

STUDIO VISIT

Silvie Granatelli

Floyd County, Virginia



Just the Facts

Clay
porcelain

Primary forming method
wheel throwing and hand forming

Favorite surface treatment
carving and applique

Primary firing method
cone-10 gas kiln

Favorite tool
6-inch tool-steel metal rib

The Studio

My studio is near my house in rural Floyd County, Virginia, in an 1800-square-foot building. The studio is designed with the throwing, glazing, and firing rooms situated to move through the phases of my process. A packing and storage room is at the end of the building.

Many years ago, I dreamed of building a house in a U-shaped footprint, with a courtyard in the center of the U. Living space would have been on the left side of the U and across the middle. The right side of the U would have been the studio. Years passed until there came a time when I moved and needed to build a new studio. I applied that old dream to the design of the studio. Because of building restrictions, the U had to be splayed out to more of a V shape, which made for a much more interesting design. The studio is designed with a flow pattern based on the cycle of making, firing, and shipping pots. It took about 6 or 7 months to build.

I have a gallery in my studio building that is open year round. The workspace was designed with good lighting, so there are no shadows on the work. The building has solar panels on the roof, which significantly lower the cost of my electric needs. I have a studio intern, who has a separate studio room in the building. We share kilns, equipment, and materials. My interns work with me for two-year intervals.

The studio is equipped with three electric kilns and two gas kilns. One of the gas kilns is used by my interns and some local potters who rent it out as needed. The gas kiln I use



is a car kiln. Donovan Palmquist designed and built both of the gas kilns in the studio.

I have more wheels than I use. I like Shimpo wheels and have three of those. One is ancient, which I basically use to run the ball mill. I also have my old Randall wheel that I bought in the early 1970s. This old wheel has a serial number that tells me that it was the fourth one made by Randall. Who would want it now? I keep it for nostalgic reasons.

Paying Dues

My undergraduate degree in ceramics is from the Kansas City Art Institute, and I have a graduate degree from Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana. In all my 40-plus years of being a studio potter, I have made my living as a potter. I have taught for brief periods of time at Berea College in Kentucky and part time at Virginia Tech as an adjunct professor.

I am now in the late stage of my studio life. In the middle years, I made pots 7 days a week unless I was traveling to sell my work. Now I work anywhere from 4–6 hours a day, 4–5 days a week. I

typically make small batches of pots. Most days I throw and then finish what was made the day before or several days before. I throw fairly fast and finishing can take several days. Visual clutter makes me feel mentally confused. I sweep many times during the day, reclaiming what is on the floor.

For most of my career, I fired twelve or thirteen kilns per year; I now fire four or five per year. I make pots until I have made enough to fill the gas kiln. I spend about a week bisque firing, then glazing begins. This is a major change for me. I might call myself semi-retired now. The studio is still a large part of how I think of my creative life and spend much of my time. I now work slower and do more varied work, indulging myself in what I would call follies, as well as developing ideas I have long contemplated.

I did shows at the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show; the Smithsonian Craft Show; Old Church Pottery Show and Sale in Demarest, New Jersey; the St. Croix Valley Pottery Tour in Minnesota; and the 16 Hands Studio Tour in my home region of Virginia. I have also exhibited my work at various galleries around the country, and have instructed workshops across the country and internationally.



Providing Mentorship

About 20 years ago, when I started having official interns, professors might suggest me as a mentor for students. Now it seems people type in “apprenticeships” or “pottery internships,” and I come up in the search results. My website has a page explaining how to apply and what the internship is like.

I require that people applying come for a studio visit and an interview. After that, I request a resumé, images of work, and three letters of recommendation.

My expectations are that interns behave as though they are professional potters. The two-year period is a time to learn what this feels like. I give them all the expertise I have. Tasks include developing a glaze palette and kiln cycles. I have them produce a marketing plan, as well as a financial plan. By the second year, they usually tend to have found markets and are receiving income from their work. The majority of people who have worked with me have stayed involved in the ceramics field, either by teaching or by a commitment to a studio practice. Over the years, I have been able to conduct deep conversations, exchange philosophical points of view, and suggest a lot of reading material.

Clay Community

Every generation of potters, in some way or another is identifiable from the era in which they reached adulthood. Each generation is responding to the world it lives in. I do not mean just the new inventions and the social or economic distinctions. I mean the wars, the terrorist attacks, the disasters, the ups and the downs. These are reflected in the pots that we see. Because so many potters are currently looking at each other on social media, I see a lot of repeated styles. Sometimes they are indistinguishable from one potter to another, therefore there is less individuality.

It seems many young potters derive motivation from outside of themselves. We live in a world of quick answers, whereas slow answers tend to develop personal ideas. We look at YouTube to get a fast lesson in order to learn a technique, when imagining an outcome instead might produce a unique solution to a technical problem. So, I notice a lack of deep thinking and a lack of social communication skills taking root.

In the mid-1960s, when I became aware of the clay world, there were Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach, but not many other professional potters to look at as examples of how to develop a life



as a potter. It was the beginning of the Studio Pottery movement. It was a back-to-the-earth dream for me. I did earn a master's degree, but all I really wanted was to be a potter. And, I did. Potters still want to be studio potters, but some tend to develop small industries using mechanical tools like molds, RAM presses, and such, as potters did in the early 1900s when industry was cusping the village potter.

What excites me about ceramics in the studio is the inventiveness that surfaces often and the unsuccessful periods that always lead to better resolutions and new work. In the field at large, some of the large clay sculptural work catches my attention—Cristina Córdova and Syd Carpenter come to mind.

Marketing

With regard to marketing, in the early and middle years of my career, I would try anything that seemed reasonable to get my name and work out into the marketplace. Doing workshops brought a broader awareness of me as a potter. The style and techniques I developed over the years were in many ways unique to me, and I enjoyed sharing them in the workshop setting. Lately, I have

used social media to promote the 16 Hands Studio Tours and my work online.

At present, I show my work in just a few galleries along with the gallery in my studio building. I participate in two 16 Hands Studio Tours each year. One is on Thanksgiving weekend and the second is the first weekend in May.

Mind

Travel, with crafts or art being the emphasis, has been a charging station for me. Nature and the culture of food are other inspirations.

Lessons I have learned throughout my studio life are to embrace failure and disaster. These temporary hurdles provide great problem-solving insights, which for me is what being an artist is all about. Food has always been an inspiration for me in my design process. I love cooking and the culture that surrounds food around the world. One cannot disregard food trends; they have guided the ceramic industry and potters for as long as people have needed to contain food.

www.silviegranatelli.com
Instagram @silviegranatelli