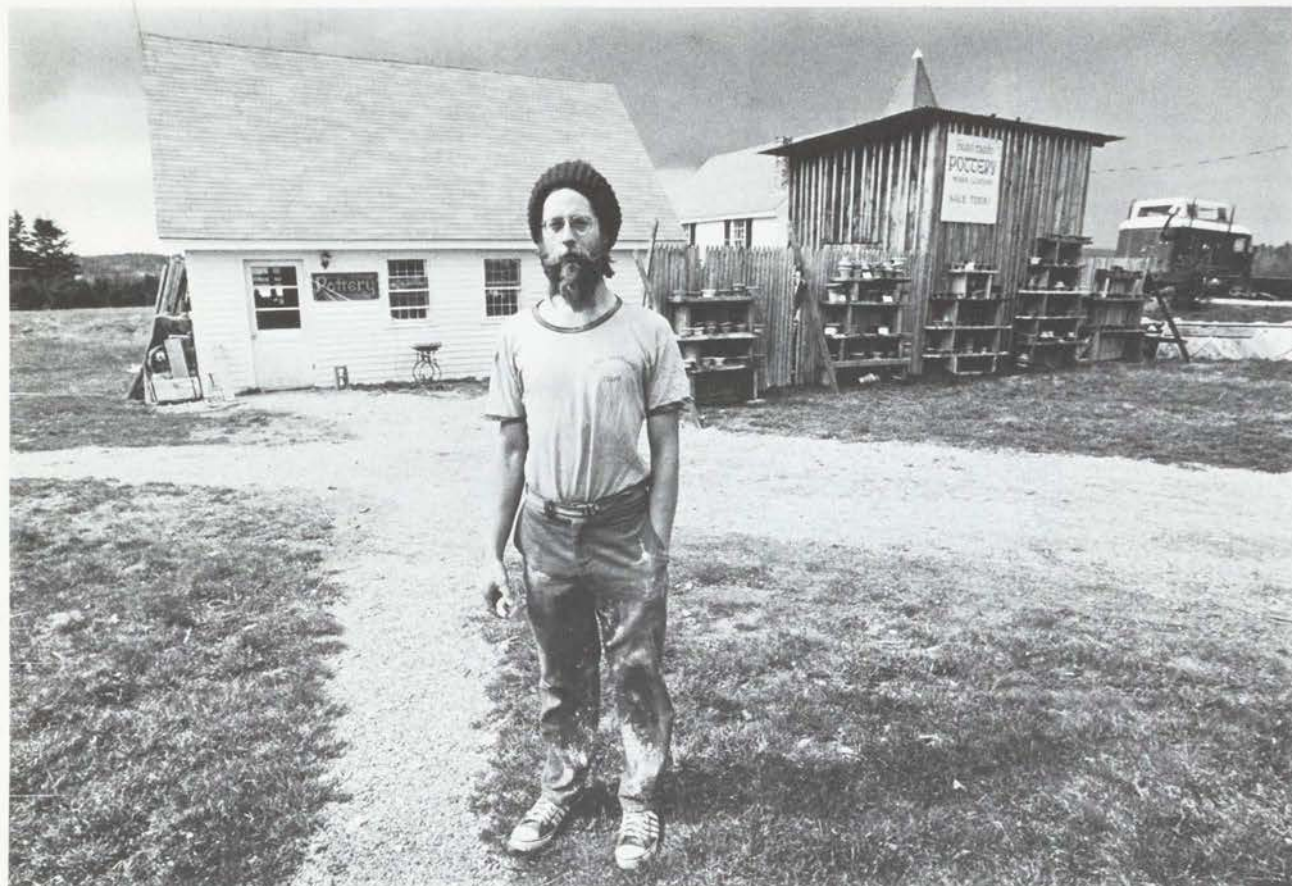


# Thirteen Maine Potters

Photographs by Robert George



MARK GORDON  
H.O.M.E. Co-op  
Orland, ME 04472

Operates pottery at unique craftsmen's cooperative in small coastal village.

Independent studio potter 5 years.

Received BA in philosophy and physical education from Oberlin College.

Feels combination excellent training for working with clay.

Production equally divided between C/6 stoneware, raku and locally dug C/03 earthenware.

Fires in three 55 gallon drum kilns and a 25 cubic foot, flat top gas kiln.

Main interest is in producing limited one-of-a kind blackware.

Burnished African pots are strong influence.

