



Scottish potters association newsletter

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Chair's letter

BY FIONA ROBERTSON

From me to Morgan Freeman via exploration, innovation, creativity and business development, with a wee shroom for good measure...this issue has the lot!



Spring flowers emerging in my garden

This is my final Chair's letter as I am (finally) stepping down as Chair at the AGM on 4th March at Tulliallan.

I am sure you will have gathered from my various Chair's letters that I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in the hot seat, but personal commitments have limited the time I have available. However, unless something changes between now and then, I will put myself forward for the role of Exhibitions Coordinator rather than leave the Committee completely (unless one of you is desperate for the role!).

The AGM will see several more changes to the Committee with a further three members leaving after a combined 28 years on the SPA Committee! Iain Campbell, Christine Flynn and Maria Nordgren have all decided that it is time to hand over the reins to others. With them goes an incredible wealth of experience but we know that they will always be there to share their knowledge in the background and all three with still be involved in the 50th Anniversary celebrations. Iain will also continue to collate and digitalise the archive.

In addition, we have seen quite a few other changes in the Committee over the course of the year with several members leaving for work, family or personal reasons, or to start new ventures (keep reading). It has not been without its challenges, but new members have also joined, and we have a great new Secretary, Kirsty Forsyth, and Membership Secretary, Chris Pellow, who are both settling in well to their new posts.

I am delighted to say that we do have volunteers to stand at the AGM for the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair from amongst our current committee. Both Carl and Caroline are lovely people as well as being extremely enthusiastic and full of ideas. I hope that the membership will back their appointment at the AGM as I think they will be an incredible double-act and be a very positive step forward for the SPA.

All we need now is for a few more members to step up at the AGM to fill the vacant posts (Workshops, Social Media, Newsletter and Markets) and the new committee will be able to take the SPA forward into its 50th year and beyond.

In this issue, we have a great selection of articles on the theme of personal growth and development, of challenging the creative processes to produce new and different work, or jumping whole hog into a brand new adventure.

Kicking off the issue is an article by Juliet Macleod on her wonderful winning competition piece for Potfest Scotland 2022. For those of you who know Juliet's work, you will know what a big departure this was from her norm and the result of her efforts was

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sublime.

Next, we have an interesting article by Kerstin Gren on where she comes from and how that has shaped how she works. Rather than rest on her laurels, Kerstin is constantly challenging herself and trying new creative processes to inform and develop her work.

Our new Secretary, Kirsty Forsyth, has adapted to life on Arran and has found new ways of working, both with the local community of potters and with the local clay.

Our former Secretary, Irene Hughes, stepped completely out of her comfort zone to set up a new teaching studio in Montrose. All her friends on the Committee are extremely proud of what she has achieved in such a short time and wish her every success in the future.

And talking of success! Hannah McAndrew was awarded Maker of the Year 2022 at a ceremony in the House of Lords. A very well-deserved accolade.

A little off topic but definitely a bit of fun is a short piece by Hilary Firth on mushrooms at Potfest. Its little ladybirds in 2023. And the fun continues with images from with monthly challenges.

And the issue winds up with another book review and discount code.

Yet another wonderful issue by Christine - well done - you are leaving big boots to fill.

By the time you receive this, the selections for both exhibitions this year will have taken place. If you havent been selected, fear not! We have some great opportunities about to be announced for 2024.

I am now suitably inspired to get into my studio and push the boundaries of my own creativity and I hope you will be too.

I will hand over my final words to Morgan Freeman who once said, "Challenge yourself; it's the only path which leads to growth."

Until we can meet in person, take care and best wishes.

Fiona

chair@scottishpotters.org

Front cover image courtesy of Kerstin Gren

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Next newsletter deadline 1 May 2023

For planning purposes please contact the editor in advance of submitting articles.

newsletter@scottishpotters.org

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Off the beaten track

BY JULIET MACLEOD



Specimens for Discovery: A series of wheel thrown porcelain bottles with handbuilt porcelain flowers displayed on a charred larch plinth. Photo above courtesy of Shannon Tofts.

Recently I joined the first SPA online coffee morning of the year - I don't always manage to take part but really enjoy them when I do. Amongst other things we were discussing the importance of creative development. It can be easy to forget or avoid this important discipline and I know I find it difficult to allow proper time for it in a busy studio. We talked about residencies, side projects, as well as doing non clay related creative work that might help by running in parallel to your normal practice, and it reminded me of last year's Potfest competition.

