

Floral sculpture evokes “Venetian Wood”

By Carolyn Baum and Ruth E. Thaler-Carter

We usually think of wearable glass art in terms of small-scale pieces such as jewelry – earrings, brooches, necklaces. Glass artist Carolyn Baum has taken the concept much farther and created a stunning costume in glass: her wearable “Venetian Wood.”

Baum, who now has homes and glass studios in Florida and New York, was a middle-school art teacher for 15 years and turned to creating glass art after retiring from teaching. “I am at a point in my life where this is *my* time. I’m not interested in formal teaching,” she says. “I consider

it a privilege to be able indulge myself in this creative, fun activity and not have to worry about any other responsibilities.” She enjoys sharing what she does and doing demonstrations, but sees those as different from formal teaching.

Creating the costume

Baum’s “Venetian Wood” costume evolved from her first Glass Art Society (GAS) conference, around 1999. “I saw a glass fashion show, which is done at GAS every five years, and knew I wanted to participate one day,” she recalled. At the 2007 GAS conference, Baum met Laura Donefer, who urged her to “extend myself and create something dazzling.” That encouragement got her started on the costume, which she worked on from then until 2009. It weighs about 20 pounds and is about three feet high by four feet wide. Baum worked on it for about five months altogether. She chose the vibrant colors with its presentation in mind: “I based my color choices on the need for them to show up under strong lights on stage.”

The costume combines many individual glass flowers with a wire armature and other decorative elements, such as fold-formed copper leaves. “I made a wire armature out of copper tubing because that was easy to bend, but also gave the piece the strength needed to hold up a tremendous amount of weight,” said Baum. “I formed the armature on a model, then wrapped the flowers one at a time. I had a color scheme in mind and chose colors to fit.” She used floral tape to attach each flower to the copper

tubing. Then, after the flowers, buds, leaves, and fill-in pieces were in place, she wrapped it in heavy, textured yarn, “several strands at a time, so it was quite thick and strong, to give it a texture that would duplicate a natural, mossy look.” The yarn covered the wires and tape, and softened the surface so the costume was more comfortable to wear.

Once Baum had made and demonstrated her glass costume, she had an added bonus: “We all paraded around the grounds of the museum and back to the auditorium. Paul Stankard was standing right there and wanted to take a photo with me. I was so thrilled – it was such an honor!”

Creating the glass costume was a natural progression for Baum; she studied the history of costume and costume design in college, and bought and sold antique clothing and jewelry from 1983–2000. She started glassmaking in 1996, initially with beads. “Beads have been part of my life for many years,” she says at her website. “I used them in many ways while teaching middle school students and also when buying and selling antique jewelry.”

Inspired by nature

Baum’s “Venetian Wood” glass costume is a natural extension of her long-



carolynbaumdetail

Details of the wood and glass sculptures created from the “Venetian Wood” glass costume.



carolynbaumdetail2

Details of the wood and glass sculptures created from the “Venetian Wood” glass costume.



standing interest in depicting flowers and other elements of nature in glass. Flowers as a motif have been a part of her glass world since she began working in the medium in 1996. "Trying to capture their beauty has been an ongoing challenge," she said. She persevered through many failed attempts to encapsulate them, which led her to the Corning Museum of Glass (Corning, N.Y.) and a week-long workshop there with Paul Stankard. "Studying with Paul reminded me of my many hours spent with watercolors," said Baum. "What makes Paul's art so enchanting to me is his use of negative space – an important element in watercolor painting. It enables his work to appear so magical."

Baum's connection to watercolors has also caused her to work almost exclusively with transparent glass. "I am fascinated with the blending of colors in transparent glass as they do in watercolor paint," she said. "The transparency offers a delicacy that a flower has, yet reminds us it is glass, not organic. The transparency causes the glass to appear flowing and 'angulating' as do natural forms. It is this quality of the flower that interests me. I don't want to imitate a flower but to capture its essence, not its likeness."

Baum surrounds her floral arrangement forms with materials that remind viewers of the relationship between flowers and leaves, twigs, and other plants. "All of these forms add texture to the composition," she said. She uses only Morretti soft glass and works with a Minor burner (Nortel torch) and oxygen concentrator.

