

Ceramics

MONTHLY





"Darted Teapot," 9 inches in height, stoneware, wheel thrown, altered and assembled, salt fired, by Suze Lindsay, Bakersville, North Carolina.

Suze Lindsay

by Samantha Moore McCall



"Bud Vases," 7 inches in height, thrown and altered stoneware, salt fired.

If the Penland School of Crafts ever needs an advocate to boost its reputation, Suze Lindsay may be just the woman for the job.

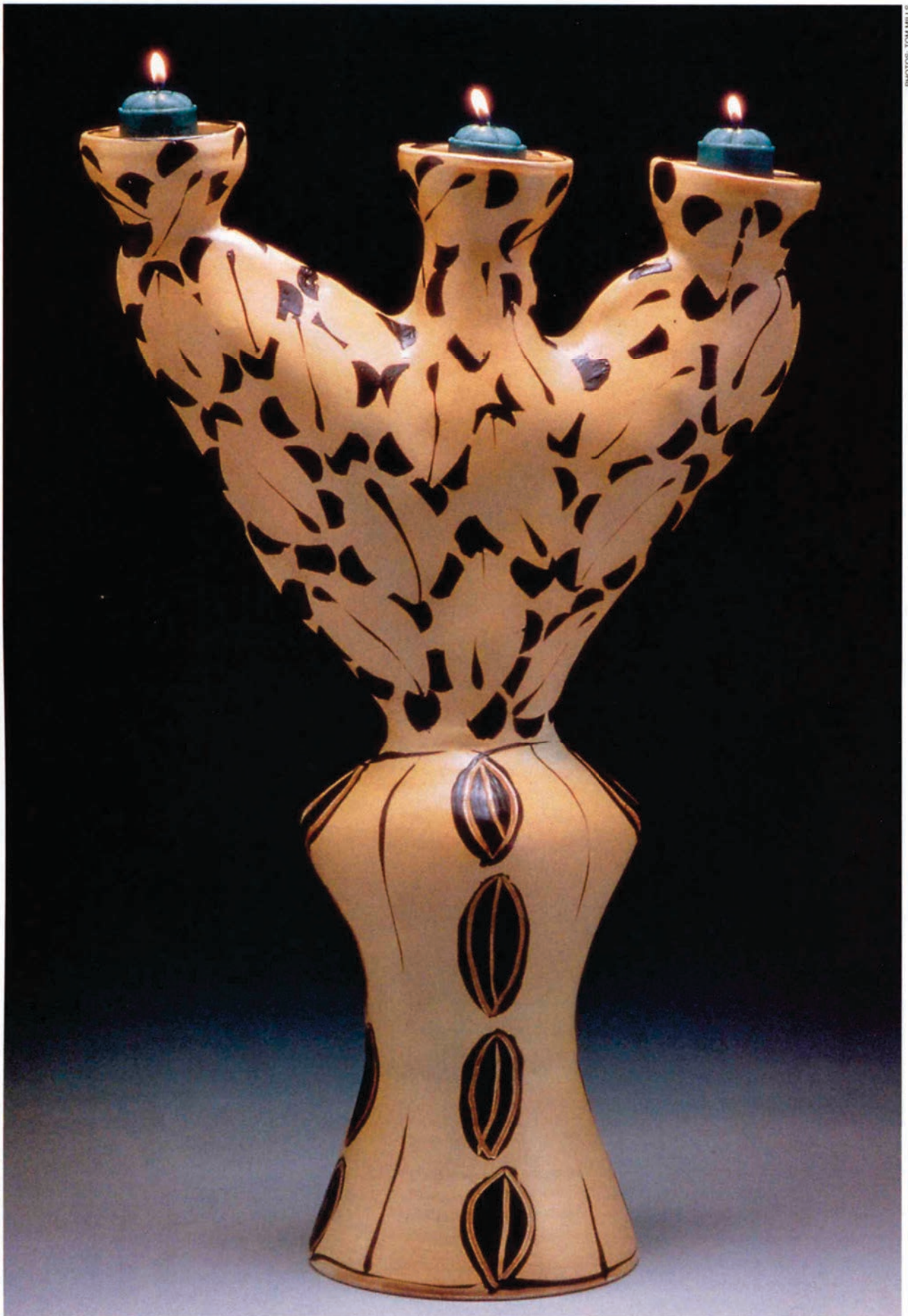
Why Lindsay? Well, perhaps it's because it's nearly impossible to discuss ceramics with Lindsay without her referring to the craft school every few sentences. That's not always the case, of course, but sometimes it appears that way. Indeed, the bonds between the two are as strong and striking as the sinuous lines and bold markings of her salt-fired stoneware.

