



Where I work Terri Adams

Photographed for *Nature*
by Leonora Saunders

I've been a scientific glassblower for 33 years. For much of that, I've worked at the University of Oxford, where I design and create glass equipment that scientists can use for their research.

The piece I'm most proud of is a perfusion apparatus that is used to keep human organs functioning outside the body. But I also make glassware that is used throughout the university, such as high-vacuum manifolds, which are a series of knobs that operate a vacuum; glass apparatus for distillation and sublimation experiments; vessels with water jackets used to heat and cool materials; and high-temperature furnace tubes made of quartz or ceramic.

My workbench hosts an array of tools for working with glass, many of which were custom-made for specific jobs. Each tool reminds me of what I first used it for and makes me consider how I might use it again.

Most are made of carbon, and need to be highly polished before use because any irregularities will be transferred to the finish on the glass.

My workbench is also where I ponder the

design of new glassware. It's quite easy to sketch something on a piece of paper, but reproducing that concept as a workable piece of glass equipment is a much more difficult endeavour.

I find that a lot of my work relies on intuition: I instinctively know when the glass is the right temperature, or at what speed it needs to rotate on the lathe. Usually, I can tell when it's turning fast enough by the sound of the lathe.

Glassblowing is a declining art – worldwide, there aren't many schools that teach it any more. A lot of the work can be done by a computer, and there are now alternative materials to non-magnetic glassware.

However, I learn something new almost every week, and am inspired by knowing that a little piece of glassware that I've made has contributed in some way to the bigger picture of science when a researcher achieves milestone results.

Terri Adams is a professional glassblower at the University of Oxford, UK. **Interview by Sarah Boon.**