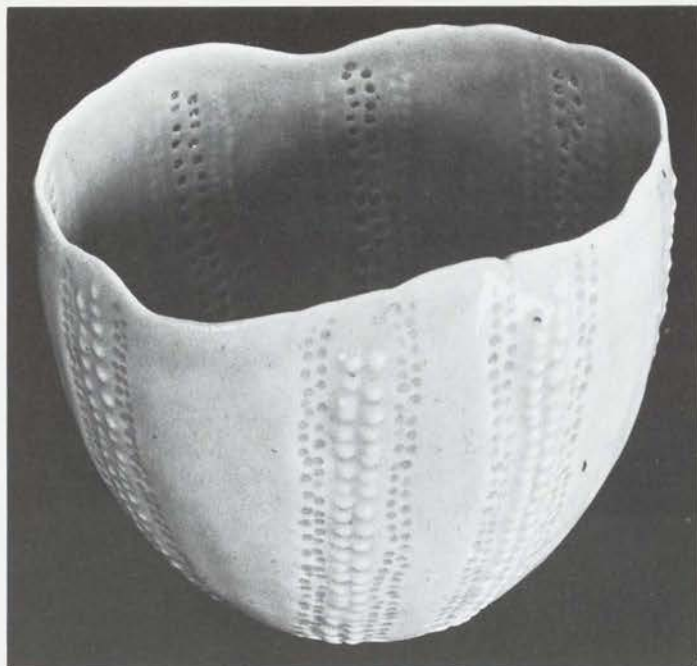
"I want the pots to be objects in themselves—to me they are explorations in form. Function, however, does enhance the creative urge to explore form."

The blackware is burnished when leatherhard, singlefired to 1900°F and reduced with straw or seaweed. Tung oil is used to deepen luster.

"I look at making the burnished pots as a meditative process, and a way to put more energy and faith into a pot."

"Clay can be allowed to speak through the form into which it is coaxed; at all times this demands keeping a receptive mind—one not bound by a rigid expectation of producing a particular type of object."





LINDA REED  
Rural Route 1  
Ellsworth, ME 04605

Combined house/workshop located on high meadow overlooking island-studded bay.

Educated in Canada. Former glaze technician at John Abbott College, Montreal, Quebec.

Studio potter eight years.

Current work mostly handformed. Larger pieces are combination of slab, coil, and pinch.

"Pinch pots were always the pots that I made for myself after a day of throwing. I couldn't seem to inject the same personal connection into my thrown work that I could into my pinch work."

Uses a variety of porcelain bodies. Forms are bold, yet ethereal.

"My pots sometimes blow away at fairs."

Fires to C/10 in 35 cubic foot catenary gas kiln. Salt-laden sea breezes penetrate kiln to form salt-glazed interior.

Feels special connection to British and Canadian potters.

Strongly influenced by Mary Rogers and Ruth Duckworth.

"I don't have an explanation for why I work the way I do—porcelain just happens to be my clay."

"There is no big secret to pottery—it's all in the process."







TOBY ALLAN  
RFD 1 Box 40  
Freedom, ME

Ex-urbanite, homesteading on sixty remote acres of meadow and woodland. Large, airy workshop rising out of flowered field off murderous back-country dirt road.

Painting and graphics major at University of Rhode Island.

Studied pottery at Haystack and Boston's Museum School.

Independent production potter seven years.

Produces mostly functional C/10 stoneware, some porcelain and raku.

Uses three basic glazes with wide-ranging results.