Over the years I've been lucky to exhibit at a number of Potfest events. Each year the organisers pick a theme for a competition that runs across all their shows. The exhibitors' entries are displayed together and provide a real focus and talking point for visitors. Members of the public, the exhibitors and the organisers vote on their favourites and there is a fantastic prizegiving one evening as part of the Potters' Supper.

Entry to the competition is not compulsory and you are allowed to interpret the theme in any way you like. I've taken part in a few, perhaps a little half-heartedly, but last year's theme 'Rooted in the Past, Planted in the Present' particularly chimed with me so I decided to have another go and grasp the opportunity to experiment and play...

I grew up in a family of plant lovers. Through them I discovered the value of plants across the board - from rare cultivars, to herbs, wildflowers and weeds. The Potfest theme immediately brought back memories of the nature table at my primary school which always included small milk bottles filled with random hedgerow flowers, labelled with their common names. Thoughts of having a collection of thrown porcelain bottles displaying some flower specimens began to brew, so I spent some evenings sketching out ideas and researching the history of plant names.

Most plants have two names: their common name - the name that caught on in a certain



area over time (this often varies from region to region and differs across the world); and their scientific name - this corresponds to a precise, universal system of taxonomy developed by 18th Century, Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus. I decided to use the surface of my bottles to illustrate the etymology and variety of plant names, but I soon realised there was also an opportunity to try some hand-building which is something I rarely do.

The lead up to taking part in a show can be stressful, but often I find when I have deadlines looming the urge to experiment is increased. I'm not sure if this is an



avoidance tactic or because my creativity is at its peak, but either way it was enjoyable to end each day of making with trying to create one of the seven flowers along with the problem solving required. I hadn't allowed any testing time, so all the parts of the project were fired together and I was relieved when they came out as I'd hoped. An added bonus was that my entry won two prizes including a free stand at Potfest in the Park this summer. I now also have more confidence in my hand-building skills and have ideas brewing for making more collections.

Trying something new or parallel to your



normal way of working can be liberating, spark new avenues or just raise you out of a period of stagnancy. A while ago a wellknown ceramicist mentioned to me that putting a single, small 'wild card' piece in each firing really helps. Whether it's using a random collection of glazes; some quick, experimental mark making; or a trial throwing or hand-building technique, you never know where it might lead. Her final tip was to then keep the tests on a shelf for at least six months and examine them regularly. At some point you forget your expectations of each experiment and instead see the potential for development.

I'm hoping to allow more time for this in 2023.

www.julietmacleod.com



Where I come from and my thinking about being a ceramic artist

BY KERSTIN GREN

I think I work from my heart and that is essential to me. Never use force. Wait for it to be a clear picture. Not hesitating to make any change of direction.

My name is Kerstin Gren and I am about to introduce myself to you. Some of you will know my work and me since a while back, maybe some of you have been to my classes or workshops, and some of you will be new to me, as Scottish Potters Association has grown so much, which is great.

You might also notice that my spelling might falter and that is because I am Swedish. I have lived here in Scotland for 19 years now but some words are still difficult or different.





I come from families of doers and by that I mean if you want something, you can make it.

My father's family was small farmers and he learned to make things, he trained first as an electrician and later studied to be an engineer, with a small salary, and on my Danish mothers side her father was a dairyman with an ill wife and six children to feed.

My mother learned to do everything from scratch and that means everything, from food making by foraging or butchering, to sewing and knitting all our clothes when we were small. When they met and starting to think about living together they had a lot in common. Both my mum and dad were very much doers.



I am telling you all this because it has a bearing on how I work in my studio which this is really about. I am sure many of you have similar family situations.

I trained at an Arts and Craft School in Sweden when I was in my thirties. It was founded as a training school for teachers in the fifties, to train children in the skill of making which didn't happen in schools at that time. The connection between the brain, the eye and the hand is what they teach there even now. It is very William Morris influenced as I rediscovered when I moved here.

I knew a bit about it because in Sweden there was a big movement too of Art and Crafts artists. So that is where I connected my family story with art as life and art is the same thing for me.

The need to create is big, to be innovative with what we have and now, that is called sustainability. The connection with art is happening at the moment we start thinking; what can I do with this? What do I think of the first moment I think of making something? Any memories? What are my memories?

