

Mountain Life

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Creative Living in the Southern High Country \$3.95



Partners In Clay

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And, as Suze has learned, the better the belly, the better the pot.

With all this talk of bellies and lips, it might not be clear that Suze and Kent are professional potters. Bellies, lips, shoulders and feet are just the accepted trade words they use as part of their everyday ceramic conversation.

While Kent hails from Florida and Suze from Louisiana, they met while learning and refining their craft at the renowned Penland School of Craft in Penland, North Carolina. Both fell in love, not only with the rural region surrounded by the majestic Blue Ridge Mountains, but with each other, choosing to settle just minutes away from the school that brought them together.

"The first time I came to Penland," Kent remembers, "I fell in love with it. The mountains, the wildflowers, the climate, were all great. What really impressed me, though, was how many world-class artists called this region home. I have to admit, it's cool to live in the same neighborhood."

"Not only is it a beautiful place," Suze adds, looking at the lush greenery and peaks that surround the couple's small farmhouse, "but here, we can have an affordable lifestyle that we enjoy, not to mention one that allows us the opportunity to do what we love."

What they love, of course, is making pots—big pots, little pots, planters, sinks, dishes, mugs, bowls and more—all under the moniker Fork Mountain Pottery. "Other couples are amazed

that we can work in the same studio even though our work is so different," Suze remarks. "Most couples we know have their own spaces. But it works for us. We leave each other alone but we're also there when we need feedback from each other. It's nice to have someone to talk to when you're figuring out a problem or process."

It's also nice to be able to sell two different bodies of work in the tiny outbuilding that houses their gallery. "There's no doubt," Kent notes, "that it helps to have different kinds of work in there. If a visitor doesn't like one of our styles, quite often they'll like the other."

During spring and summer months, when the couple's vegetable garden is spewing tomatoes and okra at an alarming pace, visitors not only get to take home the pots they purchase, they often get to cart away a little bag of fresh produce. "Gardening is definitely a hobby we enjoy doing together," Suze says.

What kind of work do visitors leave with? Kent sees his work as being straightforward utilitarian pottery. "Primarily, I work with high-



Top: Suze Lindsay, *Stacked Candlestick*, salt fired stoneware, 15" x 3" x 2".

Bottom: Kent McLaughlin, *Platter*, celadons on porcelain clay.

Unknowing eavesdroppers would certainly wonder what the heck was going on if they overheard Kent McLaughlin tell his wife Suze Lindsay that her belly was off and that her lips weren't just right. Fortunately, Suze knows exactly what he's talking about and no offense is taken. That's because the aforementioned belly doesn't belong to her, but to the clay vessel she is crafting.



fired porcelain," he says. "I've got about three or four different glaze combinations I like to use." When

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his customers tell him they see the mountains in some of his glaze combinations, he’s not surprised. “Certainly,” he offers, “I’m influenced by what I see out my window every day.”

Suze’s work comes with more of a funky, almost Asian influence. Her earth-toned vessels with their glib brush strokes come alive with a unique movement and attitude. “There are so many different types of clays and glazes and firing options to choose from,” Suze cites. “People choose the clay that possesses the qualities they’re looking for. Kent and I use different kinds of clay, and we also fire the work differently. Where Kent uses porcelain, I prefer stoneware. Where he fires in a gas kiln, I salt fire my work.”

Despite their vast years of experience as potters, both admit there’s still a lot of experimentation that goes on in the studio. “There are endless variables in this work,” Kent says. “First, you need the finished idea and then you have to work backwards.” Suze adds, “There’s a progression our work goes through. You make something happen and

then you learn from those results, whether they worked or were mistakes. Hopefully you can apply what you’ve learned.”

One of the things they’ve learned is that while they love making their own work, they also love admiring the work of their peers. “Part of why I enjoy looking at other work is for purely professional reasons,” Suze comments. “The other part is purely personal. As Kent and I get to know other potters, we often trade work with them.”

Those trades have netted a nice collection that lines every nook and cranny of their home and studio. In fact, even the dishes and glasses are hand-crafted. “The best part about our morning coffee routine,” Suze smiles, “is choosing whose mug we’re going to drink from. Once we choose the mug, it’s like we have the chance to visit with that potter. It’s a great way to start the day.”

Fork Mountain Pottery is located at 1782 Fork Mountain Road, Bakersville, NC 28705. Hours are 10 - 5 daily. Or visit Fork Mountain Pottery online at www.pottersoftheroan.com.



Above: Kent puts the finishing touches on another expertly formed clay vessel.



Above: From her Western, North Carolina, home Suze indulges herself in one of her favorite activities, throwing clay on the potter’s wheel.