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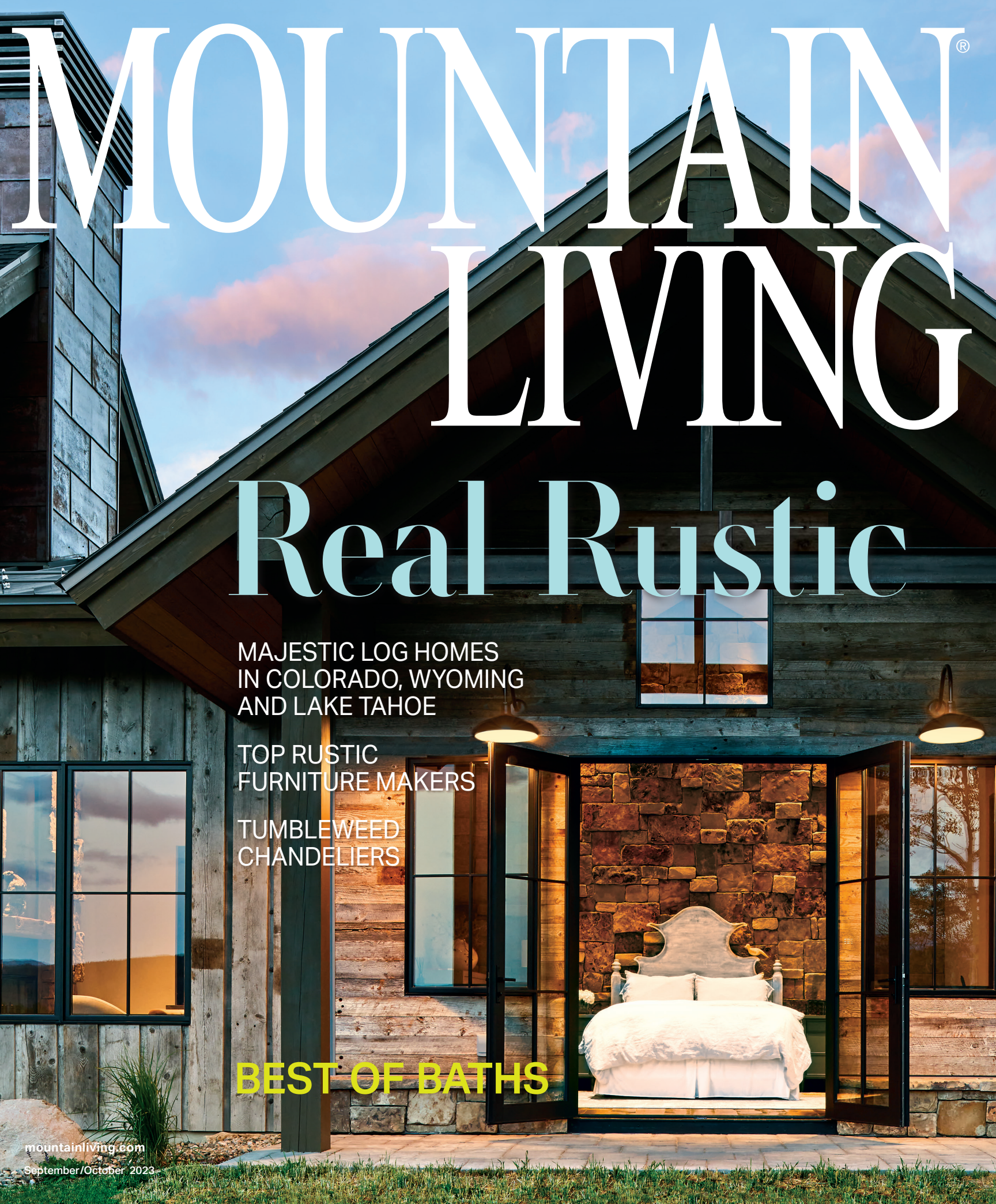