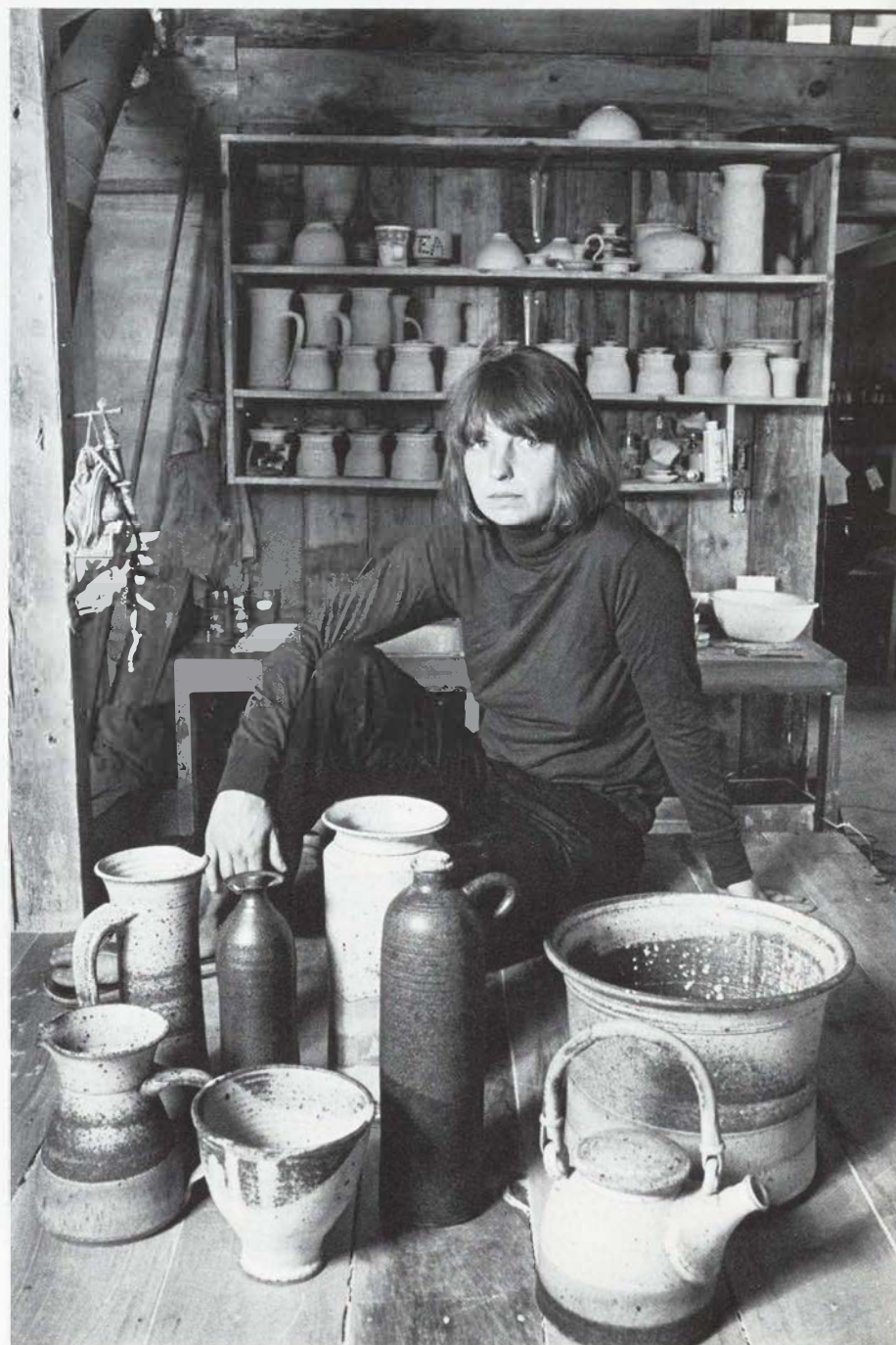
Fires in 50 cubic foot sprung arch gas kiln.

Sells majority of work through 'Chosen Works,' a crafts cooperative she co-founded in Bangor, Maine.

Feels special kinship to work of Paulus Berenson and Richard Schneider.

"Pots are flat forms for my glazing which I think of as landscapes."

"Although my own work is basically straightforward, I'm open to, and can appreciate, a diversity of ways of working with clay; if somebody is doing what they want to be doing, then that makes it valid."





JEFF PETERS  
Box 151  
Georgetown, ME 04548

Former Californian. Started working seriously with clay while in high school. Continued at the University of New Mexico with William Bailey and Carl Paak.

Full-time production potter seven years. Mostly functional C/10 stoneware and porcelain, both slab and thrown. Heavy emphasis on brushwork and slip designs.

Prefers working with people. For last four years apprentices have become integral part of work cycle. Helpmate Jill Holbrook provides much of the organizing energy in the studio.

Workshop built of rough-cut logs into side of rock ledge located on narrow, one-road peninsula.

Fires in 55 cubic foot sprung arch gas kiln.

Came to Maine "because the people here seem really loose and mellow and easy to get along with."

Feels it is important for potters to develop a "common-sense knowledge of materials."

"Pottery is timeless, warm, and natural."





CHRIS PECK  
Box 333  
Waterboro, ME 04061

Started working in clay at age 11, at State University, Potsdam, New York.

Essentially self-taught, though considers Art Sennett a strong influence.

"My problem throughout my life has been that I was always too young to do anything that I wanted to do."

Production consists mostly of functional C/10 stoneware and porcelain. Dinner sets are a specialty.

Forms influenced by early American redware, rocks, and shells.

"I like my pieces to make little environments."

Fires in 15 cubic foot electric kiln and 40 cubic foot crossdraft gas kiln.

Shares studio with Patti Benson, printmaker.

Sells mostly wholesale; some retail from combination craft and antique shop adjoining studio

"I think I have more respect for the work of past craftsmen than I have for today's craftsmen."

Professional musician and composer.





BARBARA O'BRIEN  
Main Street  
Newfield, ME 04056

Independent studio potter five years.

Former college English teacher. Self-taught potter. Built first wheel without knowing pots had to be fired.

Produces functional stoneware, heavy on "kitchen pottery."

"My pottery comes right out of, and then fits right back into, my daily routine."