My aunt's patchwork is showing up in my work. What I see though my windows or what

I see when out for a walk. Land, colours, patterns and the feeling I get when I let my mind wander. I photograph a lot with my phone and then I often edit it to make different pictures, like to black and white.

My work with natural wild clay as painting on ceramics is a perfect merge of what I have been describing here. It fits. It is grounding, keeping me there. There is a simple beauty in just using different coloured clay to paint on clay and that's it!

I think I work from my heart and that is essential to me. Never use force. Wait for it to be a clear picture. Not hesitating to make any change of direction. For me it is important to not have any expectations but to learn from what I see and think about it as a possibility.

I constantly want to be curious about everything. So ways of moving forward with my work is to use photography, painting, collaging, sewing, being outdoors and learning to see.



I also try to go on courses during the year and for me it works best if it is not a ceramic course. I find that the main thing about a course is to get the mind going in other directions than normally, so I don't get stuck in a rut with my work. It makes it more interesting. But it is not easy. What happens when you put things together? Merge techniques?

That is why we offered a course in sculptural thinking in August last year. We are planning to repeat that this coming summer.

Where I come from... (cont.)

Research and experimenting is another way of moving forward. My students often laugh when my answer to the question, "what happens when you do this or that?" is that there is only one way of finding out..... that is to try it and see what happens. Much learning comes with curiosity, daring to make mistakes and then be frank with yourself. Do I like it, Shall I pursue it?

This summer, when my father died, I had a long break in making and teaching. It was too hard to even consider. I wanted my mind to stay still with that moment.

Further on in the year I still did not work with clay but I started to research, read books about other artists and also to listen to artist's talks, and I found that very inspiring. The internet is full of it.

There is a quote I found and I want to finish with it.

'The need to be a great artist makes it hard to be an artist. The need to produce a great work of art makes it hard to produce any art at all. Fear is what blocks an artist. The fear of not being good enough. The fear of not finishing. The fear of failure and success. The fear of beginning at all.'

Julia Cameron, The Artist's Way

I have learned a lot about my self during my break and I am back in the studio again. Very happy and inspired to continue.

You can follow me and my work on Instagram @kerstingrenceramics



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Becoming a Potter on Arran

BY KIRSTY FORSYTH

I am the new Secretary of the Scottish Potters Association committee. After several appeals for people to join the committee, I volunteered, was interviewed, and appointed until the AGM. The SPA is an active organisation that works hard for its members so joining the committee seemed a good way to meet other potters, continue learning, and keep my brain as active as my hands.

Moving to the Isle of Arran seven years ago was the start of developing independently as a potter.

I started evening classes in Glasgow at the Wasps Studios and at Fireworks in Garnethill in 2010. Two years later I took early retirement, invested in a second hand Ratcliffe wheel and a Skutt kiln, and set up a small studio in our garage. I have everything I need, except space, heating, and a place to dispose of wastewater. I have a bucket that I use for dealing with glaze clean-up water, and a series of buckets for recycling clay.

We now live in a beautiful place. From my studio I can lift my head to see fields, hills and trees. Looking slightly further I can watch the tide ebb and flow in Lamlash bay and see the beach, a source of found pottery, agates, and special finds from old shipwrecks.

The neighbouring farmer has given me permission to dig the natural red clay that can be found in ditches on the farm. It is astonishing to think that this clay is the same clay that was used by Neolithic people on Arran 10,000 years ago, and that we can see in



Lamlash Bay and the Holy Isle





Digging local red clay

Neolithic pottery displays in Scotland's museums and art galleries.

In 2020, a group of artists on the island invited me to be part of the Machrie Moor Collaborative. The group challenge was to develop and work to a brief - to tell a story about Machrie Moor. I chose to tell the story of Standing Stone No.3 and created an individual piece of work that is very different from my other work. We were fortunate to have our work exhibited in the Barony in April 2022.

Pottery offers so much freedom. There are so many choices – what clay to use, hand build or throw, what form to create, size, shape, to glaze or not, what decoration to use, functional or aesthetic?

I enjoy reading about other potters approaches to their work. I am continuing my learning by developing my knowledge and skills while working with clay. I love throwing on the wheel and want to throw a very large bowl; however I am also now choosing to develop my journaling skills as I am still finding my creative voice and

Machrie Moor Standing Stone No.3



Photograph by Fiona Doubleday from the Machrie Moor Collaborative's exhibition at The Barony, April 2022

Becoming a Potter on Arran (cont.)

want to be able to create the pieces that I dream about.

