

From molten glass

to Wilfried's world of art

During the ARTlounge exhibition last month, *Arabian Homes* catches the live performance by German Glass Blower **Wilfried Markus** who fascinates us with the intriguing formation of melted glass as it takes shape into delicate works of art.



Wilfried Markus:

I was born in Rheinfelden, Germany to a master glass blower, my father Willi Markus. Being born into a family where glass blowing is a tradition, it has given me the inspiration to dedicate my work and creations to one material- glass.

I have done my apprenticeship as a glassblower at the family-owned glass company in Rheinfelden. Furthermore, I attended a technical school for glass instruments in Wertheim, Germany. Then, from 1967 to 1983, I worked as a scientific glassblower and technical consultant, for which I hold my master's degree in. Since 1983, I opened my own glass studio in Rheinfelden as an independent lamp worker and took over and expanded my father's glass studio, which was founded in the 1950's.

Arabian Homes: *What drives your passion in glass work?*

Wilfried Markus: Inside my studio dreams are being created, melted by fire, blown by breath, and formed by hand. I celebrate the joy of just 'being' by entering into a playful dance with the glass. In dialogue with the material I bring objects into existence and visions to life.

AH: *What type of glass work do you create?*

WM: By using thin glass tubes in the flame of the burner, I create fragile bowls and cups, balls and vases, figures and objects. On the other hand, with the studio furnace, I create more solid objects.

In my studio, I'm also creating objects by fusing glass into a prepared, fire resistant form. For example faces and busts but also bowls and any detailed forms to obtain a special surface.

I also make art out of used glass bottles from time to time and incorporate my creative visions with environmental concern.

AH: *What does the glass blowing process involve?*

WM: In the flame of the burner, I make precious objects and fragile creatures by drawing the forms out of special fire resistant glass tubes and rods called borosilicate glass.

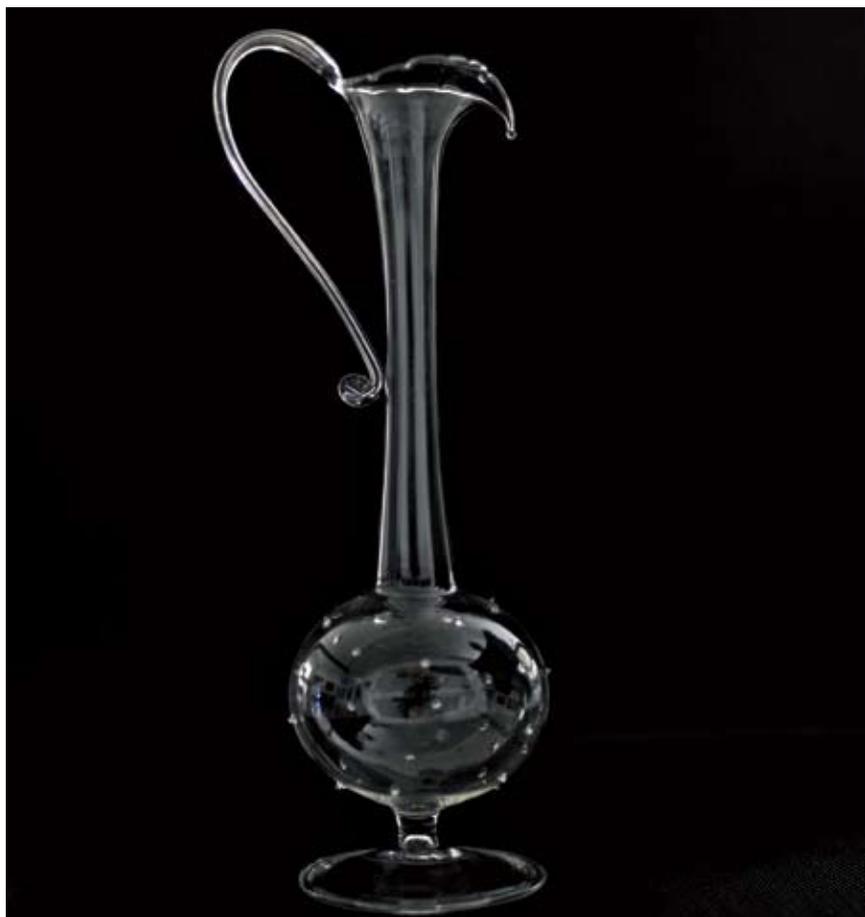
There are three types of furnaces involved in the glass blowing process- the first is the heat resistant furnace which holds the molten glass, the second is known as the "glory hole" which is used to reheat the glass at various intervals throughout the shaping process, and the third is the annealing oven where the final glass piece is left to slowly cool for several hours to a few days.

