

Niek Hoogland workshop

BY BARBEL DISTER

I took part in the workshop run by Niek Hoogland over two days – 15-16 June at the Glasgow WASPS studios – and loved every minute of it.



Niek Hoogland, a dutch potter throwing with earthenware clay, decorating with slips and glazes, demonstrated for the first day; and let us have a go ourselves with pots and tiles we had prepared beforehand, to try his colours and techniques, on the second day.

Niek has been making pots for a while – there is no magic to making pots he says, in fact, watching him I would say it's love, patience and skill that does it!

He started off being interested in ceramics as a kid because his dad worked in a ceramic factory, that his dad worked there as a joiner and not a potter mattered not – he had access to a world that inspired him. And after a detour involving other jobs he ended up doing what he loves, making a living as a village potter, as he calls himself.

He started off with demonstrating throwing, beautiful, graceful and earthy shapes, jugs, plates, bowls – shocking a room full of potters by picking up a just-thrown plate from the wheel with both hands and plonking it on a bat, just like that. When I do that I end up with a plate with ears!

Handling, pulling a spout, all done with perfect ease – did I say I loved it?

Then the decorating – sliptrailing of course, brushwork and scrafitto – a bird drawn with three or four lines and set against a landscape indicated by one – lovely.

The following day things got a bit more chaotic! There were eight of us buzzing about (on the first day we were 15 people) with our tiles and pots, pouring white slip, covering the floor of the hall next door with drying pieces, hoping for more sunshine – it rained instead – so we got a hairdryer out to speed things up.





Things did speed up and got a bit curly – but never mind that, we tried birds and landscapes, butterflies, abstracts, fishes and elephants, with Niek still demonstrating and advising.

And I think a great time was had by all.

Sooo – what have I taken away from this?

- Keep things simple. Mark the change of direction on the profile of a pot. Don't distract from the shape of a pot by covering it with – stuff .
- Make slip trailer nozzles out of plastic ear-bud stems – recycle, recycle, recycle! (sorry, I really wanted to get that one in).

- You can pick up a soft plate with both hands and lift it.
- And for flattening a plate use the knuckles of your hand.
- After having wedged the clay put it sideways on the wheel, not spiral facing down, as that creates too much tension in the pot and might lead to cracks.
- Visit the Duesseldorf Ceramic Museum.
- Don't use too much water.
- And aim for grace and efficiency.

There you are. As simple as that.