I sell my pottery as a sole trader, attending local craft markets that take place on the island.

I am thinking about whether to become more organised and sell online. Business Gateway courses are very informative, and the Digital Boost scheme that gives new businesses 20 hours of free support seems appealing, however building a website is a task for another day.

Arran has a vibrant arts community, other potters on the island are generous with their knowledge and skills. A few of us now meet for coffee and are planning joint sessions glaze testing, wood firing and raku firing. Who knows where these new Arran pottery friendships will lead? I am sure that with other potters the fun is guaranteed.



Sea splash bowl



Slab-built bowl inspired by Brodick Castle

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The Clay Half...the unexpected Pottery Studio!

BY IRENE HUGHES

Having unexpectedly started teaching pottery 7 years ago, and loved it ever since, a year ago I found myself thinking of ways to keep teaching. I'd been running pottery beginner and intermediate weekly classes at Springfield Creative Arts, Fran Marquis' pottery studio in Arbroath. But it was time to fly the nest and Frans steady mentorship had set me up perfectly for this next step in my pottery career. I didn't once think of just stopping, I'd just returned from a trip abroad which had put me in the right mindset and this was a challenge I was ready for.





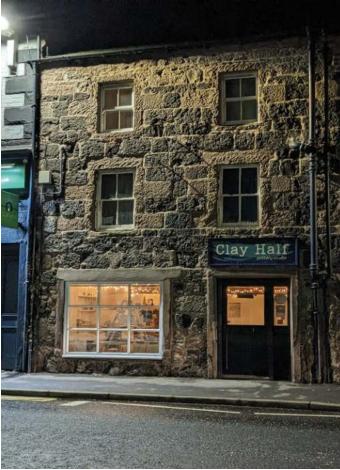
Living on the High Street in Montrose I had initially envisaged building a new studio in my garden and using that to continue my teaching. However, with material costs at their peak this would involve a large initial outlay, a bit too risky and I was also very aware of all of the empty shop units in the town centre. So, I selected a few that seemed a good size and contacted the owners.

Sometimes things just fall into place and when I found 55 Murray Street, a former art gallery, gift and picture framing shop with real warmth and character, it felt like the pottery studio I was looking for, and became the Clay Half.

The name the Clay Half is taken from the old map of Montrose which had an area of land to the west of Murray Street called Clay Half, the area to the east being the Sand Half, my first job on leaving school was a Cartographic Technician, so the link of maps and clay was perfect.

I quickly developed a more business way of thinking and once I'd confirmed that I was keen





to rent the premises there were a few major decisions to make, all based on the rising cost of electricity and the potential running costs of the studio.

I wanted the classes to remain as affordable as possible so as well as pottery specific decisions such as a new small Nabertherm electricity efficient kiln and using earthenware clay instead of stoneware because of its lower firing temperature, I realised that I would need to open the Clay Half to other creative users, running classes and workshops when I wasn't there.

The owner of the premises was happy with this and in January a local artist began teaching drawing and painting classes one day a week. A local jewellery designer is running a ring making workshop at the end of March and several other local artists and creatives are planning printmaking and other workshops in the coming months, so the studio is becoming a lovely creative space.

The Clay Half...(cont.)

Everyone who has been in the Clay Half loves the space and it feels like it has so much potential.

All creativity is good for peoples health and wellbeing and I'm delighted that I have somehow become the owner of a studio able to offer this welcoming space for creativity to the people in and around Montrose and hopefully from further afield.

Most folk at pottery classes haven't had a chance to play with clay since schooldays, it makes me happy to be able to make it more accessible and to bring pottery to the people.

If you're interested in either pottery classes or using the Clay Half for your own classes please email me at theclayhalf@gmail.com with an outline of what you are thinking of or looking for.

Current classes can be found at https://bookwhen.com/clayhalf





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Maker of the Year 2022

Hannah McAndrew, a slipware potter and one of our members, has won Maker of the Year at the UK Heritage Crafts Awards, sponsored by the Marsh Charitable Trust and presented at a prestigious Winners' Reception at the House of Lords on 30 January 2023.

The result of the award and £1,000 cash prize was revealed at the ceremony opened by Heritage Crafts' Co-Chair Jay Blades MBE.

