



With Roots in the Old Country
SIMON PEARCE
Now In Garrett County
Maryland

Photos by **Lance C. Bell**

In 1971, Simon Pearce opened his first glass-blowing workshop in Kilkenny, Ireland, after having spent years studying the time-honored craft at European glass houses and throughout the world.

FROM THIS START, Simon developed his mission of creating products that are beautifully designed, produced with premium quality materials and time honored techniques, and suited to a lifetime of everyday use.

In 1991, Simon and his wife, Pia Pearce, moved to the US to seek relief from European business constraints and high-energy costs. They settled in an historic woolen mill on the banks of the Ottauquechee River in Quechee, Vermont. The river generates hydroelectric power to run the glass furnaces and provides electricity for the entire facility. It proved to be just the place the couple needed to build their glass and tableware company. As the business thrived, Simon Pearce opened a second manufacturing facility in Windsor, Vermont, which also serves as corporate headquarters.

From the beginning, Simon has been committed to using the same classical skills, techniques, and craftsmanship he learned in old European studios. Though there are numerous craftspeople blowing glass at the company today, Simon can still be found in the studio blowing glass, evolving his craft, and mentoring apprentices. It takes an individual two to five years to learn the art of glass blowing while working as an apprentice.

Each Simon Pearce piece is hand blown and finished by a team of two to three glass blowers. Simon Pearce works in clear glass only, a lead-free mixture of silica, lime, potash and barium, which in its raw state is in pelletized form. Once a glass furnace heats the pellets to 2400 degrees Fahrenheit, a glass blower places a heated blowing pipe into the furnace, rotating it to pick up some of the molten glass. This step is called “the gather.”



Perry Schwab is shown here opening a candle stick holder.



The showroom displays much of the beautiful glass works of Simon Pearce. Glass works and pottery can be ordered or purchased at the showroom, as well as packaged and shipped for customers.

Following the gather, the pliable glass is shaped on a workbench with wooden tools, called blocks. The glass blower creates a rough symmetry in the molten glass, then blows into the pipe to force an air bubble into it. Depending on the piece, a wooden form or mold might be used to create the basic shape. Next, the stem, handle or foot of the piece will be created and attached.

Once the piece is formed, a small glass pipe called the “pontil iron” is attached to the bottom of the piece. This pipe aids in separating the blow pipe from the piece. The almost finished object is then reheated in an oven called a “glory hole” as part of the final hand finishing process, and

the pontil iron is severed, leaving a small mark on the product, called a “pontil mark.” This mark will be found on all Simon Pearce glassware, and testifies that each piece is handcrafted and one-of-a-kind.

Lastly, the piece spends six to eight hours in a 950 degree Fahrenheit “lehr” oven which allows a gradual cooling—a process called annealing, which helps contribute to the unusual durability of Simon Pearce glass. Craftsmen hand inspect each piece as it comes out of the lehr oven.

In 1999 Simon Pearce opened its third manufacturing facility at the former Bausch & Lomb location in Mountain Lake Park, MD. The 194,000 square foot facility enables the company to meet current demand and offers capacity for future growth. As with the Windsor, Vermont location, the Mountain Lake Park facility is home to a retail store and a working glass blowing studio, where visitors can view the glass blowers from a catwalk above the shop floor.

Today, the Maryland facility employs 40 people, including 13 glass workers on the production floor with two cold end / grinding employees, and two people in quality control inspecting the finished product. Forty-six percent of the company’s total glass production is located at the Maryland facility.

Simon Pearce is open to the public daily from 9 am to 5 pm and is located at **265 Glass Drive in Mountain Lake Park, MD**. Glass blowing is available for viewing Monday to Friday from 9 am to 3 pm and on Saturday and Sunday from 9 am to 5 pm. For more information call **(800) 774-5277** or visit **SimonPearce.com**.



On these two pages, local artisans are shown in various stages of their craft at the Simon Pearce facility at Mountain Lake Park in Garrett County, Maryland.

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Photos: 1. Ben Lantz makes ball for a lamp.

2. Colin Miller scoring neck to break off for a pitcher.

3. Colin Miller attaching handle to the pitcher.

4. Anthony Wrotten attaching "pontil" to the bottom of a dish. Once removed, the pontil leaves a small mark or brand on the glass.

5. Celso Lopez trimming a Woodbury Vase.

6. Perry Schwab shaping molten glass.

7. Paul Burger, blowing glass into a mold.



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