Lindsay has been a studio potter since 1992, and she credits much of her success to this 69-year-old crafts school located in the foothills of western North Carolina. "Penland is such a magical place because of the creative energy that's there and the exciting people who come through it," she says. "Penland opened up a whole new world for me. I don't want to sound hokey, but it really changed my life. There's no question I wouldn't be where I am today without it. I've really always kept my roots there, even while I was at graduate school."

As outgoing and cheery in person as her functional stoneware pots are bright and fun, Lindsay is known for her once-fired, highly decorated vases, teapots, mugs, plates, pitchers, candelabra, platters and bowls. "I've seen and held so many pots over the years that I think I can fairly say that among the potters today who once-fire and alter their work like Suze does, she's the best," says Joe Bova, who is currently serving the first year of his two-year term

"Bouquet Vase," 15 inches in height, wheel-thrown and altered stoneware, brushed with slips, salt fired.





PHOTOS: TOM MILLS

"Candelabrum," 28 inches in height, thrown and handbuilt stoneware, with slips, salt fired.



"Gravy Boats," to 8 inches in height, thrown and altered stoneware, with dipped and brushed slips, salt fired.

as Penland's chairman of the board of trustees. Bova, a ceramics sculptor and art professor, recently stepped down from his post as director of the School of Art at Ohio University (Athens) but continues to teach ceramics there. "Suze's work is really eye-dazzling and her upbeat personality shines through in her pots," he adds.

Lindsay's singular work did not evolve overnight. In fact, it has matured over a decade of unyielding hard work, dedication and commitment to clay from a woman who majored in speech pathology as an undergrad at Pennsylvania State University in 1980.

Indeed, Lindsay originally started "playing" (a verb she frequently uses when talking about how she works) with clay as a hobby while teaching hearing-impaired children in New Orleans in the early 1980s. She recalls that "it took me two years to learn how to center." But her teacher at the local community center encouraged her to do a summer workshop at Penland, a suggestion she readily accepted, unaware that she was

irreversibly setting the wheels of destiny into motion.

Indeed, that one fateful workshop eventually led Lindsay into becoming a core student at Penland for a year and a half. This status allowed her, among other things, to take seven workshops in one summer, in exchange for working part time at the school. About the same time, Lindsay started to sell her work at craft fairs, and she even began thinking she was on her way to becoming a production potter.

"Then, one of my first teachers at Penland told me during a workshop not to quit my day job, and she was right," Lindsay admits good-naturedly. "I went into Penland thinking I could be a production potter, but it was a very humbling experience for me to be around such great potters all the time. That was quite a reality check for me."

Undeterred, she decided to go to graduate school to further her studies in clay, and was pleasantly surprised to learn that the university just down the road from where she was living

had one of the finest ceramics programs in the country. In 1989, under the direction of Linda Arbuckle and Joe Bova, then later Bobby Silverman and Kate Blacklock, she embarked on a three-year M.F.A. degree at Louisiana State University.

While at grad school, Lindsay began to identify the vast array of historical references, natural objects and textiles that continue to influence and shape her work today. Among those influences are Mimbres pottery from the American Southwest, ancient Greek figures from the Cyclades, Japanese 16th-century Oribe ware, textiles and designs from indigenous cultures around the world, and the trees in her own backyard. Not to be forgotten are her "pottery heroes," those who have influenced her work as well, including Linda Arbuckle, Clary Illian, Jeff Oestreich and Michael Simon.

It was also at grad school that she began to really experiment with form, once firing, and altering and stacking pots. Simultaneously, she began playing



Suze Lindsay unloading a salt kiln at her studio in Bakersville, North Carolina.

with the use of bold lines and repetitive designs—marks Bova now refers to as her “calligraphic strokes.”

Following grad school, Lindsay once again returned to Penland, where she had been accepted as an artist-in-residence for three years. The residency program provided her with a safe base from which to further develop her individual style and to launch her business career as a studio potter.

“It was here and through this program that I learned that it is possible for artists to support themselves and actually make a living by selling their work,” she says, repeating a message she frequently shares with budding ceramists and students. “I was surrounded by all sorts of other artists, from glassblowers and paper makers to weavers and jewelers, and was able to learn a great deal from them about how to financially support myself in the art world.”



“Cappuccino Cups,” 4 inches in height, thrown and altered stoneware, with sgraffito decoration, salt fired.

Nowadays, she spends about 75% of her time putting in long hours, seven days a week in the studio she and her husband recently built on their property in Bakersville, North Carolina, which—not by coincidence—is about 20 minutes from Penland.

