



HIROSHI SUEYOSHI'S pottery is in the permanent collection at the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery.

LAURA SPATHOLT of Calabash attends pottery classes twice a week in Southport.

Expressions In Clay

Students Explore The Functional, Sculptural Art Of Pottery

Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?

—Isaiah 45:9

TEXT AND PHOTOS
BY LYNN CARLSON

This is my ceremonial cup," the potter joked, applying a few design touches to a cylindrical clay vessel big enough to hold two gallons of liquid. "This is not what it started out to be, but this is what the clay told me it wanted to be."

So who says a cup has to be 6 to 8 ounces, anyway? Or that it even has to look like a cup?

Certainly not Hiroshi Sueyoshi, Japanese-born potter and teacher guiding a friendly group of novices and experienced amateur potters through hand-throwing, hand-building, glaze-making and decorative techniques at the Franklin Square pottery studio in Southport.

The students are studying pottery through Brunswick Community College; Hiroshi is a visiting instructor from Cape Fear Community College holding four six-hour workshops with them.

An award-winning potter whose work is on permanent display in the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery, Hiroshi has assigned the fashioning of a ceremonial cup, as well as a treasure box, to the students.

The Japanese take their ceremony very seriously, he advises; even the act of getting up and drinking coffee can be one.

As for treasure boxes, he's not looking for something to stow jewelry in, rather a work of clay which symbolizes anything that the potter treasures.

Hiroshi learned pottery 23 years after first pursuing engineering ("I didn't like it") and industrial design ("you can't express too much of your own opinion"). What appealed to him was pottery's outlets for both functional and sculptural expression.

Pottery, after all, is one of the world's most enduring crafts, its oldest and most widespread art. Primitive peoples fashioned pots and bowls of baked clay for their daily use. Clay tablets and other objects are critical to the archaeological

process of dating settlements and civilizations.

And, closer to home, pottery has a place in the history of North Carolina. Potters settled Jugtown in Randolph County around 1750, and today, fifth generation potters continue family traditions of both functional and artistic pottery in the Seagrove community near Asheboro.

Laura Spatholt, a student in Hiroshi's workshop, drives from Calabash to Southport twice a week for pottery classes, and has for two years.

"It beats work," says Jamie Smith of Southport, working a potter's wheel side-by-side with Spatholt.

"It is work," Spatholt replies, "except at work I feel a little more in control of what I'm doing."

At the end of their second session, Hiroshi's students are clay-spattered, while Hiroshi, except for his hands, remains relatively clean. Some are working on potter's wheels, others using their hands and various tools to hand-build their projects. He moves quietly around the room, answer-

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ELLEN JONES of Long Beach works on hand-building a "treasure box."



ED BALDIGA of Southport etches designs along the border of a hand-built piece.



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