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Ka Pottery

HOBBY TURNS TO THRIVING BUSINESS

Nestled in thick woods down a country road in eastern Covington County is a unique treasure. Located on Shirley Sanford Road, Ka Pottery is a quaint studio where Claudia Ka Cartee along with husband Troy, of 32 years, have taken a hobby and developed a thriving business. >



*story & photos
by
Amy Beets*



Pictured: Claudia Ka Cartee

↳ The potter, Claudia, moved back to Covington County in 1974, where she and her father, Claude Mackie Newton, a molds maker, rebuilt a small pottery studio from materials recycled from an old building owned by her brother.

The studio was built down in the woods where Claudia sought to build her new life as an artist. Nearby, Claudia and Troy built a cozy house a short walk from the studio. Later on the Cartees built a bigger studio with a kiln shed.

A professional potter since 1973, Claudia creates unique pieces with distinct glazes. Her pieces range from hand-built forms to sets of dinnerware, which she has found is the key to making a living while still doing something she loves. Claudia developed a style resembling a landscape in the late 1980's, that has become a signature design for her dinnerware. Lately she has been thinking more about trying solid styles with design elements and breaking out of her traditional landscape to give her clients more variety.

She has also begun a series of square and triangle dinner plates and found it extremely refreshing and new, branching out from the traditional round plates.

“When I get orders for dinnerware, I make twice the amount of the order, so I can make sure that it is

absolutely perfect for my customers.”

Claudia will throw a piece of pottery, trim any excess clay, and allow it to dry for several hours, or days on a shelf. She will then apply glaze or texture to the piece, allow it to dry again and then turn it over to Troy to fire in the kiln. They screen the glaze several times to ensure a smooth finish and a strong product.

Before Claudia uses a glaze for dinnerware she sends it to a nearby lab and has it food-tested for safety. Her clients can absolutely know they are getting a safe product. Those extra steps to ensuring a safe, durable piece is what keeps small businesses, like Ka Pottery going.

Troy plans kiln loads so the space is perfectly used. He also assists in packaging pottery to ship, art shows and tasks around the studio.

“I love making dinnerware. I use my pottery all of the time at home so that I can test it for wear and tear and longevity. It seems to be very durable and I raised my daughter, Ananda, using it.”

Cartee's pottery has been know to survive multiple washes in the dishwasher; but is not recommended to be used in the microwave. She offers a guarantee on her pieces. If items should crack or the client has any trouble with it, she will replace the piece. ↳







“We take pride in the product here,” said Troy. “The personal relationship is important to small businesses. If you keep your clients happy, they will keep coming back.” The collection of pieces in her studio are almost limitless ranging from vases, teapots, river dolls, serving platters, non-utilitarian pieces, bowls, etc. but all works of art in their own respect.

Claudia received an associate’s degree in business and worked in the corporate world for four years. She soon learned the high executive career wasn’t what her heart desired and went back to school to pursue a BFA in California and received a degree in art with a ceramics emphasis. She has also done postgraduate work at the University of Southern Mississippi.

As a student in 1973, Claudia found she could sell handmade mugs for \$1 at a local tea house and make enough money to pay her rent at the time.

“I said I can do this. That was the realization that I could actually support myself. I would have to work hard, and I might in the beginning be poor, but that I could make a living. It’s grown, times have changed,” Claudia said. “The most important thing of all was getting the perfect partner, and that is Troy. We also do what he likes to do which is fly-fishing, camping and hiking in the summer. It’s great.”

Born in California, Claudia lived in Seminary as a little girl where her father farmed and ran a molds making business.

“My craftsmanship and my work ethic I know came from my father. He was a self-made man and excitedly driven by his work and his craft,” said Claudia.

Although her father passed away several years ago, Claudia said she feels his presence in her work and living on the land he tended until six months before his death, at age 81.

Claudia’s mother, Dodie Dobson, 85, paints watercolors and she is who Claudia feels she received her artistic and creative qualities from.

“I feel so blessed I have the craft and my work ethic from my father and this awesome artist sense from my mother.”

For the past 17 or so years, the Cartee’s have hosted a holiday open house at the studio. The by-invitation only event has become such a success, this year, two weekends will be dedicated to guests.



Set for Nov. 27-29 and Dec. 4-6, the open house will provide guests with a chance to tour the studio, see “pot throwing demonstrations,” and purchase pottery. They also hope to hold more open houses throughout the year and really focus on seasonal items. Guests can visit the studio by appointment only during fall, winter and spring.

“A couple of years ago we decided we didn’t want to do art shows anymore, it’s become highly competitive and the shows are so big. Our open houses have become steadily bigger and we just want to be local,” Claudia said.

For years the Cartees have traveled all over the Southwest region attending art shows and selling pottery, they have decided to slow down some and focus on the studio and the construction of a gallery a few steps from the studio. There Claudia and Troy will be able to display their pieces, meet with clients and host open houses. They hope to hold a grand opening for the gallery in 2010.

For three months of the year, they spend their time

in Colorado. They handbuilt a small cabin there and enjoy spending time with daughter Ananda, and her children Drake, 12 and Kyra, 7, of Texas and son, Jason and his children, Zachary, 17 and Brittany, 11, of California. Claudia has taught Drake, Kyra and Brittany how to throw pots and Drake has even developed his own design style, which Claudia is very excited about. While out west, Claudia said she finds inspiration and is able to clear her mind and focus on new ideas and designs.

“Every summer, I get totally refreshed and come mid-September I’m ready to finish up my pottery. The work I prepare for the fall, I throw in the spring.”

At the Colorado cabin, she has a small studio and wheel, where she can ‘throw pots’ or try out new designs. They also do a lot of fly-fishing (catch-and-release) and hiking while enjoying the beautiful views and getting back in touch with nature.

“It’s a wonderful time to empty out what I have been doing and I come back with new ideas. It keeps it new for me.”

👉 The Cartees also love cooking and entertaining friends and hope to devote more time to that.

Claudia's work is currently displayed in five galleries including the A Gallery in Hattiesburg, and has held exhibits across the south primarily in Mississippi. She has been a member of the Craftsman Guild of Mississippi since 1978 which Claudia said has "tied me to other like-minded craftman" and has provided many opportunities. She has held all of the offices in the guild as well as served on all the guild committees. She also hopes to show pottery at a gallery in Colorado next summer. To learn more about the Cartees, sign up for the open house mailing list, and purchase pottery, visit www.kapotterystudio.com." 🌿



Pictured: Claudia & Troy Cartee