Baum has always been fascinated by how well all the parts of nature "fit so wonderfully together." "Not only do they function to stay alive, but the diversity of textures, colors, forms, and shapes works so well to create a perfect composition," she said. She finds inspiration in her outdoor activities, such as scuba diving and mountain-climbing. "When I dive under the sea or climb mountains, this relationship of hard to soft, rough to smooth, dark to light, or bright to subdued captures my imagination," she said. As she says at her website, Baum's **"world of glass [is] created with fire and inspired by nature."** She looks for "the harmony between glass and metal."

Transforming the work

Baum's "Venetian Wood" glass costume underwent a metamorphosis after the GAS conference – one that took its direction from her favorite focus. "When it came time to take the costume off and transform it into a new creation, it was to nature I looked," she said. "I knew I wanted the piece to climb and reach upward. The perfect base was sitting right outside my door. I had stolen it from the woods several years ago – an ancient cedar root that my husband helped me drag out of the woods because I knew someday I would need it."

The cedar roots in the woods have fascinated Baum for many years. "I have photographed their wonderful shapes, but, until recently, had not tried to move them," she said. "They turn to iron as they age and make perfect bases. Those of you who collect things because you know someday you will need them can understand how this root was waiting for me to use it. It has arms reaching up, but a strong foundation to anchor the floral forms."

A muff that accompanies the costume is a separate piece that is now a chandelier, demonstrating yet again the versatility of the glass medium in general and Baum's work in particular.

Baum mostly makes life-sized lamp-worked glass flowers with copper wire for leaves and other decorative elements. She also adds the flowers to pieces such as hand-blown bowls. Her use of wire with her glass sculptures and forms goes back to her childhood. "As a small child, I was fascinated by a glass-and-wire lamp in my grandmother's home," she recalled. "I'm not sure where it is today, but the image of it remains in my mind, fueled by having seen many similar pieces since then, in antique stores and homes of people who have traveled to Venice." She saw the Blaska flowers early in her glass career; in 1997, the librarians at Corning and Stankard let her and other students handle the Blaska pieces. "What a thrill to witness first-hand how they were made!" Later on, she saw the Blaska flowers at Harvard and again in Corning, where David Whitehouse gave a "wonderful, inspirational speech" about them.

With those influences in mind, Baum began embedding sterling and gold wire into her glass jewelry flowers several years ago and designing pendants with them. Eventually, the opportunity arose to study with Andrea Penzo of Murano, who was still using the old technique in his work, when he led a week-long course at the Pittsburgh Glass Center. "I jumped at the chance," Baum said. "Andrea Penzo uses copper wire and Murano glass to create graceful, ethereal sculptures that have adorned the streets of Murano. I now have the skills to expand my horizons and incorporate so many ideas into my work. Using this ancient technique in a new way will challenge me for years to come."

All of Baum's other education in glass has been from watching videos and going to demos at conferences of GAS and the International Society of Glass Beadmakers. She has won awards for her beads at several national shows, has had her work chosen to represent beadmakers in national shows, and has had her beads featured in magazines and books on beads.

This year, Baum's interest in costumes is leading her to travel to northern Thailand and Vietnam "to see for myself the hill-tribe people who still wear their native outfits." She expects to come home with new ideas and inspirations for translating such garments into yet another stunning glass costume.

To see how Baum creates individual flowers that can be assembled into projects such as her "Venetian Wood" glass costume, see the article on page 24.

Carolyn Baum splits the year between homes in Gardiner, New York, and Ellenton, Florida, with a studio at each location. Her website is www.cbeadsandbuttons.com and her glass jewelry is also available at www.etsy.com/shop/carolynbaum.

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"Venetian Wood"

3' X 4'

A glass-and-wood sculpture
by Carolyn Baum

Photo by Randy Fitzgerald



Hibiscus how-to

Text by Carolyn Baum

Photos by Peter Baum

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Making glass flowers is one of Carolyn Baum's passions. She has taken that one item and turned it into stunning creations large and small, from glass-flower jewelry to a complex, wearable glass-art costume piece that incorporates several hundred flowers with wire, floral tape, and yarn that weighs about 20 pounds. She encourages fellow glass artists to take this hibiscus as a starting point and use their imaginations to make more flowers and assemble them into similarly ambitious glass sculptures. — "The overall piece is essentially the same thing repeated over and over again, although each flower is different," Baum said.