With the steel blow pipe, I reach into the middle of the furnace to gather the melted glass. I then roll the molten glass on a steel table to prepare the shape for the sculpting process. The fire which has been working on the red-glowing glass substance for 12 long hours does not allow for any impurity. And, throughout the process I will make frequent trips back to the "glory hole" to reheat the glass and maintain its temperature above 1000 F.

At this point, I add in the colored accents which melt right into the initial piece like flowing water; it's almost like gracefully painting with a brush. The color and patterns are added into the glass piece by rolling it around to pick up the colored glass and other accents. Then I make visits back to the glory hole to melt the additions more accurately into the glass. Following this, I give shape to the glass by sitting at a bench and working simultaneously with both my hands while keeping the piece in constant motion.



Glass camels Wilfried has created as a depiction of the local culture; **opposite:** Wilfried Markus blowing glass live in Bahrain.



Below/opposite: Wilfried blowing glass and shaping the glass accent (seen left) during his live performance in Bahrain.

The blowing process actually begins once I have my piece pre-sculpted. I take the end of the pipe and begin to blow to create a bubble in the piece. Depending on the shape will determine how many times the steps in the process are repeated, such as reheating, blowing, sculpting, etc.

Once I have created the desired shape, I transfer the piece to the annealing oven where the glass is gradually cooled for long hours until it reaches room temperature. This process keeps the glass from cooling too quickly and possible cracking or breaking.