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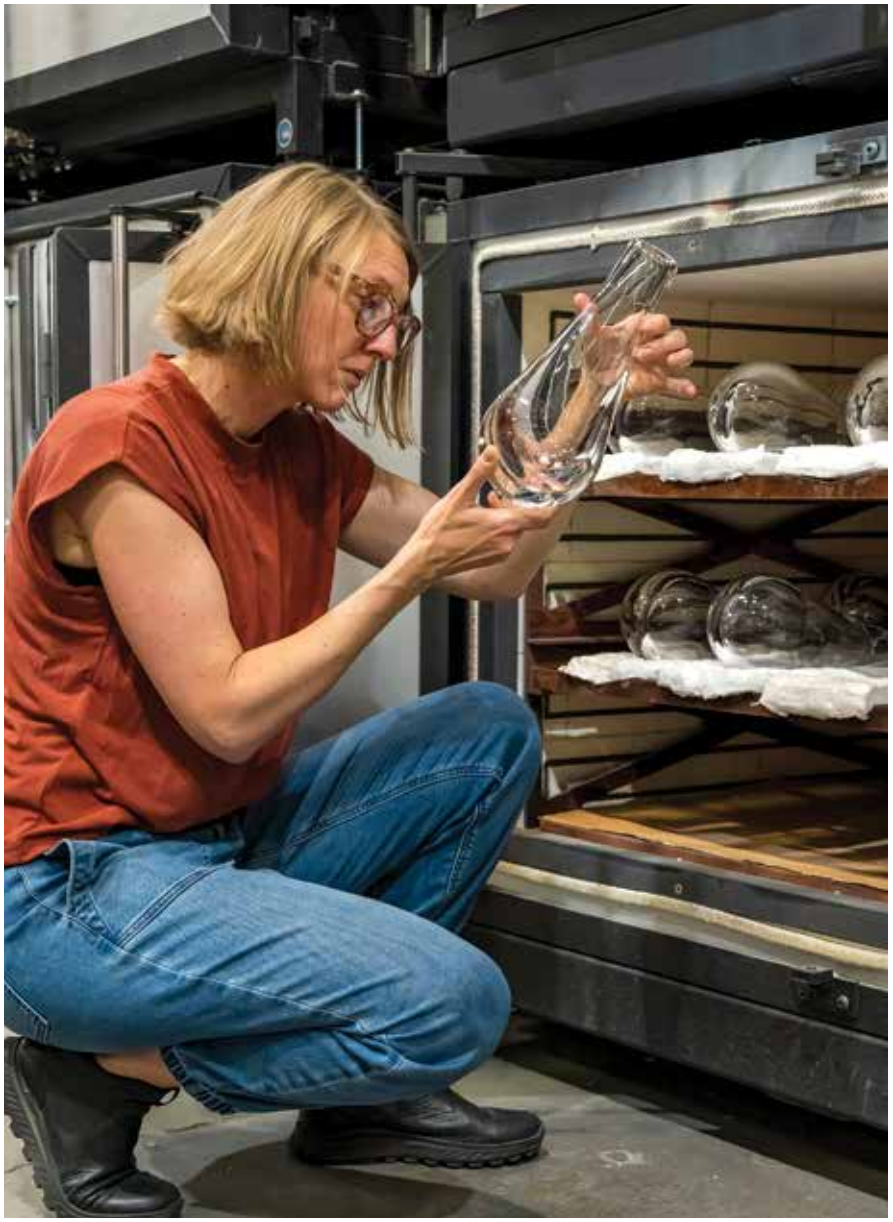
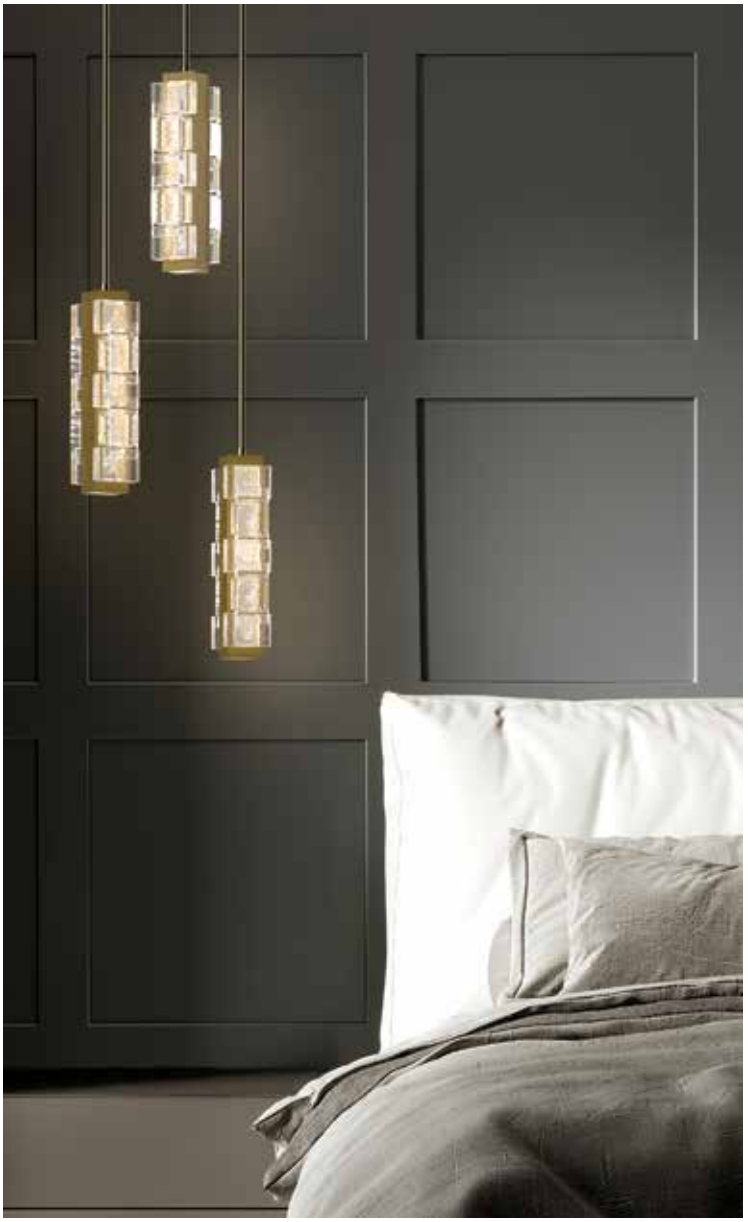
HAMMERTON STUDIO MARRIES INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION WITH HAND-BLOWN GLASS

