

Nancy Zoller

Loveland, Colorado



Just the Facts

Clay

Mile High Ceramics' Dover clay, an extremely smooth, white, cone 10 stoneware clay body

Primary forming method

wheel-throwing, handbuilding

Primary firing temperature

cone 10 reduction

Favorite surface treatment

slip trailing, carving, stamping, and brush work

Favorite tools

home-made bisque molds, a hand-made leaf stamp, the extruder, two wooden ribs from my college days, and Mud Tools rubber ribs

Studio

I have had a pottery studio since 1975, after graduating from college at Arizona State University. I built my first down-draft sprung arch gas kiln under the supervision of Randy Schmidt as an independent study for my last three ceramics credits, and later purchased an Olsen 12-cubic-foot gas kiln for that studio.

In the intervening years, my husband and I have moved three times. First to Ft. Collins, Colorado, in 1982, purchasing a home that was the show home for the subdivision that had a finished space for my studio. My gas kiln (an Olsen 24, which replaced the previous Olson that was destroyed by movers) was outside. We then moved to Loveland, Colorado, and converted the garage on the new house into my studio with finished space. The gas kiln was craned over to the new location, still outside. The electric kiln was inside. In 1993, we purchased the house we currently live in, also in Loveland. This house had a covered patio on the back, adjacent to the garage. I hired a carpenter to enclose this area, creating my studio. The fun of this addition was standing with the builder and explaining to him where the two outside doors needed to be as well as where I would like to have the windows located.

The finished studio space is 22x14 feet, with three entry doors, one each on the north, east, and south walls. The gas kiln is just adjacent to the studio, in the garage, accessible through the south-facing door. My favorite aspects of the studio are the window placement and the peaceful feel of my work environment. The windows give me a beautiful view of my backyard and the mountains in each of the distinctly different Colorado seasons. My least favorite aspect of the



studio is that there's not a separate area for glazing. To begin the glaze cycle I clean, move my wheel out of the way, and roll out the glaze buckets. A typical cycle is three weeks of production, three to four days glazing and loading the kiln.

Most days involve pottery work and some type of physical activity. A typical day for me involves going to yoga in the morning, then a variety of different pottery-related tasks in the studio until 6pm, when I call it quits. Working in the dark has never appealed to me—no night owl here! I do split the days up differently, and never have the exact same schedule each day, sometimes working in the studio in the early morning, then going to yoga or swimming laps at the pool later in the afternoon.

I love both the morning and late afternoon in my studio. Everything seems very “new” in the morning. Thinking about the possibilities for new pieces, and knowing there are twelve mugs that need handles and teapots thrown the day before that need to be put together are positive motivators. The potential in new work, and in work that can be completed throughout the day is exciting. During the late afternoon, with no outside commitments to attend

to, I enjoy the very soft light in the studio. The light from my west windows filters in and makes a board of pots on the slab roller look beautiful with the shadows cast.

Time flies by in the studio. I lose all track of the clock and have never noticed that I am working in there alone. The public radio station is usually on, or my iPod, as music is important to my work day.

Since my workspace has always been at my residence and I have raised three children with my husband in my career as a potter, there are always many distractions in each day! Starting and stopping work has never seemed difficult. My family has learned over the years that my work is important to me and there are times I can walk away to help them and other times that I cannot. I did learn many years ago to say “this is just not a good time.”

Having a studio attached to my home has many advantages! I can go into the house and put some food in the crock pot quickly, eat my own food for lunch, take a nap, read my emails, or make a quick catch up phone call. This lifestyle does require discipline regarding distractions for sure, but I think it is a more naturally satisfying way to live.



We have a small two-car garage. And yes, in addition to the kiln, there are two cars in it! We also have bicycles hanging from the ceiling, counter and storage space made using our old kitchen cupboards, a file cabinet, tools, and trash cans. My husband is very neat and makes sure the cars fit in the garage. It does seem tight at times, but I am thankful and grateful for the space I do have.

My studio door goes directly into the garage, then there's a second door in the garage to the back door of the house. This means that clay dust stays in the studio (except for what is on my shoes), and there is no tromping through the snow to get to the kiln. This is something I did for many years until my wonderful father one day suggested that he would like to finance a new kiln for me that would function indoors (he watched me shovel snow off kilns and shelves for many, many years). He purchased my new 18-cubic-foot Geil kiln with lighter Advancer shelves.