Baum tries to "use the fluidity of the glass to let forms almost create themselves." That's why her pieces are "so unlike any real flower," even if they are based in nature, and "that's what makes it all so exciting. You can go wild with it—the [creative] possibilities are endless," she said. — Ruth E. Thaler-Carter, copy editor

Tools and materials

- Moretti transparent red
- Moretti transparent yellow
- Moretti transparent greens (several shades)
- Moretti opaque color rods
- powdered enamels
- 22 gauge brass or floral wire

- waxed linen cord
- leaf press
- large flower press (Baum uses the ones made by Glasscraft)
- tweezers
- wire fingers (a tool that wraps around a hollow ball-form that is adjustable, can be used to grab pieces; five wires bend inward to hold something that is hot and rounded)
- stainless steel pipe about 3/8" diameter and 12" long
- optic mold
- Minor burner (Nortel torch) and oxygen concentrator

Petals

Place both red and yellow rods in the flame, touching each other, and twist them to blend the colors ([image 1](#)). When you have a good-size gather, flame-cut the yellow rod off, leaving about 1/2" still on the gather. Melt it into the end of the gather. Heat gather through and press with flower press ([images 2 and 3](#)).

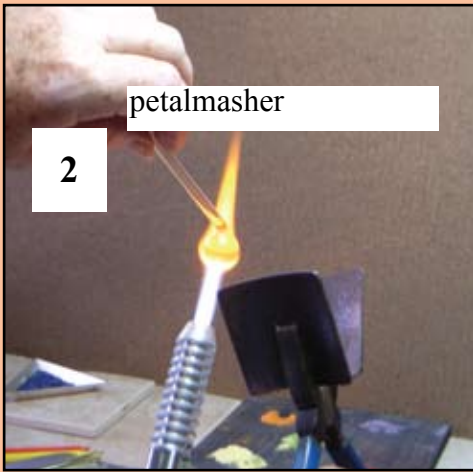
Take a pinch of enamel and sprinkle on the petal, melt it into the glass ([images 4 and 5](#)).

Heat the lower end of the petal nearest the punty. Place the press back on the top half of the petal and pull until the lower portion of the petal stretches ([image 6](#)). Remove the press and heat the upper portion of the petal a small area at a time. Each time you heat the petal, use the tweezers to shape the ruffle ([image 7](#)).

Using tweezers to hold the petal, flame-cut the punty off ([image 8](#)). Heat the end of the wire gently. While heating the tip of the petal, insert the wire into the molten glass ([image 9](#)).

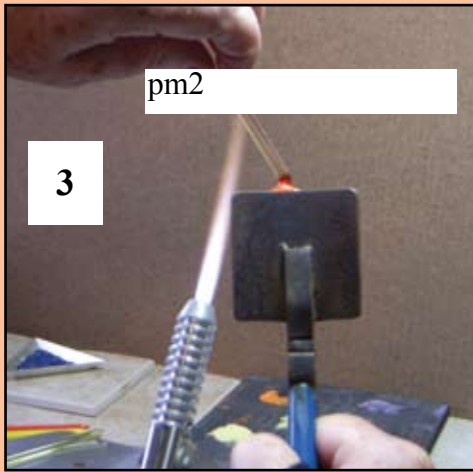
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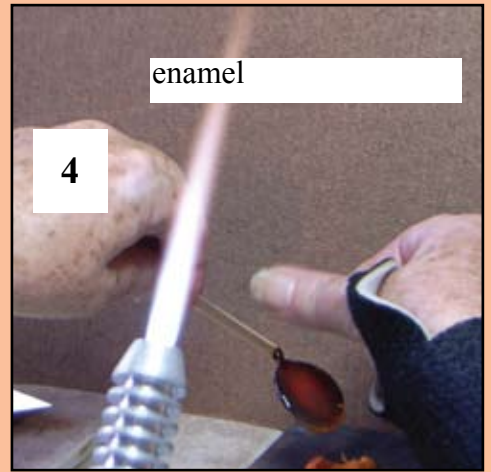
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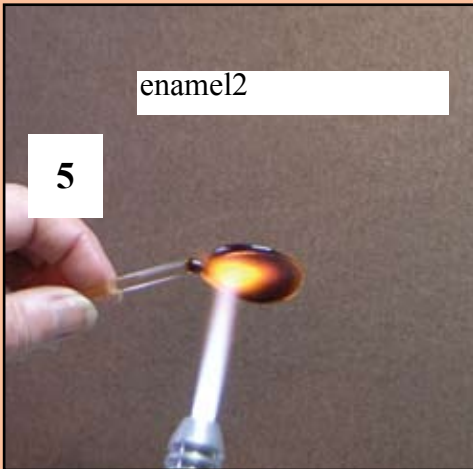
pm2