MANY HANDS, LIGHT WORK

STORY **JAMES FARRELL**
PHOTO **JONATHAN COOK**

RAINDROP *This elegant Raindrop pendant chandelier is a perfect example of how Hammerton Studio harnesses the natural unpredictability of blown glass: the fixture is repeatable on a large scale, yet each raindrop is hand-blown and unique.>>*

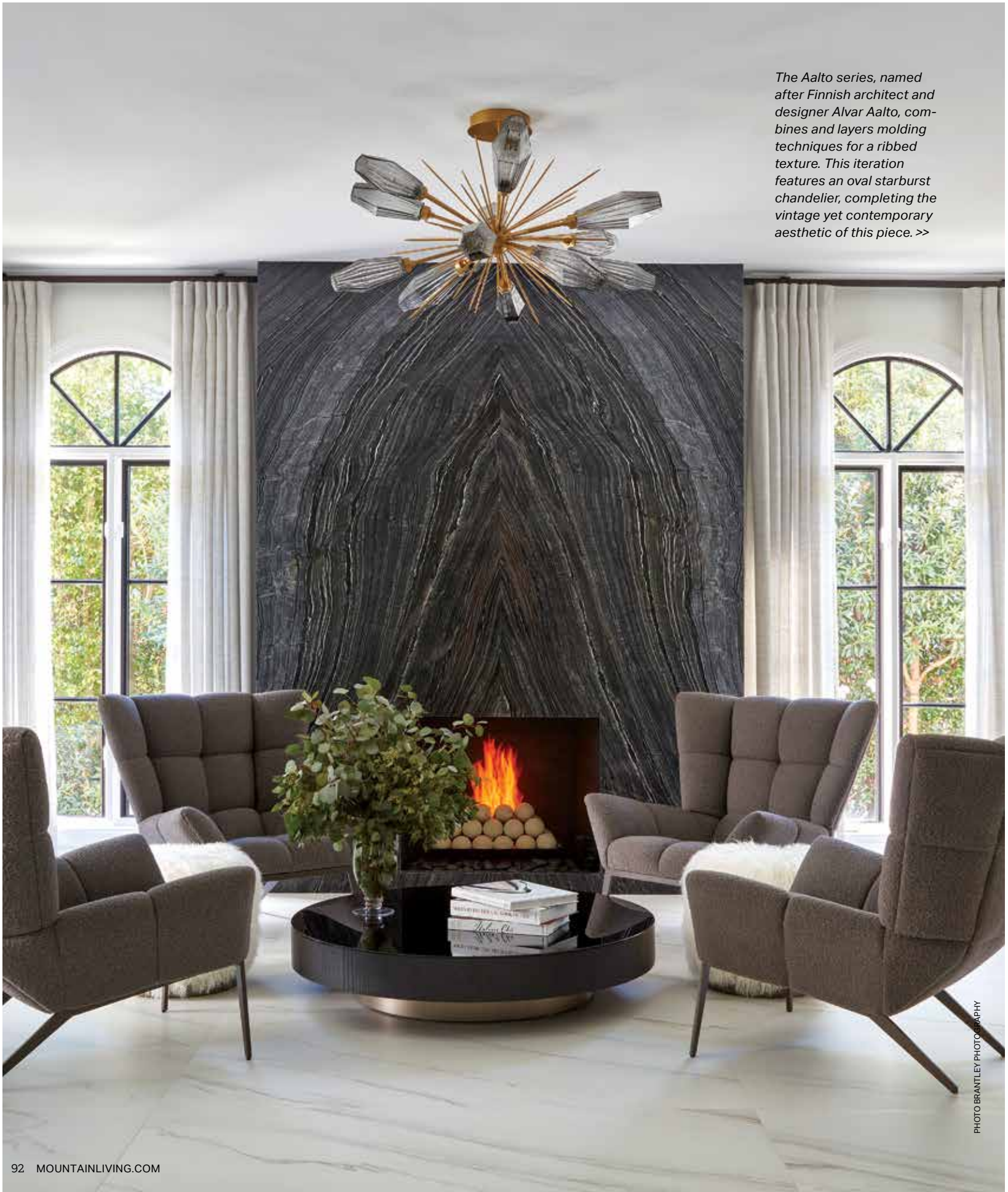




Heated in furnaces at 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit or more, molten glass is a fluid, volatile medium. It can be dangerous and difficult to predict. As a result, glass blowing is a physically demanding art form that takes a long time to master. So how does Hammerton Studio produce over 1,000 handcrafted lighting fixtures with factory-level precision every week, all while honoring the art of glass blowing in every piece?

It's no simple task, and there's no simple answer, no magic wand. It's all down to teams of talented artisans working in concert, with the support of Hammerton's engineers and facility. "Hot shop" manager Emma Walters leverages her years of experience with top studios across the country and 15 other glass blowers to get the job done. "I'm involved on the hot side, and I'm also involved on the ideation side, so there's input at the design stage," she says . "We do all the design in-house, from napkin sketch After they settle on a vision, there's a back-and-forth >>

LEFT: Emma Walters, examining a Raindrop pendant before its fixture is attached. Any piece that doesn't pass inspection goes back into the furnaces to be reused. RIGHT: The Teserra pendant is an organic-modern take on glass mosaic tiling, a practice that dates back 2,500 years.



The Aalto series, named after Finnish architect and designer Alvar Aalto, combines and layers molding techniques for a ribbed texture. This iteration features an oval starburst chandelier, completing the vintage yet contemporary aesthetic of this piece. >>