The chimney of the kiln was custom designed (by Geil) to go through my roof in the garage. There is a small window behind the kiln as well as a vent hole we cut at the base of the back wall. I always crack the garage door at the first of every firing while the wax burns off. Having the kiln in an enclosed garage makes it very easy to see the flame out the front even in the middle of the day as it can be very dark in there. It also makes lots of heat, so in the winter, we leave the back door to the house open...just a little benefit.

There's not much storage space in my studio. Most orders are due to be shipped the day they are unloaded from the kiln, then the next order begins. A small trailer serves as storage for shipping boxes and bubble wrap. I write out my orders as they come in and

post them on the wall. Lots of counting and recounting. Some of this organizing just seems more organic than geometric (with large charts). I know when there is enough pottery to fill the kiln just by looking at the boards on the shelves.

Paying Dues (and Bills)

Earning my BA in art education (emphasis in ceramics) from Arizona State University was the beginning of my clay education. Finding inspiration from other wise working potters is still an ongoing part of my education. Monday through Saturday I spend six or so hours in the studio. The work day is longer at the end of a glaze cycle; I just keep working until the kiln is loaded. I fire the kiln at least 12 times a year, making over 2000 pieces of pottery annually. A lot of my work sells through wholesale galleries, which order 60–100 pieces at a time. Teaching a weekly pottery class for the city of Loveland is my only outside employment.

Body

Physical activity outside the studio has been my saving grace. I go to the mountains to hike and snowshoe, often climbing over a dozen Colorado 14'ers. In the last few years, yoga and walking have become my favorite physical activities. At age 60, I have no physical limitations in my work life, which can be attributed to staying active outside the studio. Combining handbuilding with wheelthrowing allows for movement and variation in the work day, giving balance to my work routine. A loving family and a daily glass of wine also help!



Mind

I am enjoying *Reading Lolita in Tehran* right now. Experiencing books about people and their varying circumstances, especially when their lives are so different from my own, is enjoyable. Of course, clay publications are always an integral part of my reading diet. In addition, nature is and will always be my first source of inspiration.

Recharging creatively seems limitless, as the Internet offers communication with an endless array of clay artists and access to their information. Isn't it amazing just how many inspiring clay artists exist? The flow of creativity involving clay never seems to slow down for me; there is an urgency and a sense of purpose in making pottery. Teaching others about clay opens many doors to experimentation and growth.

Marketing

Trimble Court Artisans, a member-run fine-craft gallery in Ft. Collins, Colorado, has been a part of my pottery life since 1982. This is a group of about 45 artists, all of whom participate in running the gallery. Our commission split is 65% to the artist and 35% to the gallery. As a co-op, we seem to grow stronger and more profitable each year. My work has also been in the Grand Lake Art Gallery on consignment basis for the past 20 years. The remainder of my galleries are wholesale. I began my relationship with www.wholesalecrafts.com five years ago. Learning much from them, I then developed my personal website into a user-friendly wholesale site. All of my wholesale galleries are listed on my website; my appreciation goes out to all of the galleries representing my work.

The favorite (and most profitable) annual event for Zoller Pottery is a Christmas Open House and pottery sale, which I have held in my studio for the last 30 years. I am blessed with a large following of local customers and friends who begin their holiday each year in my studio. Juried exhibitions provide further clay exposure on a national level. *Pottery Making Illustrated* magazine has published articles I've written (November/December 2010, pages 40–42; and May/June 2011, pages 29–32) helping me share techniques and broadening my exposure as an artist and a clay educator.

All of the above are necessary to find balance and maximize profits and exposure.

The most disappointing online experience for me happened just this year. An inquiry came in from a customer who viewed my website, and after extensive communication and physical sample approvals, she ordered for a dinnerware set of twelve. When the dinnerware was complete and shipped to the customer her response upon opening the four large boxes was that the pottery was “too teal.” She had hoped it would be more “turquoise.” The customer then returned the order. This was an interesting lesson for us both. Being a potter always keeps you humble. This dinnerware set (shown above) now has a home. It was purchased by a sculptor who also lives in Loveland.

Nevertheless, being a potter has, and will always be, a fabulous life. I am fortunate to have been able to live and practice my clay passion for so many years. There will be more dinnerware in the future.

www.nancyzollerpottery.com