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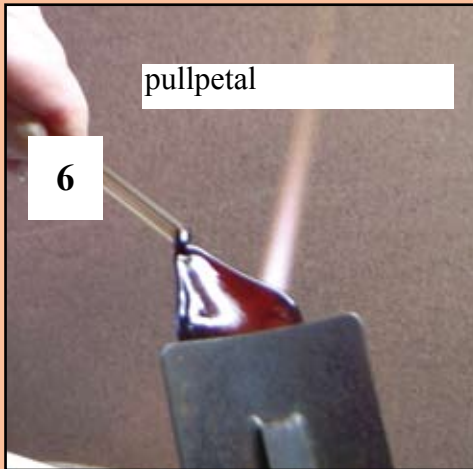
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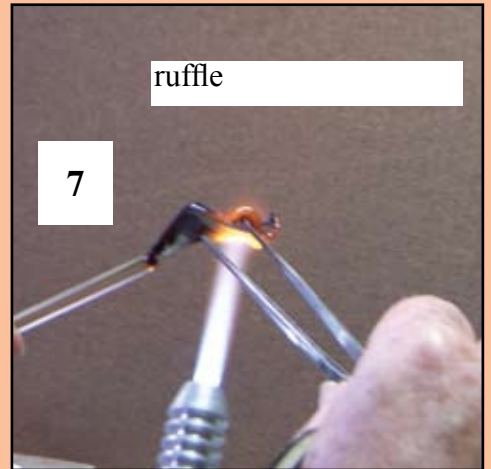
enamel2

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pullpetal

6



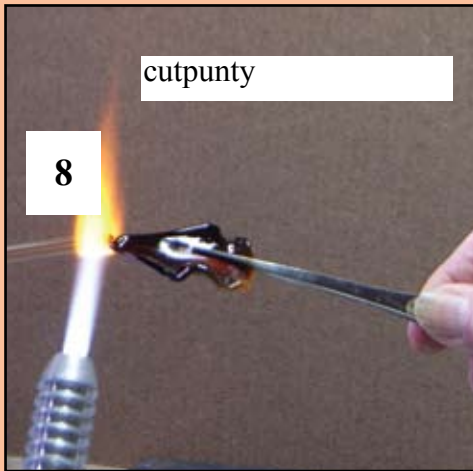
ruffle

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Put the piece into the annealer; repeat four more times.

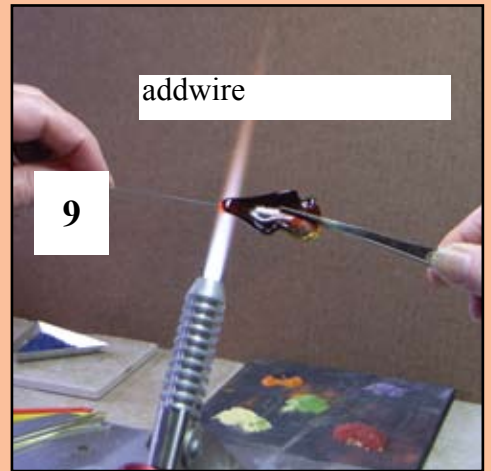
Leaf
Same as above, but use the leaf press to get veins into the glass (image 10). Use a punty on each end to stretch and twist the leaf (images 11, 12, 13, and 14). Repeat as many times as you like.

Stamen
Pull opaque rod into stringer (image 15). Use another color to add dots around