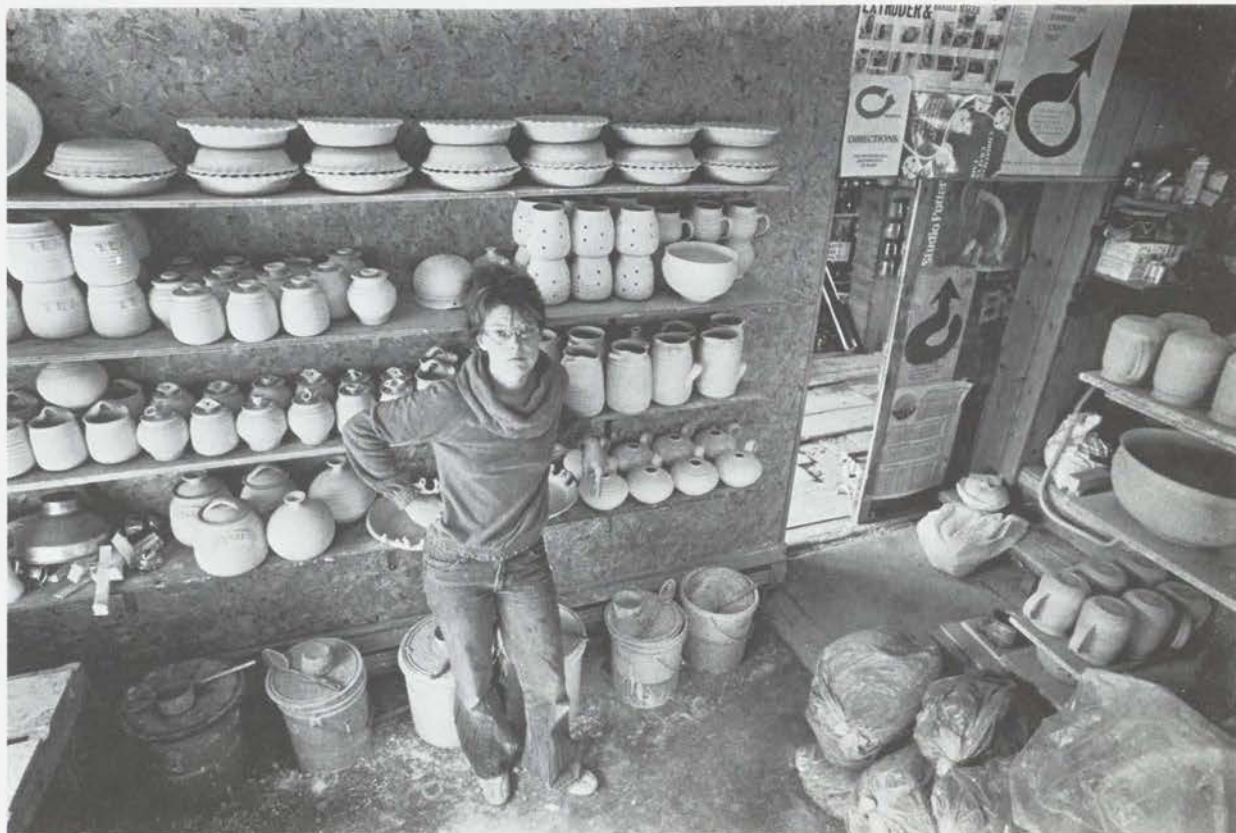
Combined workshop/gallery located next to restored Victorian village.

Shares workspace with Tom Mostrom, clay supplier and gentleman potter.

Fires in 20 cubic foot sprung arch gas kiln. Prefers small studio and kiln because "It keeps things moving at a good pace."

"What's important about clay is its responsiveness, how alive it feels on the wheel—all things are still possible while the pot's still wet. By the time it's bonedry, to me it's dead."

"I never worry about my lack of art background. All that deprives me of is the drive for recognition that seems to be the downfall of so many potters. Most 'artist-potters' are so occupied in their heads with designing that their hands are idle."





LAURIE ADAMS  
Upper Mountain Street  
Camden, ME 04843

Maker of functional C/10 stoneware and porcelain since 1973.

Studied architecture and graphic arts at Bennington College.

Later worked with Bill Wyman at Boston's Museum School, and M.C. Richards at Haystack.

Former lecturer on history of pottery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Influences are Sung dynasty pottery and early Korean folk pottery; paintings of Paul Klee and Miro.

Fires in 30 cubic foot sprung arch gas kiln.

Uses some local clays from Deer Isle, as underglaze.

"Porcelain and stoneware each have attributes which challenge me. Porcelain's delicate, iridescent quality lends itself to subtlety and depth of glaze: a wonderful surface to decorate. Stoneware's more rugged quality I like for cooking vessels and handbuilt work."