After serving an apprenticeship with Dumfriesshire slipware potter Jason Shackleton, Hannah began her first workshop in 2003, now working alongside her husband and fellow potter, Doug Fitch. She draws influence from the ancient British folk heritage of country pottery, whose makers demonstrated extraordinary, intuitive skill, a high benchmark to which she aspires.

Her 'This is England' charger was accepted into the permanent collection of Centre of Ceramic Art, York Art Gallery in 2021. This piece, made as a response to the racist abuse during the Euro 2020 football tournament raised £9,000 for FareShare UK and was featured on the national news.

Hannah saw off competition from fellow finalists: hat maker Rachel Frost and lettercutter Fergus Wessel.







Top: Image courtesy of Hannah. Other images are courtesy of Shannon Tofts showing examples of Hannah's work











The Game of Shrooms

BY HILARY FIRTH

Last year, before Potfest Scotland, there was a craze on Instagram about making and then hiding mushrooms for others to find.

We decided that it would be fun to do this from the Scottish Potters Association stall at Potfest, so a group of us made a variety of mushrooms.

The mushrooms were hidden around about and many of them were found. However, some made their way back to the stall where they made a pretty display.

As the idea was that people who found them could keep them, I took some of them on the Sunday to "hide" on SPA potters stalls.

I was wandering around, trying to find a stall for the last mushroom, a big, brightly coloured one from Caroline Gault, when a stall holder spotted what I was holding. She was very excited as her daughter had told her about the craze, and asked her mum to look out for a "shroom "for her! So amid much laughter, I hid the shroom on her stall. She couldn't have been more delighted. Her name is Michaela Goan from Seatree Argyll pottery.

It was a wonderful end to the "shroom" story.





Coffee Mornings and Evenings

Our free member coffee mornings and evenings take place EVERY week on Zoom. All welcome. A great place to ask a question, get to know some of your fellow potters or just listen in to some pottery (or non-pottery) chat.

- Wednesday at 10.30am
- Thursday at 8pm

The Meeting Room ID is always 793 322 4286 The link is:

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7933224286

Monthly Challenges

BY FIONA ROBERTSON

The idea of a monthly challenge came about during one of the many lockdowns as a result of chats during the coffee mornings about lack of creativitiy during the pandemic. Soon the idea spread to our closed Facebook group, Scottish Potters Community.

To enable the wider membership to take part, details of each monthly challenge will also now be included in the main monthly ebulletin and via our main Facebook and Instagram accounts.

A selection of the images sent will be displayed on the various social media platforms as well as possibly featuring in the quarterly newsletter. If you have read all the articles in this issue, you will hopefully have some inspiration to try something a little different and step, creatively, outside your comfort zone.

Recently, we have had 'Agateware' in December, 'Mishima' in January and 'Hearts' in February. Below are a selection of images from members.

The March challenge will be March Hares. They can be slip trailed, carved, sculpted, painted - the choice is yours.

To take part, simply send your images to: socialmedia@scottishpotters.org



Clockwise from top left: Karen James, Catherine Callow, Stephen Wood, Jane Robertson and Veronica Newman

Book Review

BY FIONA ROBERTSON

DESIGN AND CREATE CON-TEMPORARY TABLEWARE: MAKING POTTERY YOU CAN USE

Linda Bloomfield and Sue Pryke

Publ. Herbert Press £30.00 ISBN: 978-1-78994-072-5

Given the pedigree of the authors, I was quite excited to receive my copy of this book. With their wealth of experience in design, making and glazing, combined with the clean lines of their work and the clear style of writing that Linda Bloomfield has become renowned for, I had very high expectations.

As the name suggests, the book aims to cover all aspects of the making of contemporary tableware from where the inspiration comes from, the design, materials, clay preparation and recycling, glazing, firing and combining clay with other materials. There are also sections on the usual making methods such as hand building, throwing, mould and model making and slip casting but the book goes further with the inclusion of the jigger and jolley and 3D printing. There is also a short section on health and safety and, unlike most books where this is relegated to the back pages amongst glossary and index, this one is close to the front of the book ahead of the making methods.

Within the chapter on design, there is a useful section on the elements of design, getting the proportions of a piece right and visual balance. There is also a rather fascinating section on the implications of the design of tableware on the taste of food. There is information on the design aspects of each different type of tableware from mugs to lidded pots, and bowls to lemon juicers. Somewhat unsurprisingly, given the authors, I found the chapter on design interesting and informative and something I would be likely to refer back to as the years go by.