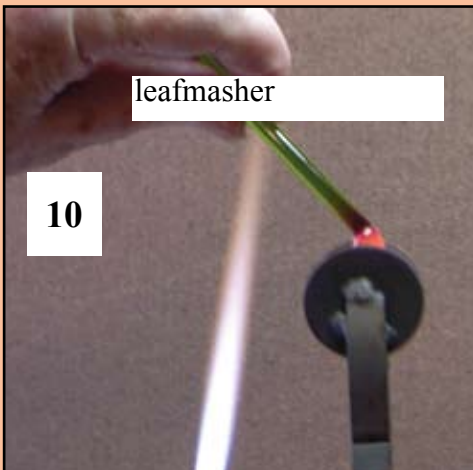
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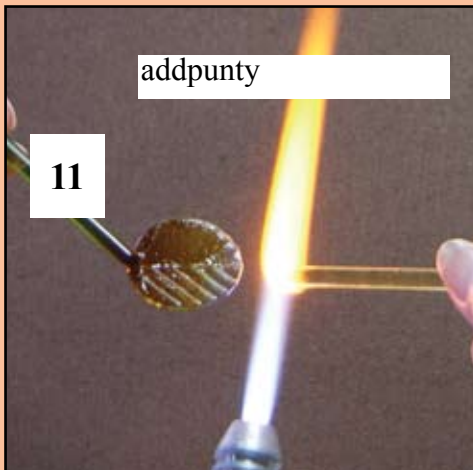
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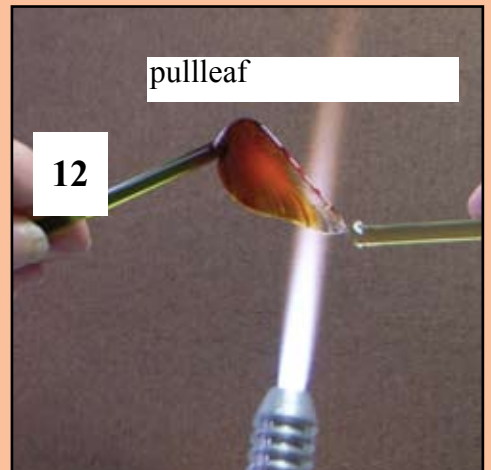
leafmasher