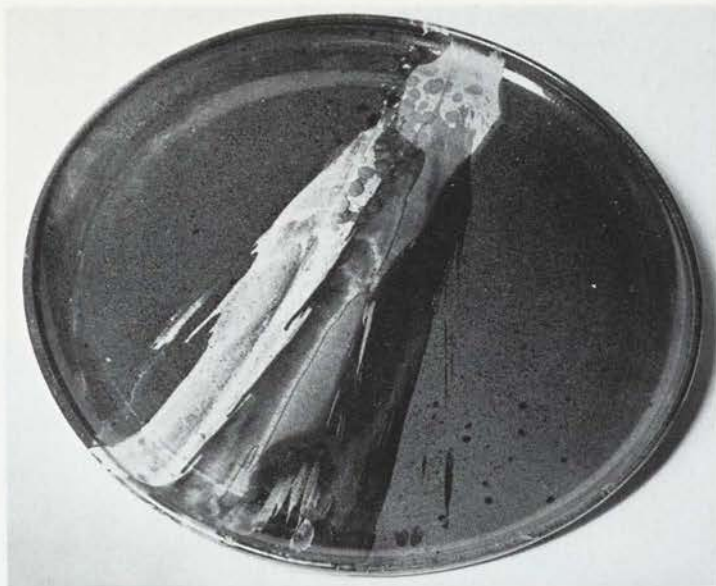
"It really is the process that is most important to me—after I unload the kiln, after that moment of magic, after the pot is on the shelf—then essentially, as far as I'm concerned, it is over and gone."

"Objects made by people for others to really use are a reality that machines negate. I prefer to think of the world in personal terms, that is part of our identities."



Paul Oratoisky





MARVIN GARNER  
Lincolnville, ME 04849

Studio potter twenty-five years.

Studied painting at the New School with Stuart Davis and Kunioshi, and pottery at Cranbrook with Toshiko Takaezu.

Former chairman of Fine Arts Department, State University, Potsdam, New York.

Works mostly with large stoneware vases and platters.

"Most porcelain really doesn't appeal to me because it lacks the warmth and intimacy of stoneware."

"When working on platters I tend to think from a painter's point of view."

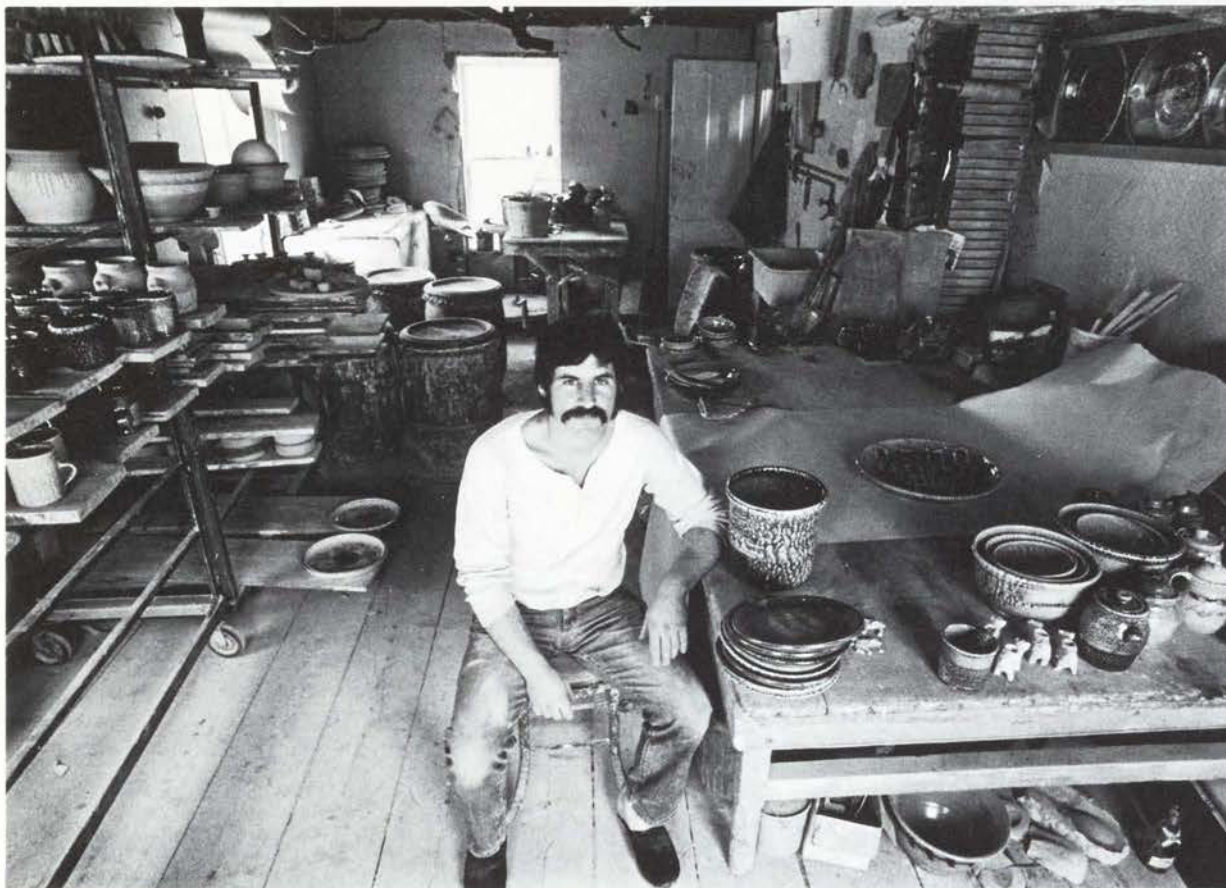
Fires in 40 cubic foot catenary arch gas kiln.