"I'm spoiled rotten living in the community I do, completely surrounded by other talented artists," says Lindsay. "I cannot imagine living anywhere else. Penland's presence over the years has attracted a rich community of craftspeople who have come here to live."

She spends much of the remaining 25% of her time on the road giving lectures, workshops and teaching at universities and craft schools. "This is always a really rejuvenating time for me. It's a time for me to question things, and I end up learning as much from my students as I hope they do from me," she says.

It is during these workshops and classes that she generously shares her techniques with students eager to learn more about how she alters and stacks thrown forms, as well as how she decorates them in an earthy palette of stains, slips and glazes for salt firing.

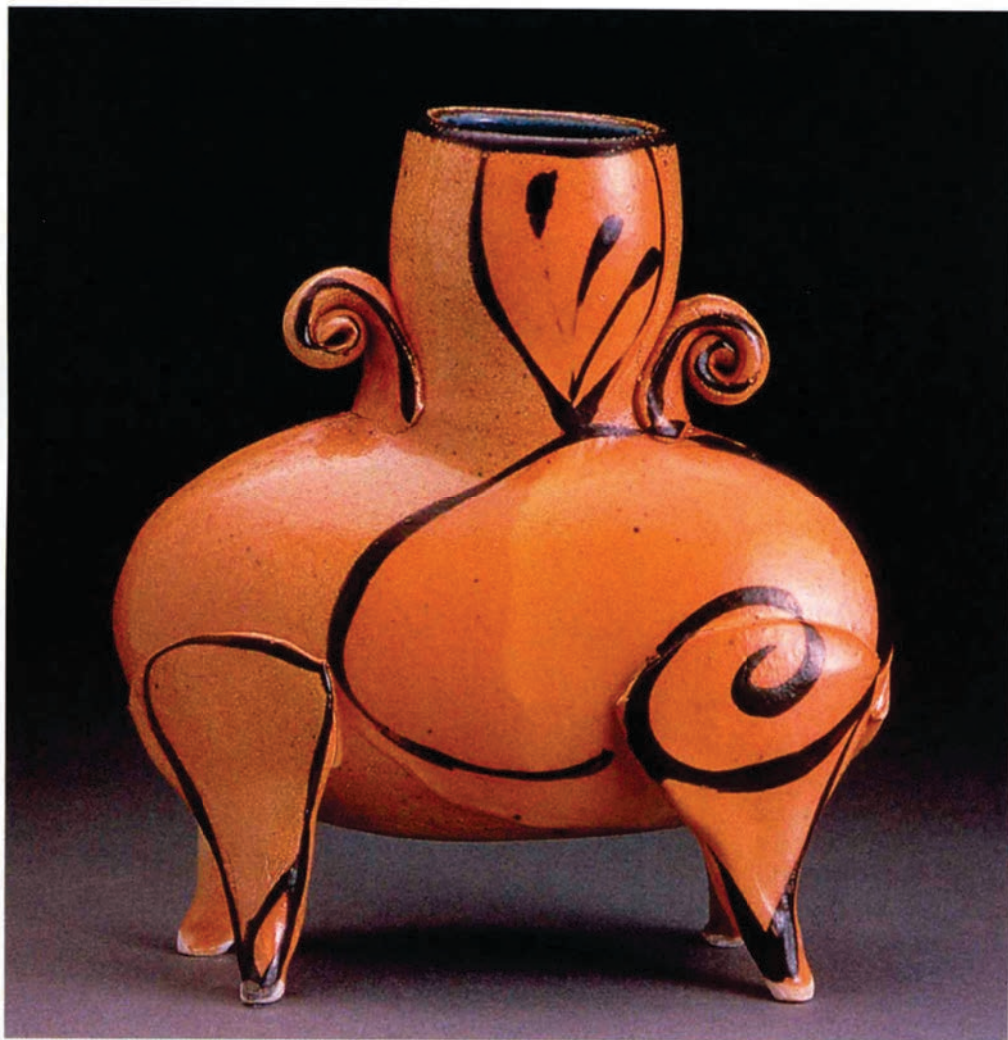
Most of her work is thrown on a treadle wheel, but she also enjoys handbuilding and often combines the two methods, frequently adding handbuilt elements to thrown pieces. For example, her 2- to 3-foot-high candelabra have a thrown base that's been altered, but the three branches extending upward are handbuilt. For her bud vases, which are about 7 to 10 inches high, she often makes the base in slump molds, then adds a narrow cylinder to the top and attaches handbuilt feet or small handles.

Except for the occasional mug or plate, rarely does one of her pieces escape some form of alteration. In fact, many are oveled, some thrown with bottoms and others without. Some forms are so animated they appear to have a stance and an attitude all their own, with some resembling sassy women with their hands on their hips.