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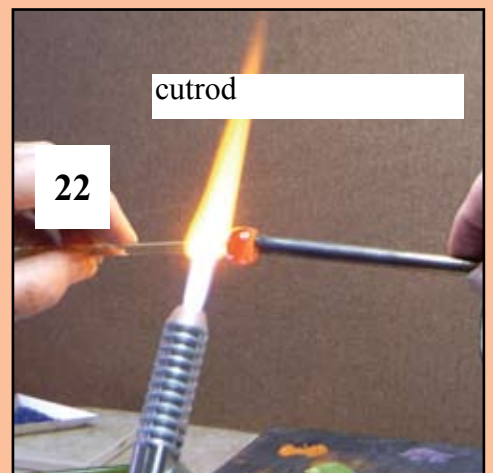
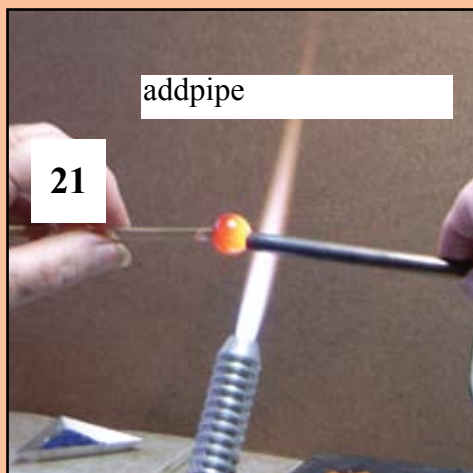
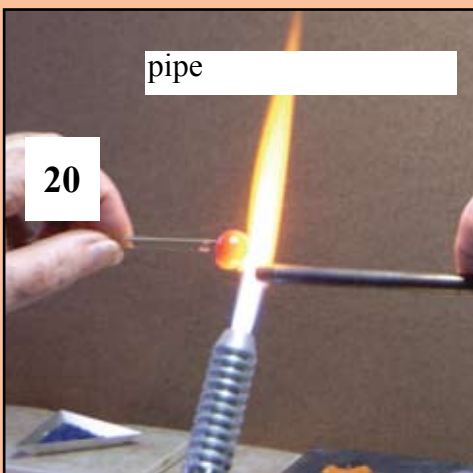
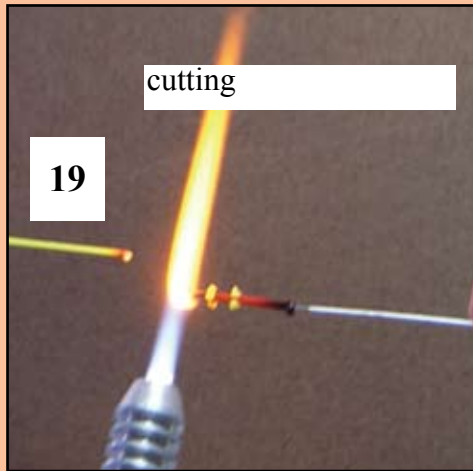
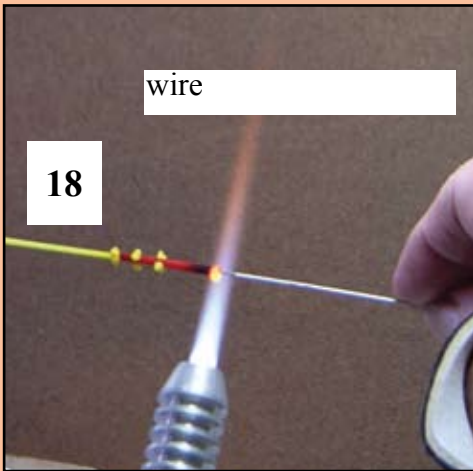
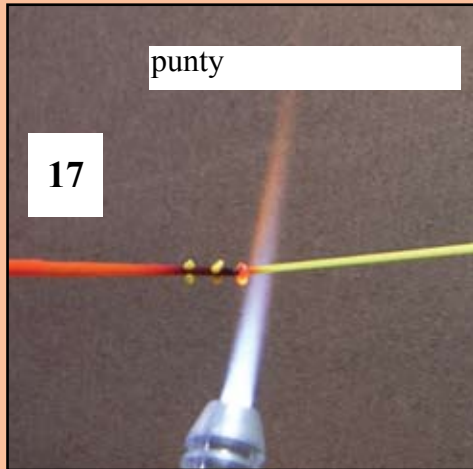
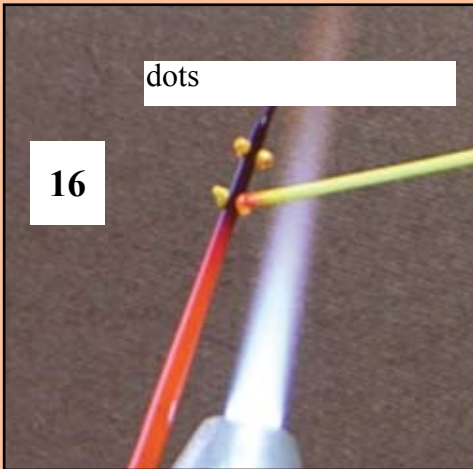
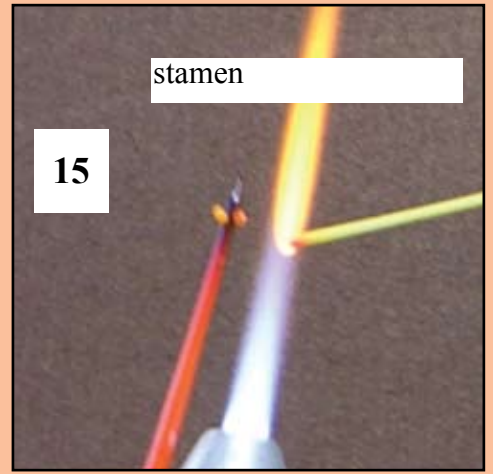
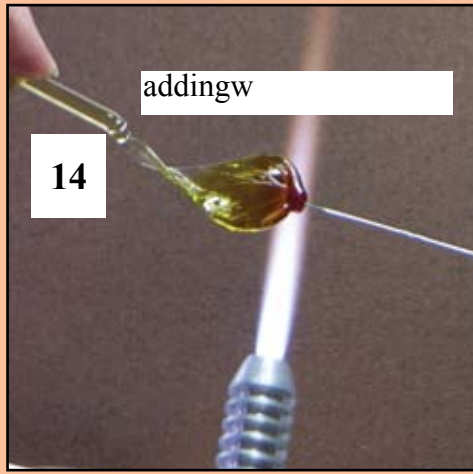
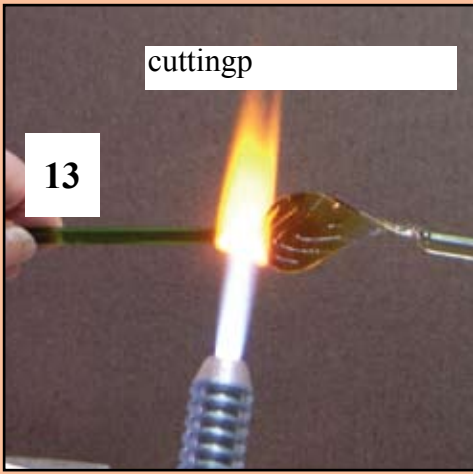
addpunty