Sells mainly through bookstore/gallery run by wife, Peggy.

We have more skillful potters today than at any other time in history—there is no limit to what they can do. I just wish that they would use their imaginations and get off this stale pop/funk kick. The Dadaist plowed that field with much more success in the early 1920's."

"If you work directly with clay and you work with it a great deal, you're almost sure to discover that anything is possible."





RON GARFINKLE  
Monroe, ME 04591

Former engineer. Served two years with Peace Corps in Peru; later spent two and one-half years at Penland as part-time assistant to Bill Brown.

Settled in Maine "because the land was cheap and the atmosphere sympathetic to craftsmen. Just about everybody works with his hands in some way up here."

Full-time production potter since 1969.

Works almost entirely in singlefire salt glaze. Most interested in the dynamics of firing and in retaining wet look of freshly made pots. Does most decoration on wheel.

"I seem to be more in tune with the pot when I'm throwing. I don't like to go back and fuss over things—the pot has to be pretty much done before I'll take it off the wheel."

Fires in 100 cubic foot sprung arch kiln built of scrounged chrome-magnesium bricks from local cement plant. Oilfires with two scrapped domestic burners. Stack made of 30 foot stainless steel aircraft pontoons.

Working away from strictly functional toward modular, sculptural forms.

"If you take a brush stroke and repeat it, the pattern that emerges is oftentimes much more interesting than the brush stroke alone. The same goes for forms. A series of forms creates a much more interesting statement, especially when the salt kiln delivers incredible surface variations."





DAN AND MARY LOU WEAVER  
Box 60  
Ashville, ME 04607

Independent production potters since 1971.  
Studio and retail shop in 100-year-old former general store and post office, overlooking quiet marsh-lined cove.

Produce mostly functional pottery, all C/10 stoneware, about equally divided between slab and thrown. Most forms worked on by both.

Both former Texans, B.A.'s from University of Dallas.

Dan later received MFA from Alfred University.

Major influences: Val Cushing, Bob Turner, and fellow Texan, John McAlroy.

Well organized work cycle—three weeks throwing, one week glazing, firing, and shipping.

Fire in 90 cubic foot flat-roofed, shuttle gas kiln about ten times yearly.

Most work sold directly from shop, some by mail from own catalog. Large sinks, thrown and slab formed, are standard production items.

Dan, a master wood and metal worker, currently building a boat shop. Mary Lou an accomplished quilt maker and musician.

They consider themselves totally outside the New York crafts scene “—and happily so.”

Dan: “I’m not interested in promoting myself as an individual. I’m interested in selling what I make so that I can pay my bills.”

Mary Lou: “A potter who teaches will seem to be speaking for the potter who makes pottery for a living—and that’s very annoying.”





# Maine Conversation



DENNIS VIBERT  
Route 1  
West Sullivan, ME 04689

My interest in crafts really started as occupational therapy in a RAF hospital during World War II. After the war, my wife Ruth and I left England and went to Canada, where I studied pottery for one year at the Ecole des Arts et Metiers in Montreal. At the end of the school year we came straight to West Sullivan, Maine. Because I was a foreigner and had no work permit I couldn't work at a regular job, so we had to make a living from our pottery very quickly, and we did, more or less. There was only one other potter that I knew of in Maine at the time, so it was far from a sure thing.

I first built a very crude kiln that burned oil and wood, but that was a complete failure because it was built too cheaply. We then borrowed some money and bought a Denver oil kiln, which we used for a number of years. A pretty bad fire gutted the workshop—and with it the kiln—so to get going again in a hurry we turned to an electric kiln. With the Denver we used to bisque. When we started firing with the electric kiln we couldn't get enough production out of it, so we simply stopped bisquing. Since then our production has been almost totally once-fired in an electric kiln.