AH: *What kind of instruments do you use?*

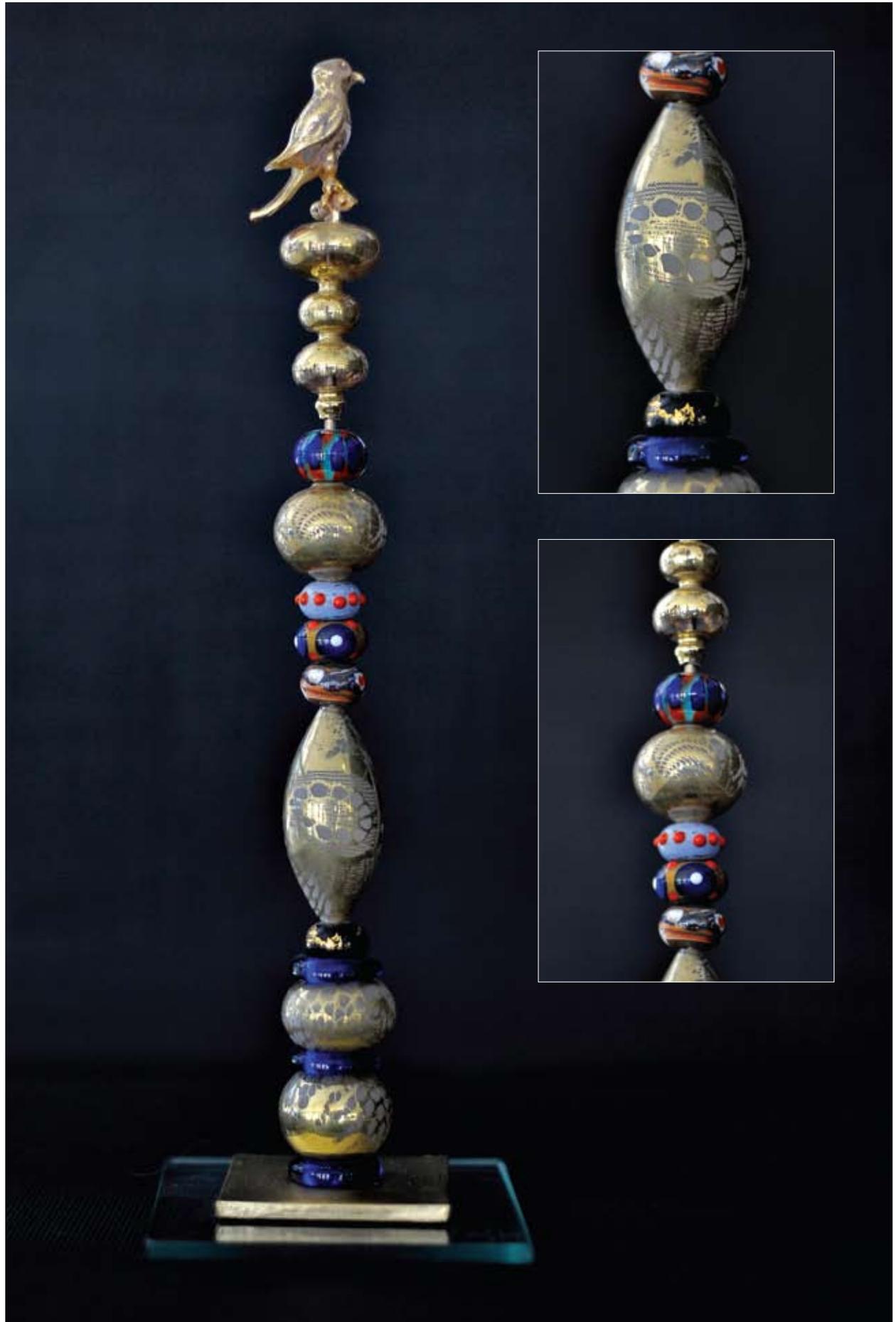
WM: The most important instruments are my hands and the fire! But of course, to get the direct contact to the hot material for example, I will use charcoal rods, tweezers, wet newspaper, and even timber.

AH: *What is the most challenging about your work?*

WM: Being skilled with your hands is one very important aspect to glass making as you are







Right: Decorative glass piece representing Arabic tradition. Close-up of sandblasted glass; **opposite above/below:** Ball ornaments created during Wilfried's live performance in Bahrain.

“For 45 years now glass making has been a passion and a profession for Wilfried, a process that continues to kindle his desire to work with his hands and shape this amazing glow of melted glass into fragile pieces of art.”

constantly turning them to work with the melted glass, which also requires precision and patience. Each moment also counts because you are working with the molten that constantly needs to be reheated, shaped, and reshaped.

Protecting the eyes with special eyewear is very important during this process, as well keeping the hands away from the hot glass and flames. Concentration is also very important for the process because the glass can be sculpted quickly and you want to make sure you are getting the results you want. With glass making there are no drawings to follow or plans for forming the object, just the communication between the mind and the material.

AH: *Do you plan on having a new collection or theme?*

WM: Working with glass is a flowing and uninterrupted process. That's the reason why I never plan self-contained collections. For one thing, I am always inspired by the world around me and I am sure I will get deeply inspired by the people and culture of Bahrain and as a result my artwork will be highly influenced during my visit here. I plan to bring a little of the Arabian spirit into my glass work and that right there gives me the inspiration to create new pieces. Also, another theme for 2009 will certainly be the birth of my two grandchildren.

AH: *What interested you in sharing your work here in Bahrain?*

WM: I admire the Arabic culture, the people, and the way of life. The pieces I make radiate light and brightness either in their glistening transparency or their jewel-like color. The only prerequisite to understanding my artwork is openness and the readiness to allow you to be led by the glass. And this is exactly what I expect to find in Bahrain and the people here. **AH**

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