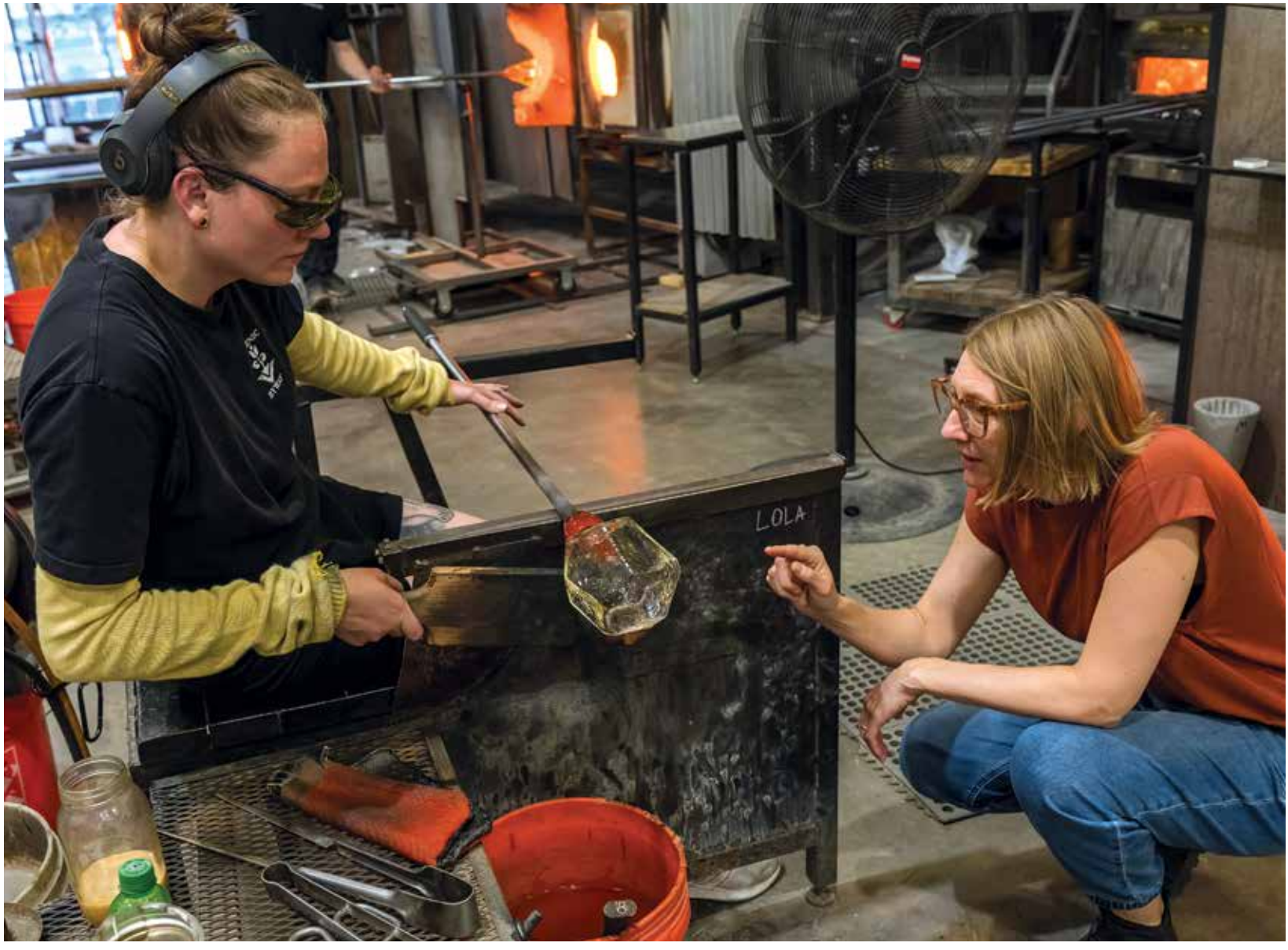
PHOTO BRANTLEY PHOTOGRAPHY

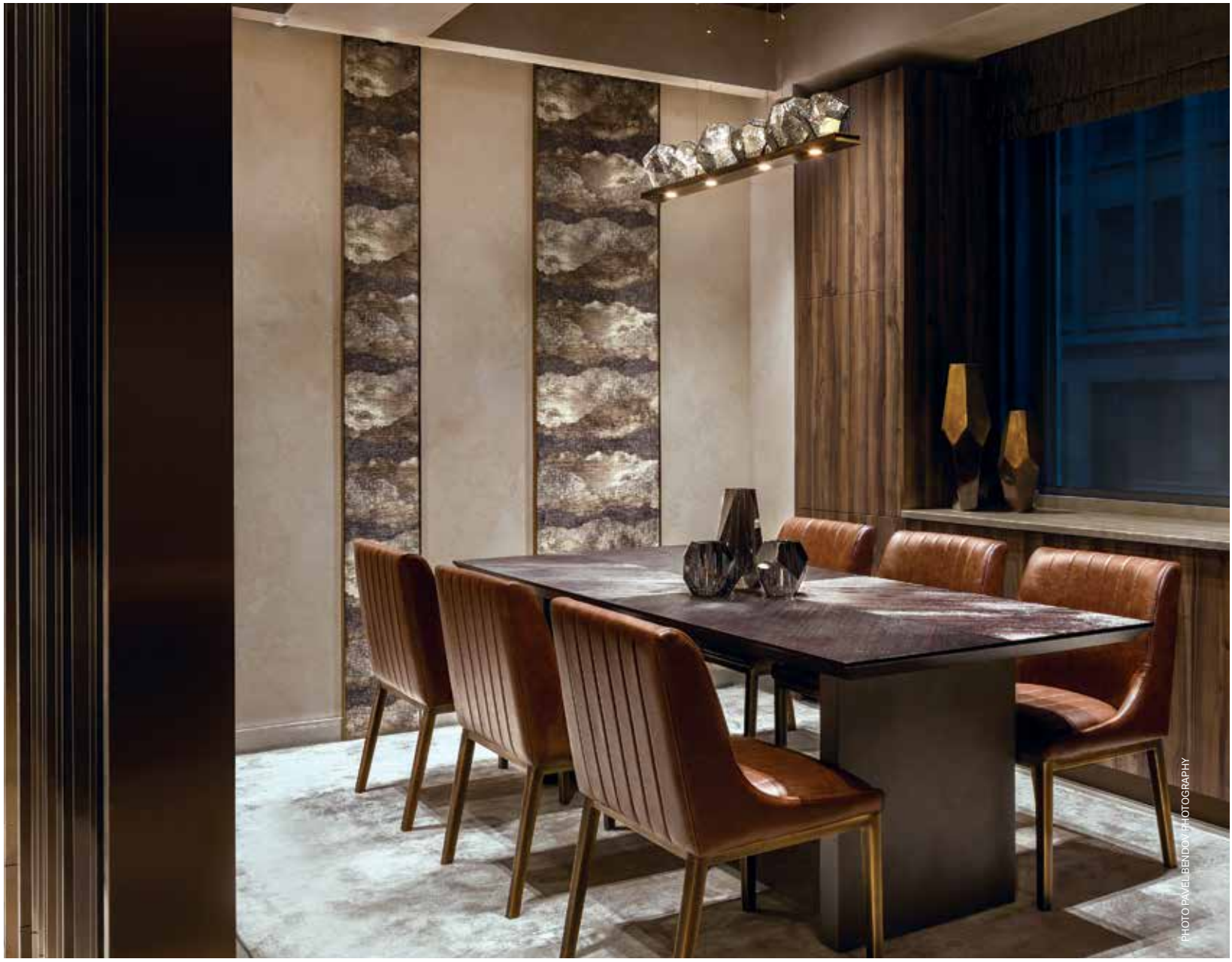
between the hot shop and the designers to detemine what's practical and repeatable on a large scale. "Sometimes it works right away," says Walters. "Sometimes it doesn't, and there's tweaking that has to happen. That's quite common."

Four teams of glass blowers work in shifts. They gather material from the furnace and inflate it by blowing into the blowpipe, a hollow metal rod. Depending on the piece, a wooden tool doused with water shapes the bubble as it expands, or they might blow the glass into a series of molds instead. Once the form is ready, its temperature is lowered slowly in an annealer.

Last, the metal fixture is attached. Each fixture is engineered to form one organic whole with its glass counterpart, but the glass doesn't stop changing shape until it's completely cool, and even a tiny discrepancy can throw everything off. "Today, a piece was out of spec by 1/1,000th of an inch," says Walters. It was enough to not fit the fixture, which demonstrates the stunning precision of their work. They fixed that problem the same day. >>

Glass blowing is a physical art form. "It's like [playing] a musical instrument," says Walters. "It's learning how the material moves, learning the heat, learning the breath, the hand movements." Watching and doing are the only ways to learn. Hammerton trains their glass blowers, and many of them learned completely in-house.





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But for Walters and her team, the beauty of glass isn't just in controlling the white-hot liquid, it's in understanding it, predicting and guiding those imperfections. Hammerton's Blossom series, a great example of that play, starts in an evenly shaped mold. The artisans then reduce the air inside. "You can see the piece that comes out was molded," says Walters, "but then it collapsed in this natural way." This controlled unpredictability is part of the secret to the glass blower's art, making every piece repeatable but wildly different.

The final product is many things: a functional lighting fixture, a form showcasing the natural beauty of blown glass, and the result of thoughtful engineering. All of these combine into a single unified sculpture. And because no two pieces of blown glass will ever be the same, each one is a unique moment frozen in time, its textures capturing and reflecting the light inside. ○

Shaped in an irregular geometric mold and featuring the natural texture of glass meeting a colder surface, Hammerton's Gem collection conjures images of precious stones and jewelry. ***hammerton.com***