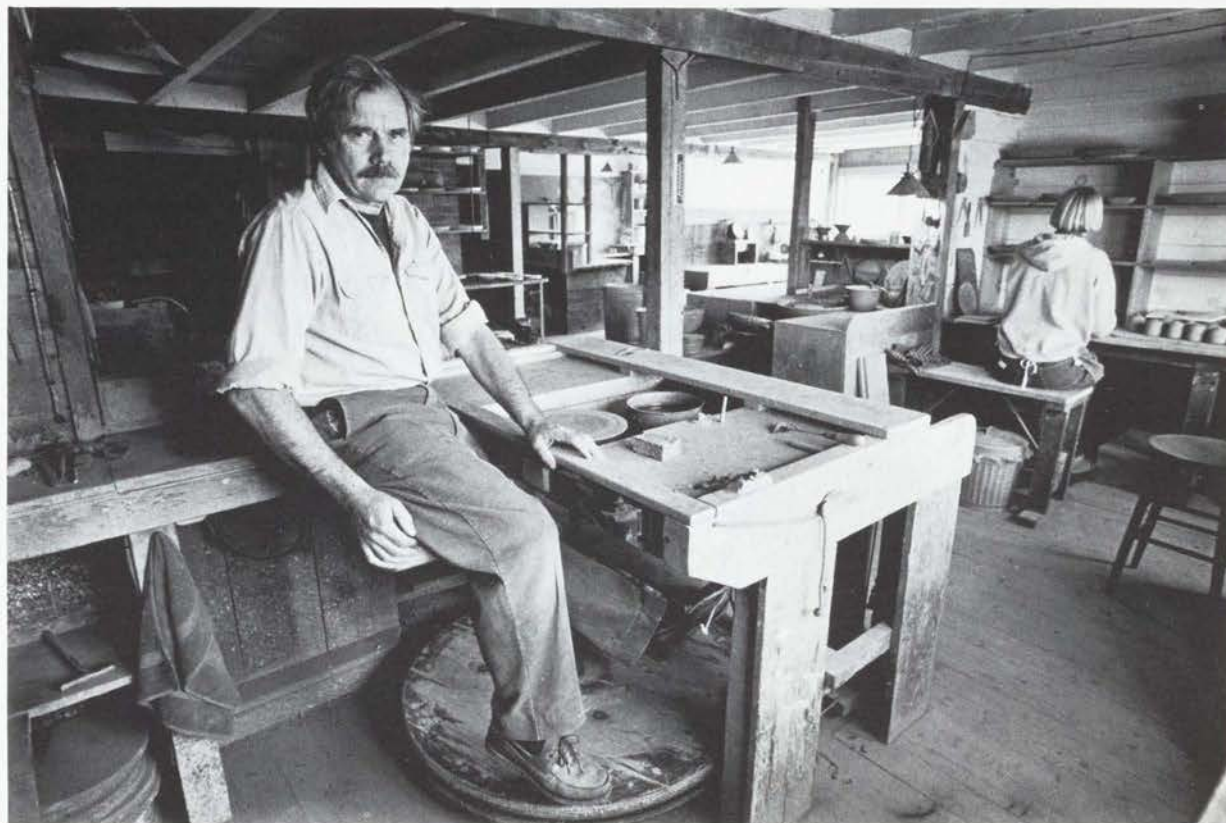
The people who write about kilns—like Leach and Rhodes—in the little that they condescend to devote to electric kilns, say that, of course, if you can't do any better, if you live in an apartment, you can always have an electric kiln. But they say nothing else about it.

The electricity in West Sullivan is generated by water power from the Union River in Ellsworth, and therefore I feel that it is more ecologically respectable than burning up oil products, or even denuding woodland. It is a completely renewable resource. And here at least, per cubic foot, electric kilns are cheaper to fire than gas kilns. This may not have been true four years ago, but since then propane has more than doubled in cost. Another reason why electricity is cheaper for firing is that the kiln can be built of lighter material, and the whole of the kiln is stacking space, so there's far less structure to heat. Also, you don't have a lot of heat going up the chimney. Electricity may be more expensive for heating a house, but in a kiln it is very much more efficiently applied than in a fuel-burning kiln—and of course, electric kilns are easier to fire. We start our firing at about five o'clock in the evening and we fire all night without any fuss; we can do that three times a week. By omitting the bisque firing and having a fast firing and cooling

cycle, an electric kiln can have the production capability of a very much larger fuel burning kiln.

It is commonly said by the kiln 'authorities' that electric kilns have a 'neutral' atmosphere, neither reducing nor oxidizing. In fact, electric kilns have the most strongly oxidizing atmosphere possible because the atmosphere inside the kiln simply consists of air. In fuel burning kilns, even in an oxidized firing, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide are constituents of the kiln atmosphere.