11



pullleaf

12

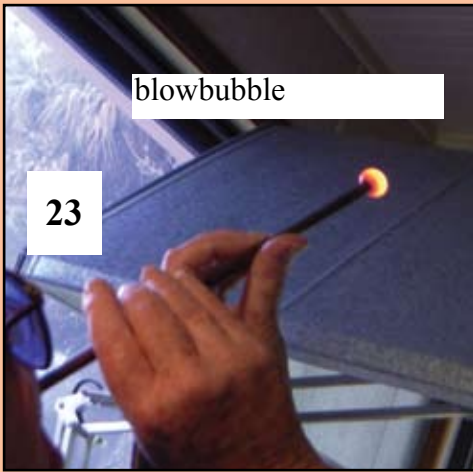


the stringer (image 16). Finish by placing contrasting color rod onto end of stamen (image 17). Flame-cut other end at the length you want the stamen to be. Gently heat wire and insert in molten glass (images 18 and 19).

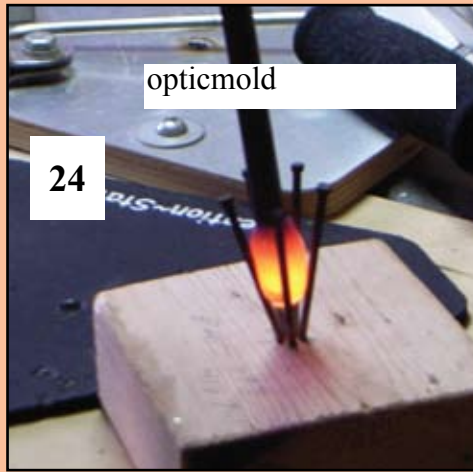
Bud

Heat and mix red and yellow rods together into small gather (images 20 and 21). Flame-cut red rod off and attach hollow pipe to the gather while both gather and pipe are hot. Flame-cut yellow off and melt into ball at the end of the pipe (image 22). Blow air into pipe until a small bubble appears in gather (image 23). Heat gather and keep rotating it to keep it centered, then lower gather into optic mold, allow it to elongate and blow bubble until it fills the optic mold with glass (images 24 and 25).

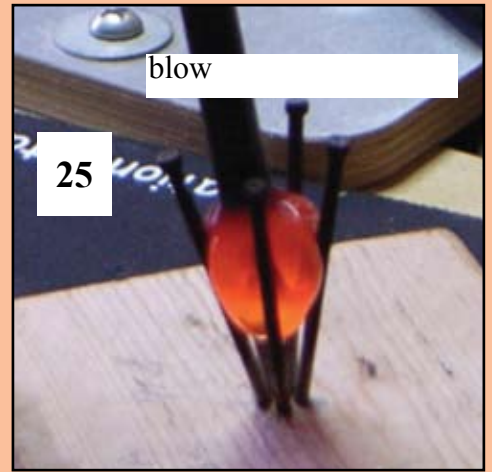
Attach glass punty to the end of the bud (image 26). Heat the bud gently in the top of the flame, and pull and twist the punty to form a more elongated bud shape (image 27). Flame-cut punty off.



blowbubble



optigmold



blow

Use wire fingers to hold the bud (image 28). Tap the steel pipe on the torch so it comes loose from the glass bud. Melt the end of a green rod and attach it to the open hole where the steel pipe was (image 29). Insert wire into molten green glass (images 30 and 31). Place in annealer (image 32).

Assembling complete flower

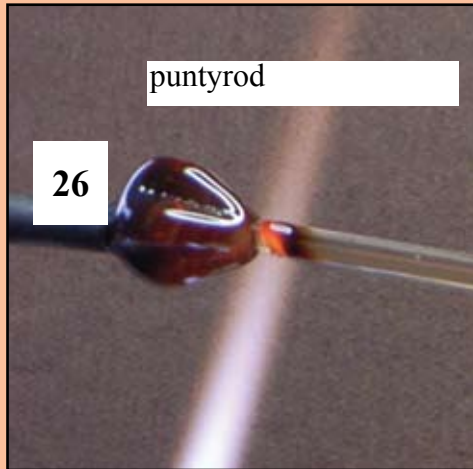
Wrap waxed linen around each wire to hold flower together.

Start with the bud. Lay cord perpendicular to the wire stem and start wrapping at the base of the bud. Wind the cord until about 3" is wrapped, then cut cord and place a bit of glue at the end of the cord. Place aside and repeat for both leaves.

