

Building for Penland's Future

THE KILN SHED

"When this project is complete, Penland's ceramic kiln facility will equal or exceed that of any of the summer craft schools." That's how ceramics instructor and Penland Board Chair **Joe Bova** assessed the most visible construction project going on at Penland right now: a new structure to replace the jumbled set of buildings which were referred to as "the kiln shed" (the singular was euphemistic).

This area, which housed the bulk of Penland's ceramic kilns, grew organically to meet the needs of an evolving program; when more space was needed, a little more construction was done. The resulting structure was functional after a fashion, but it featured five separate roofs, poor drainage, inadequate light, and several different floor levels (a real problem when you move fragile pots around on wheeled carts). It worked, but it wasn't a great place to work.

The situation couldn't really be improved by tinkering, so the demolition, redesign, and rebuilding of the kiln shed was designated as the major construction priority for 1996-1997. The new structure, designed by Asheville architect Michael Robinson, creates a unified space on one level which is open and flexible. Natural light is supplied by clerestory windows and translucent panels in the metal roof. The roof also covers the walkway between the upstairs studio and the kiln area.

The construction was done by Penland's maintenance crew under the supervision of staff carpenter **Mark Wessinger**. It wasn't a quick start as the old shed had to be torn down and the mismatched concrete floors broken up and removed. After the site was graded, a four-foot retaining wall was built on the upper side of the building, and a new slab was poured.

The salt kiln (which stands under a fairly recent and sound roof) was kept in operation during construction, and spring Concentration students also had access to the wood kiln and the electric kilns located behind the downstairs studio. As summer classes begin, the building is nearly complete, and studio coordinator **Louise Radochonski** has been working nonstop—with assistance and consultation from the clay community—to get things operational.

In addition to the salt, wood, and raku kilns, summer students can look forward to an array of electric kilns and a new reduction kiln.



The almost complete kiln shed.

Robin Dreyer

Designer **Hank Murrow**, who built Penland's stainless steel reduction/oxidation kiln will be coming in June to supervise the placement and fine-tuning of this kiln in the new space. Eventually the building will house a new soda kiln, a large car kiln for sculpture, and more electrics. The five-year plan for the studio also includes replacing or rebuilding some of the older equipment. "We're going to have just about every kind of kiln we can have," said Louise. "This place is gonna rock!"

FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE ICE HOUSE

The spring of 1997 saw the completion of a Penland construction project which began as a workshop in 1989. Originally called the ICE (Integrated Craft Environment) House, the building was conceived as a guest house and a demonstration of the integration of craft into building design and furnishing.

The first phase of construction, which was funded by a New Works grant from the NC Arts Council, was executed by a small group of students who came to Penland to study timber frame construction. Timber framing is a time-honored technique (now enjoying a great renaissance) in which the basic structure of the building is made from carefully notched timbers which fit together like furniture parts. These frames are so beautiful that they are generally left visible on the inside of the house. It is a craft-oriented way to build.

The workshop participants cut and notched the timbers and then, with assistance from blacksmiths attending the first Penland Iron Symposium, raised the frame. Before the workshop was over, the structure was covered with insulation and plywood and a temporary roof was added shortly thereafter.

That's how it stayed until the fall of 1995 when **Ken Botnick** decided it was time to finish the project. Led by Mark Wessinger, and supplemented by numerous hired hands, Penland's maintenance crew began to work on the house—as time permitted. They added to the original structure to accommodate a second bedroom and bathroom and then worked their way through all the steps of completing a house.

Whenever possible, decisions about construction and materials were made with a long-

range perspective. "I think this house won't need much maintenance for a long time to come," Mark said. The completed building is a beautiful two-bedroom house with a porch, living room, and kitchenette.

It seemed likely that the original meaning of the building's name would get lost (and pretty soon people would say that we used to keep ice there in the old days), so the finished house was renamed **Bonnie's Place**, in honor of **Bonnie Willis Ford** who spent much of her life working at Penland. Her son **Bill Ford** has been putting the finishing touches on the place by building stone steps and retaining walls.

Although the name has been changed, the original intent to integrate craft into the building has not been lost. Wrought iron cabinet pulls and curtain rods, a handmade sink, and other touches complement the excellent finish carpentry.

However, there is room for more handmade furnishings built into the house: wall lamps, interior and screen doors, bookcases, a staircase railing, a coffee table, and shelving

could all be used to incorporate craft work into the building, making it a real showplace for craft. Additional furnishings will need to match the feeling of the house, but anyone who is interested in contributing to this project is encouraged to contact Assistant Director Geraldine Plato to discuss possibilities.

All in all, it's been a busy season for the maintenance crew. Much of the work they do goes unnoticed, but these two projects are visible examples of a kind of care and attention that will benefit Penland for years to come.



Workshop students raising the frame for the ICE House in 1989.

Tim Evans



Inside the new kiln shed.

Robin Dreyer



Putting the finishing touches on Bonnie's Place in 1997.

Robin Dreyer

Special note for Auction Patrons:

We are offering a weekend Auction package which includes three nights for four people at Bonnie's Place (with meals). See page 12 for details.