I started with the idea of doing English-type slipware using native clay which I dug locally. All that we are doing now more or less evolved from the native clay, which is fusible at middle range stoneware temperatures. I don't see the point of firing any higher than I have to. It is expensive (in terms of fuel) and hard on the kiln and the kiln furniture, and in the long run it doesn't produce any stronger ware. Our casseroles, which are unglazed on the outside, can be taken directly from the refrigerator and put in the oven or on top





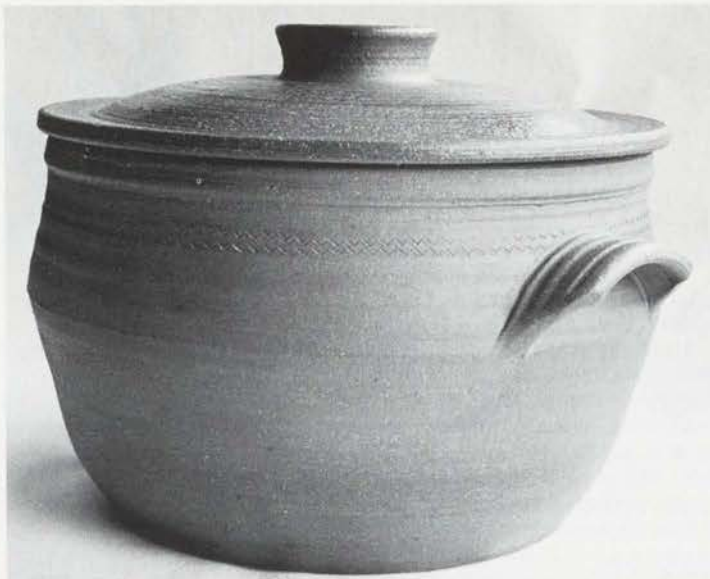
of a black iron stove. Occasionally I have trouble, and this is when one of the clays will change a bit, with the body becoming too dense. An adjustment in the firing temperature between C/4 and C/5 normally will solve the problem. This is one advantage to doing small, frequent firings—you can keep a pretty close watch on things.

We glaze all our tableware when the clay is bonedry. The glaze has a fair amount of bentonite, and also EPK, which is somewhat plastic. I use the bentonite to keep the glaze in suspension. This is necessary because of the frit, which would rapidly settle out otherwise. The frit is there to act like tiny chips of glass that will interlock with the rest of the glaze material, making a tougher coating and preventing the glaze from flaking off. We deflocculate the glaze with sodium silicate, which reduces considerably the amount of water needed. The rest of our production is slip-glazed when the clay is leatherhard. These glazes contain about forty percent ball clay. Many of our pots are first dipped on the outside and then sprayed on the inside (which can be done immediately). I don't think that a body that will absorb water very fast, a very open body, is very good for one firing.

I don't think that the only important aspect of pottery is artistic expression. I think pottery is something which, like other crafts, gives a large number of people a chance to make a living on their own, to live where they want to, and to be their own masters. At the same time, if potters can make objects that are useful, objects that people can use and enjoy in their homes, which give them pleasure at a reasonable price, then they are performing a very useful service. I think that these two aspects of the craft are really the most important.

Ruth and I started "Pine Tree Kiln" in 1948, making tableware, kitchenware and also such individual pieces as vases, bowls, lampbases and lanterns. We sold wholesale for a few years, but eventually set up a retail salesroom in the barn. Our business is now entirely retail from our shop. We also sell the work of other craftsmen, including painters and printmakers.

About fifteen years ago we were joined by another potter, Frank Stoke, an Alfred graduate. In addition, Judy Mabus now works with us part-time doing drape mold and slabwork, and some decoration.



At one time, I was a little apprehensive that perhaps the market would become flooded, but that hasn't happened. Along with the increase in the actual market. I happened to be looking through a trade paper called *Ceramic Industry* and reading some very boring things about a convention meeting where the speaker was addressing small manufacturers of what is called 'artware'—manufacturers whose sales have suffered greatly in the past few years. The speaker attributed the drop in sales partly to the increase in the number of studio potters, so evidently this is where a great part of the market is coming from. There is a huge potential market that can be taken from industry—the weekly output of one automatic jiggering machine at Homer-Laughlin probably equals the total annual production of all the potters in the United States.

JOHN OKIE  
Main Street  
Wiscasset, ME 04578

Independent potter six years.

BFA in ceramics from University of New Mexico.

Set up pottery with Monty Smith and Jeff Peters in Georgetown, Maine; later bought three-story nineteenth century general store in center of busy coastal village.

Recently taught at maximum security prison.

Produces C/10 stoneware, mostly functional, occasional one-of-a-kind for relaxation. Fires in 45 cubic foot sprung arch gas kiln, glaze-fired twice monthly. Sells 95% retail from own gallery.

Southwest Pueblo pottery strong influence on decorative motifs.

"I feel that clay has become the focal point of my energies—I love the idea of working with my hands, shaping and molding a material that caters to my whim."

"With clay, what you put into it you eventually get out of it."

