



# Barefoot Glass

Written by: **Mary Reisinger**  
 Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**

**Brandon Proudfoot, owner of Barefoot Glass, is wrapping glass on a mandrel preparing to make a bead.**

Brandon Proudfoot tried beading, woodworking, metalworking, forging, and stained glass. Then he discovered “magic” in the form of lampworking, a craft that uses a torch to heat glass which can then be shaped with blowing, hand movements, and molds. For three years, he has honed and expanded his lampworking skills, making jewelry, ornaments, sculptures, and paperweights.

Traditional glassblowing involves lifting molten glass from a vat and shaping it, but in lampworking, rods of glass are heated to a “honey consistency” with an oxygen propane torch, which is cooler than an acetylene torch and can be observed safely from 7-10 feet away. Using this technique, Proudfoot produces beads and other glass objects.

He describes the process of making glass beads in several steps. Prepare a mandrel by coating it with “bead release”—a mixture of clay, sand, and graphite—and let it dry. Melt the glass rod and wrap it around the mandrel until it takes the desired shape. Decorate the bead, using “stringers,” thin strands of molten glass, to “paint” designs.

Proudfoot has developed the knack for making beads very similar in shape and appearance; nevertheless, they all have a distinctive hand-crafted look. On the beads and other glass objects that he makes, Proudfoot incorporates flowers, animals (hedgehogs, dragonflies, cats, fish, tigers, turtles), and other images. He enjoys using his imagination, producing designs as varied as tiny pumpkin earrings,

paperweights containing figures such as a hummingbird on a tree branch, and long glass icicles.

Proudfoot is also known for his sterling silver bracelets wrapped in beads, and his skeleton keys wrapped with glass beads. These are time-consuming to make, but “they turn out beautiful every time.”

Proudfoot calls his business Barefoot Glass, a name meant to convey the feeling of freedom and connection to the earth that a person feels when barefoot. Proudfoot finds lampworking to be magical, relaxing, and healing. For the past three years, it has helped him maintain eight years of sobriety in his recovery from a heroin addiction. In fact, his sponsor was the person who introduced him to glass work. Creating his glass pieces requires intense focus; he says it gives him a new kind of “high.”

Brandon hopes to develop Barefoot Glass to the point that he can create art full-time, earn a living wage through it, and travel widely. He would like to share his passion for lampworking with others, teaching skills and presenting this artwork as a therapy tool.

Proudfoot’s work has been displayed in several local shops and galleries, festivals, and craft shows. Currently, some of his pieces are available at the Tanning Salon in Loch Lynn. See photos and inquire about custom orders through Facebook (at Barefoot Glass).



The "soft glass" cane is heated in the flame.



Producing the gather after the cane has been heated.



Marvering the gather to a disk shape.



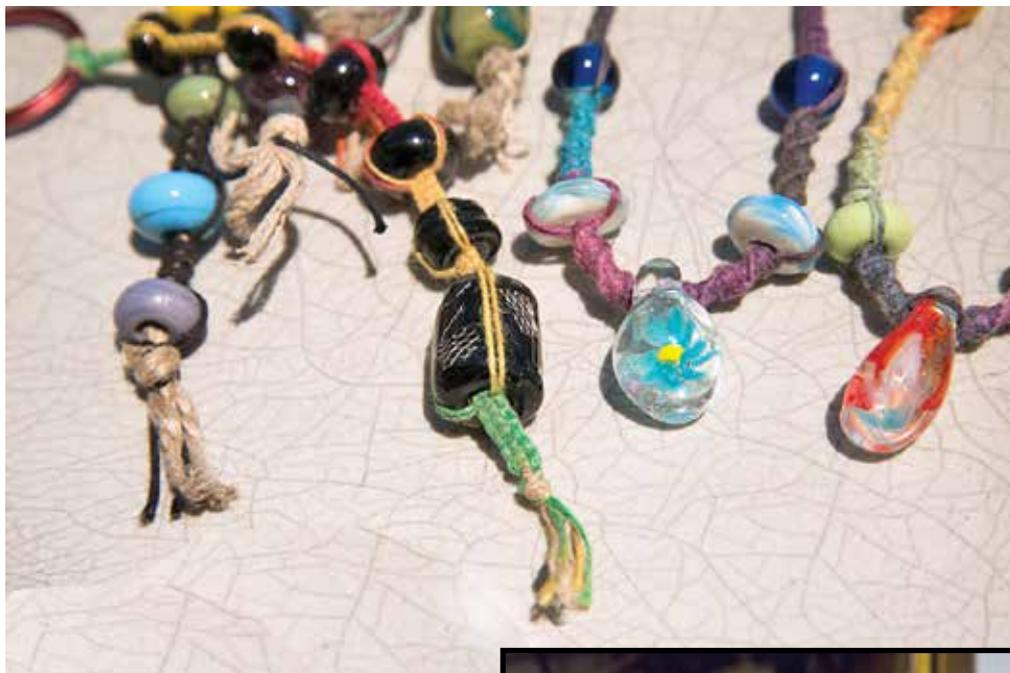
Color is placed on the disk—gravity pulls the color to the center of the bead.



The completed piece before placing in the kiln to cool overnight on low heat.

Photos at left show the gradual step by step progression to produce a finished bead. The "soft" glass rod is heated to form a gather. Forming happens as the glass is heated and rolled to encapsulate the colored pieces inside to form a flower. Once finished, the piece is put into a kiln with heat to slow cook over night (annealing). If it cools to fast it will crack.

Some of Brandon's completed artwork after it has been roped up as hemp jewelry.



Brandon with one of his glass bead necklaces. This one glows in the dark.

Brandon can be contacted by email at [barefootbeading@gmail.com](mailto:barefootbeading@gmail.com).



The completed piece after it has been annealed.

