sup>11</sup> the bag contains paint. Only one colour can be applied at a time – the ball always needs to dry before another colour can be added. So when, for example, working on a **pattern**<sup>12</sup> of five colours, the painter must **handle**<sup>13</sup> the ball at least five times.



**8** **Glitter**<sup>14</sup> 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 **dragonflies**<sup>15</sup> or for the **fins**<sup>16</sup> of fish.



**9** The whole time, the balls and other decorations remain on a **glass stem**<sup>17</sup>, 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 **loops**<sup>18</sup>.

**10** 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

- <sup>1</sup> **assortment** [ə'sɔ:tm(ə)nt] – sortiment  
<sup>2</sup> **gem** [dʒem] – klenot  
<sup>3</sup> **glass tube** – skleněná trubice

- <sup>4</sup> **glassblower** [glɑ:s'bləʊə] – foukač skla  
<sup>5</sup> **gas burner** [gæs 'bɜ:nə] – plynový hořák  
<sup>6</sup> **clay mould** [kleɪ məʊld] – keramická forma  
<sup>7</sup> **silver nitrate** ['naɪtreɪt] – dusičnan stříbrný  
<sup>8</sup> **reactant** [rɪ'ækt(ə)nt] – reaktant, reagující látka  
<sup>9</sup> **compact** [kəm'pækt] – celistvý  
<sup>10</sup> **to dip** – ponořit  
<sup>11</sup> **icing** ['aɪsɪŋ] – poleva  
<sup>12</sup> **pattern** ['pæt(ə)n] – vzor  
<sup>13</sup> **to handle** – zacházet s

- <sup>14</sup> **glitter** – třpytivý prach  
<sup>15</sup> **dragonfly** – vážka  
<sup>16</sup> **fin** – ploutev  
<sup>17</sup> **stem** – stopka  
<sup>18</sup> **loop** [lu:p] – očko