

# OUR SOUTH

MAGAZINE

volume 5, number 1

## Christmas at Merrehope

Bassett Family Treasures

Claudia Cartee ■ A Grand Christmas Collection ■ Sherye Green



## Ka Pottery

*"Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand..."* Jeremiah 18:6 (KJV)

Meandering down a sun-dappled path through the piney woods outside Seminary, Mississippi, the first thought that comes to mind is "how peaceful". I am in search of the home and studio of Claudia Cartee, clay artist and as I later find out - inspiration. At the end of the path is a clearing with several wooden buildings that look as if they were always meant to be there. These buildings are Ka Pottery studio, a shed for kilns, and the newest - a gallery which houses the creations of this mistress of clay. Everything in view that is manmade has been

fashioned by Claudia, her father (the late Mackie Newton) and her husband, Troy. The new gallery is the only building in which they had to hire help outside the family to complete. So, because everything was designed, placed, built and wrought by the hands of she and her husband, the entire site is imbued with the spirit of this vivacious artist.

Claudia Cartee is an extremely talented and sensitive ambassador of this ancient art form, sharing her creations with the public and training up the next generation of potters.

Family is at the heart of everything Claudia is and everything she makes. Mackie Newton, Claudia's

father was a mold maker and owned his own ceramic casting business and several pottery shops over his lifetime. It was while working at one of these businesses in California after World War II, that Mr. Newton met his wife, Dodie Dobson, who was working there as an artist decorating the ceramics. Ms. Dobson not only painted, but was a talented sculptress, making the originals from which her husband created his molds when he opened his own shops in California, Mississippi, and later, Florida. Claudia was born in California but the family moved to Seminary, Mississippi, Mackie's hometown when she was just nine to be closer to his family. They

Story by Ashlye Shoemaker



opened a business there for a few years, then moved to Sarasota, Florida after falling in love with the area on a trip. Claudia says some of her first memories are of helping out around her parents' studio. She, her sister Linda and brother Heber, cleaned up, trimmed pieces and observed all that was being created around them.

When she was fifteen, a man came to Claudia's father's shop with a pottery wheel and she watched him work, totally captivated. Living in Florida while in high school, she had progressed so far with the clay that she even won first place in the student division of a local art show. Claudia returned to California to go to college - first, getting an AA degree in Business, then a few years later, a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of California at Fullerton. She spent the summer before she began at Fullerton, studying with a well known ceramicist, Phillip Freeman, who encouraged

her throwing on the wheel and taught her to mix glazes. It was this experience which helped her to develop the unique glazing techniques that sets her work apart from that of other ceramic artists.

Just as her father and mother did before her, Claudia has passed on the skills of her trade to her daughter, Ananda, and is now teaching her grandson Drake, 15, and granddaughter Kirrah, 10, the art of clay - from throwing on a pottery wheel to handbuilding techniques and mixing glazes. She says that both grandchildren possess the sensitivity and personality to carry on her artistic legacy long after she has gone. It is time spent in such a peaceful environment doing what she loves with the people she loves that drives Claudia forward. She considers each day, each moment a blessing and that joy emanates from her being the moment you meet her.

It was just a little over a year ago that Claudia was battling for her life.







While in her gallery in Seminary one day, she experienced a sharp pain in her neck, which was extremely unusual for the petite and sprightly artist.

Following a visit to the emergency room, she was released with a suspected pulled muscle in her neck and some medication for pain. Claudia and Troy were preparing to leave for the summer at their cabin in Colorado. Having spent a week there, she developed symptoms that finally, after weeks of illness, led to a diagnosis of a congenital venous malformation and aneurysm in the brain. This demanded brain surgery.

Claudia was operated on in Denver, Colorado by a very highly recommended neurosurgeon. She confidently states, "I knew he was there to save my life. I wasn't afraid because I felt guided to the right place. I knew I was going to do this one day at a time, one moment at a time, knowing and trusting I was

surrounded by angels. I knew I was not going to die."

The road to recovery hasn't been an easy one. She had to use a walker for some time and has permanent hearing loss in one ear, but she stays extremely positive and looks at each day as a gift. These days, she doesn't hurry herself. After the surgery, she realized, "All we have is one moment at a time. You live loving each moment as it comes, not wanting to be somewhere else." Claudia advises, "Be there because it's going to pass. Everything comes to pass. I just believe that's closest to the idea of what eternity is. That's the only way I want to live from now on."

For years, the husband and wife duo has largely made their living traveling across the South to participate in regional art shows, winning many awards along the way. In 2011, Claudia was awarded a highly coveted Artist Fellowship from the Mississippi Arts Commission for the second time, this time to complete a series of works inspired by natural rock formations she saw in Colorado. Most recently, she was chosen to be featured in a new book released by the Craftsman's Guild of Mississippi called *I am a Craftsman: 40 at 40*. This book celebrates the 40th Anniversary of the Guild and the craftsmen who have been members throughout the years. Claudia has not only been an active member since 1978, but she has also been on the Board of Directors and served as President of the Guild. She has received the

Honored Artist Award from the National Museum of Women in the Arts and has been featured in an award winning segment of Southern Expressions on Mississippi Educational Television.

Claudia and Troy hold an Annual Holiday Open House on the weekend after Thanksgiving, where local fans of her work and those in the know can purchase her dinnerware as well as other unique works of art. Claudia's mother, Dodie Dobson, who is also an artist, often displays some of her paintings alongside Claudia's work. When viewing Ms. Dobson's art, one can't help recognizing where Ms. Cartee acquired her decorative skills. This lady, who recently turned 88 years old, is also someone who enjoys life to the fullest and has used her talents well.

When Claudia was a small child, her eccentric uncle bestowed her with a funny nickname. He called her "Ka". It was only later that she found out that in Egyptian mythology the word "ka" means "the spirit". Claudia decided that the moniker suited her and her way of life, so her business is aptly named "Ka Pottery."—05

*Ka Pottery will host their Annual Holiday Open House November 23, 24, & 25 and on December 1 & 2, 2012. For more information about*

*Claudia, her work, upcoming shows, or how to get to her gallery, please call (601) 722-4948 or go to their website*

*www.kapotterystudio.com.*