"I always rib the outside, too, to make a smooth surface while throwing so that my pieces will be easier to decorate later," she explains. "And I really like to play



"Floor Candlestick," 40 inches in height, thrown, altered and stacked stoneware, with dipped, brushed and incised slips, salt fired.



"Bud Vase," 7 inches in height, wheel-thrown and handbuilt stoneware, salt fired.

with proportion, and my method of stacking various volumes produces variation for surface decoration.

"I make the same forms over and over again but they are never exactly the same twice, and that's what keeps things interesting for me in the studio," she says. "Also, I like the conversations pots have when they are grouped together and, as a result, I frequently make work in a series."

All her pots are adorned with some sort of repeated design or pattern, including brushed swirls, circles, lines, dots and leaves.

The time she saves by buying ready-made clay, minimal trimming and once firing is used in the decoration process. The bright yellows, greens, purples and cobalt blues often found in the interior of her pieces provide a rich contrast to the outside decoration. Splashes and dots of color are also occasionally highlighted on the outside of her work but rarely, if

ever, is a piece immersed completely into a vat of glaze, let alone absent of any decoration. And no glazing session is complete without highlighting—especially the feet, lips and joints—with black stain.

"I make pottery to fulfill function and provoke visual as well as tactile delight," she explains. "I like to think of pots as works of art that are integrated into our daily living through use and participation. My hopes are that these pots please the person who uses them and they suit that person's needs.

"I hope to give my pots a personality that will invite use, whether it be for your first cup of coffee in the morning, or a fancy dinner party," notes Lindsay in her artist's statement.

Her goal is "to make good, happy pots....I love it when people come up to me after seeing my work and say, 'You must be a happy person. It looks like you have a great time in your studio.'"

Another of Lindsay's goals is to do more collaborative work with her husband, Kent McLaughlin, who worked as a studio potter for 18 years. Occasionally, he throws pieces that Lindsay later embellishes with her earthy palette of glazes and slips. It's an arrangement that works well for both and it's one they'd both like to pursue in the future.

And despite her vast array of symmetrical markings, part of Lindsay's continued creative quest is for her to find her own marks. Symbols that she can call her own.

"It's exciting and fun to pick and choose among our historical influences, wherever they might come from. I continue to keep finding motifs from nature, then rearrange them in different ways, but I'm still searching for my own personal mark. And part of that search is trying to figure out what a 20th-century American mark is in ceramics. I haven't found the answer yet." ▲



"Canister Set," to 11 inches in height, salt-fired stoneware, by Suze Lindsay, Bakersville, North Carolina.

Recipes

Suze Lindsay's preferred clay body is Phoenix, a blend developed and mixed at Highwater Clays in Asheville. It is a smooth, light stoneware body with good green strength for raw glazing and excellent thermal shock properties. Slip is applied at the leather-hard stage, with thicknesses adjusted for brushing (thicker) or for dipping (thinner).

Black Slip

Alberta Slip	78.26%
Ball Clay	19.57
Bentonite	2.17
	<u>100.00%</u>
Add: Chrome Oxide	7.61%
Cobalt Carbonate	1.63%
Red Iron Oxide	1.63%

Willie's 6 Tile Slip

Nepheline Syenite	9.80%
6 Tile Clay	68.63
Bentonite	1.96
Grolleg Kaolin	14.71
Flint	4.90
	<u>100.00%</u>

Mustard Slip

Custer Feldspar	30%
6 Tile Clay	30
Avery Kaolin	10
Grolleg Kaolin	30
	<u>100%</u>
Add: Titanium Dioxide	15%

Glazes were adjusted for greenware by adding or increasing bentonite; thus, the following recipes may not fit bisqueware:

Oribe Glaze (Cone 9-10)

Bone Ash	1.05%
Custer Feldspar	30.91
Talc	7.81
Whiting	22.36
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	12.55
Flint	25.32
	<u>100.00%</u>
Add: Copper Carbonate	5.49%
Bentonite	2.64%

Rob's Green Glaze (Cone 9-10)

Colemanite	4.74%
Strontium Carbonate	7.11
Whiting	17.06
Cornwall Stone	71.09
	<u>100.00%</u>
Add: Copper Carbonate	9.48%
Bentonite	1.90%

Pete Pinnell Strontium Matt Glaze (Cone 6-10)

Lithium Carbonate	1%
Strontium Carbonate	20
Nepheline Syenite	60
Ball Clay	10
Flint	9
	<u>100%</u>
Add: Bentonite	2%

For turquoise, add 5% copper carbonate. Use Epsom salts to prevent settling.