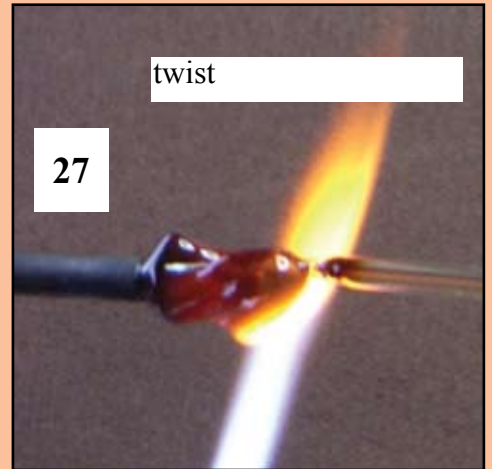
Now start the flower with the stamen. Wrap it several times, then place the smallest petal in position and wrap cord around it once. Pull cord tight and wrap around both stems once. Add another petal and another, until all five are wrapped.

As you wrap further down the stem, add the bud and leaves in positions that suit the flower. Wrap until you reach the tip of the stem, then turn around and continue wrapping back up the stem. Finish with a little glue.

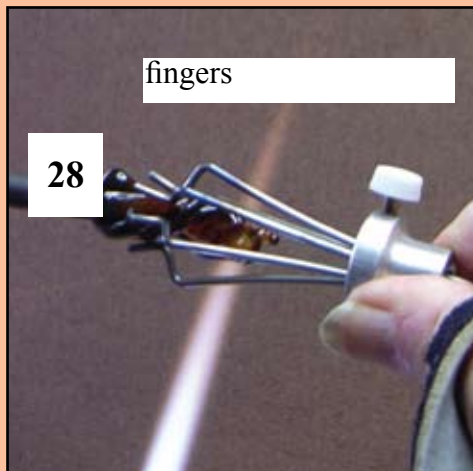
Carolyn Baum splits the year between homes in New York and Florida, with a studio at each location. For examples of her work, go to her website: www.cbeadsandbuttons.com.



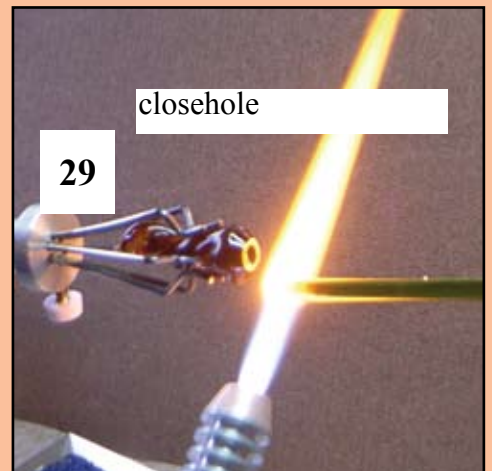
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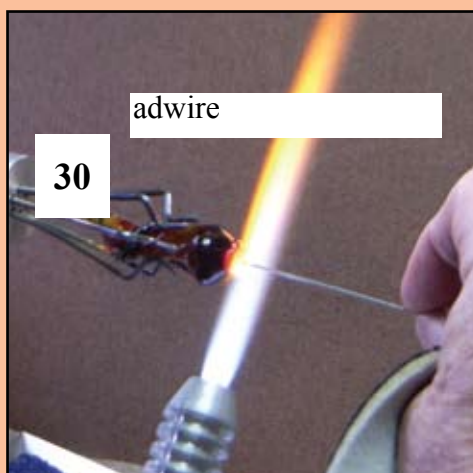
twist



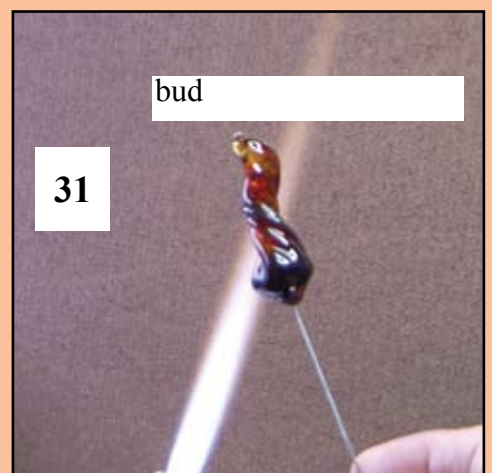
fingers



closehole



adwire



bud