

# Crystal clear

ONE YOUNG ARTIST FINDS PASSION IN  
GLASS BLOWING AND OPPORTUNITY  
IN A LOCAL BUSINESS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KATIE INGRAM

Adam Findley is an apprentice at NovaScotian Crystal, having worked with the company for about a year and a half.





Adam Findley carefully places finished wine glasses in the kiln at NovaScotian Crystal.

As a child, Adam Findley always liked drawing and being creative. But as he got older he didn't think being an artist would be profitable. Eventually, this interest turned into more of a hobby.

"I had always hoped to [work in art], but as the years started moving on I started giving up on that dream," he says. "If you had asked me three or four years ago what I'd be doing now, I'd probably say I'd be working in an office."

This idea of office work changed when Findley, now 28, was working at Jungle Pets in Dartmouth and happened to strike up a conversation with one of the store's

customers, Ray Cruickshank. While talking with Cruickshank, Findley asked him what his job was. Cruickshank replied that he was polisher with NovaScotian Crystal, the glassworks company located along the Halifax waterfront.

"I always knew the place was here, but didn't know much about it," Findley says. "I always thought [glass blowing] was the coolest thing ever, but I thought I'd never get to do it."

Through this conversation Findley also found out about the company's in-house apprenticeship program where accepted applicants are trained in different aspects of the glass-making process.

Seeing that this was the artistic opportunity he was looking for, Findley applied to the program, but was worried that his background wouldn't meet employee criteria. Before working at Jungle Pets he took a business administration course from

NSCC, with a concentration in Nova Scotia community management and had worked as butcher, restaurant dishwasher and ground maintenance worker. As Findley thought more about it, though, he realized his employment history and schooling was actually an asset.

"I realized my varied background wasn't actually a weakness as I had proved that although I had never done this job before, I was confident I could learn as I always have," he says. "I have always been able to adapt to a new situation and I believe this became one of my big selling points."

He adds that the other NovaScotian Crystal employees don't all have the same background, which allows them to bring different perspectives to the company.

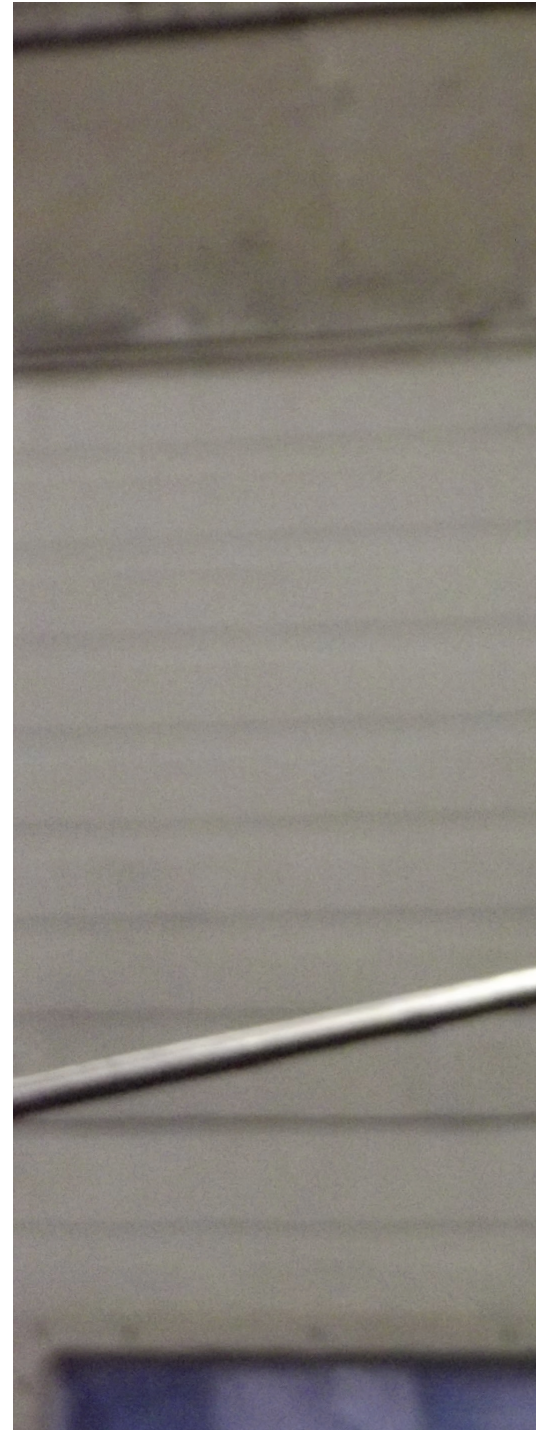
"Everyone is varied in what they have done in the past from welding to mechanics, couriers and labourers," he says. "I believe that this allows everyone to bring a certain

**The items created by the NovaScotian Crystal craftsman go through a multi-step process. This process can take between three days and three weeks, depending on the item. The following is a summary of what each piece of crystal glassware goes through before it is displayed in the showroom.**

- First, a mixture or “batch” of trace mineral elements, including silica and lead oxide, is melted down in a clay pot within a large furnace. The batch melts at 1360 degrees Celsius for 12 hours.
- After the batch has melted, glass blowers use a blowing iron to gather a small amount of crystal and quickly roll it into a basic shape.
- When making stemware, the crystal is then put into a mould and blown into the specific shape needed for the glass.
- Once the blowing is done and the bowl or the glass has been created, a stemmer will carefully add the stem and foot to the glass using more melted crystal.
- After all of these steps are completed, the glasses are put into a kiln overnight where they will cool down. This process is called annealing and it's where temperature is gradually lowered; if the temperature changes too quickly the glass could shatter. This process also makes the pieces more durable after they are completed.
- Once cooled, the glasses are taken to the finishing department where they are straightened and any sharp edges are removed. From there, they are marked for cutting by a craftsman using a grid. This grid will show the cutter which pattern is being used on the glass.
- After the pattern is cut, the glass is put into a chemical bath that polishes it and makes its design more apparent.
- Finished glasses are then taken to the company's warehouse for inspection and final quality testing. Once they have passed all tests, they are returned to the glassworks and placed on display in the NovaScotian Crystal showroom.

set of skills and experiences to the table.”

Following his interview and application process, Findley was hired in September 2012 as an apprentice. As with most apprentices, he started in the finishing department where the rims of glasses are flattened and straightened and sharp edges are removed. After about six months, he moved onto the glass-blowing side of the warehouse. His job now is to assist the craftsman with small tasks such as morning setup, evening cleanup





and making sure the right mold is being used. Findley also does the 'knocking off' task where he straightens and removes excess crystal from pieces before they are put in the kiln overnight.

Within the next few months he hopes to move onto the platform as a ball blower or bit gatherer where he'll be getting the melted crystal from the pot for the stems and feet of wineglasses.

Despite being there for more than a year,


becoming an expert in glass blowing isn't easy. It takes five to seven years for a person to become a craftsman and another five to 10 years to become a master craftsman.

For Findley, the long training time and hard work is worth it.

"There are times that you feel you've been thrown to the wolves," he says. "It can be tense at times and frustrating, but you've got to keep your head down and keep going at it."

At the end of the day Findley finds his work

and perseverance is all about the end result.

"I find it such a rewarding experience to see people leave with something I've helped make," Findley says. "The fact that every piece is unique and special and I know it's going to bring happiness and memories to whomever may be the lucky one to take it home." 

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A bit of melted crystal is added to a glass at NovaScotian Crystal.