The chapter on health and safety deals with the more general aspects of this on a fairly high level, noting, for example, the need to wet mop or not eating and drinking in the pottery. The main focus is, however, on the potential for dust and the use of toxic materials. A useful list of common materials containing silica as well as toxic glaze materials is provided, and the section on soluble materials also includes information on dealing with settling and gloopy glazes.

The chapter on clay preparation focuses mainly on casting slip and this is followed through to the section on reclaiming clay.

From reading the contents, it appeared that



making pottery you can use



each different type of making is covered in the book, and it is, but to very differing degrees. The written details of some of the processes are fairly high level and you certainly could not use this book as a beginner's guide and expect to learn a some of these methods without previous experience. However, there are still useful nuggets to be gleaned such as using a double foot ring to prevent slumping in plates or the need to trim a flat-bottomed plate to further compress the clay base and prevent cracking. There are very useful guides such as throwing weights for different types of tableware.

Where the section on hand building contains very little text in comparison to the number of photographs, the section on mould and model making processes is quite extensive - 45 of the 204 pages in the book. Lathe turning is also surprising well covered, the use of a power whirler is mentioned with accompanying photographs, and the section on the jigger and jolley was a revelation. If you are interested in learning more about mould making and slip casting, this is a very useful guide and certainly de-mystified the processes, though I am not sure how many studio potters have access to a jigger and jolley, plaster lathe or power whirler - or the size of studio needed to make production level moulds shown in the book.

3D printing and CAD design are also covered, and it is interesting to see the different ways in which a 3D printer can be used - from making stamps and moulds to 3D printing the clay itself into incredibly detailed pieces.

Linda is perhaps best known for her extensive writings on all things glaze, so it comes as no surprise that the glazing section of the book is very detailed. There are basic glaze recipes with details on how to alter the glazes to make them matte or shinier, how to colour them using a variety of additives, mixing them and their application in a variety of ways.

The section on colouring glazes gives details on all the usual chemicals (cobalt, copper, chromium etc.) as well as some of the more unusual such as vanadium as well as opacifiers. Each tells you the effect you can expect and the recommended amounts to use as percentages of the glaze recipe.

Glaze problems are covered in some detail,

from correcting issues in the glaze bucket though crawling, cracking, pinholing, blisters and crazing. Glaze fit is then discussed, and solutions offered. There are also useful information on dishwasher-safe glazing, stable glazes and underfiring. The glaze section goes into the more technical aspects of glazing such as glaze calculation, choosing the right glaze materials and also a comparison of industrial versus studio pottery. Finally, a nod is given to transfers and lustres, but neither is dealt with in any detail and is more of a mention that these are possible.

The firing section contains details of what happens to clay during the firing, about oxidation, loading the kiln and vitrification.

The book rounds up with a short section on combining ceramics with other materials such as wood, leather and metals to create an aesthetic finish to the piece.

As its press release states, the book is "lavishly illustrated" with photographs from prominent tableware makers as Sasha Wardell, James and Tilla Waters, Reiko Kaneko and Nico Contias well as our own Juliet Macleod.

Overall, I don't think this book could be considered suitable for "budding" ceramicists, but I do think it provides a useful one-stop guide to the end to end process of making tableware, and the beautiful photography also makes it a lovely coffee table addition.

DISCOUNT CODE

Order your copy at www.bloomsbury. com and receive 20% off across all formats of the book by entering the discount code Tableware20 at checkout!

Offer valid until 31st May 2023.

If you would like to submit a review of a ceramic book that you have enjoyed or one you feel didn't meet the mark, contact the Newsletter Editor on newsletter@scottishpotters.org



of their ceramic practice



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Raw Materials	10% discount
Potclays Powdered Glazes	10% discount
Spectrum, Botz & Amaco Glazes	10% discount
Mayco Glazes (except Stoneware & Underglazes)	10% discount
Mayco Stoneware & Underglazes	10% discount
Underglaze, Body Stains & Oxides	10% discount
Tools, Plasticware, Moulds	10% discount
Potters Wheels & Machinery	- 5% discount
Potclays and L&L Kilns	5% discount
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Rohde, Nabertherm, IKON kilns - - - - - - Price on application



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