Newsletter

Volume 12, Issue 5 : September/October 2011

Potters' Association of Namibia

www.pan.iway.na

OUR MISSION

The main objective of **The Potters' Association of Namibia** is primarily to foster the art and craft of pottery and ceramics in every way.

We encourage the development, recognition, appreciation of pottery and ceramics; we hold exhibitions, publish regular newsletters, and distribute related magazines. Furthermore, by providing practical workshops, technical information, skills development, arranging and encouraging social interaction,

we support the interests of like-minded people.

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Next newsletter deadline
15 January 2012

I am sure that mamy of us can recall from our young(er) years that it use to take forever for the year to end, and the Holiday time to arrive. As we get older, the time seems to pass just so much quicker, and we can't get everything done in the year. Holiday time is however important; to spend time with friends and families, reflect on what has happend in the year, all the excitement, ups and downs and also the losses and tragedies.

If that is not your thing, our Holiday edition of the newsletter will provide you with quite little reading to do. Annabelle Venter wrote a wonderful account of the 5th PAN Biennale and the workshop presented by John Higgens from the UK. In reading about the Wood-firing Jamboree in McGregor, Sarie Maritz will make most of us envious about her trip there in November. PAN's Chair, Carola Lorck, also wrote a letter, wherein we are reminded of all the fun activities PAN hosted this year.

At the end of the newsletter you will find PAN's Calendar of Events for 2012. As you will see PAN has planned at least one event for every month: Raku on the beach, pottery demos, exhibition openings, workshops by Val Garber (USA) and Daphne Corrigan (France), Fill-a-Bowl and the Bank Windhoek Kidz Fun Fair. I am sure the months that are empty will be filled with events soon enough.

As the newsletter is meant to be for all of our members, I kindly urge you to submit dates for pottery events and exhibition openings. Furthermore it is really nice to receive letters and articles from you once in a while, so feel free to submit as much as you like!

Lastly I would like to thank the PAN committee and especially all of our 55 members, for making this another eventful and successful year in the history of PAN. Your dedication towards events and activities contribute to the success of PAN.

I sincerely wish all of you a wonderful (and responsible) Holiday Season, filled with love and joy! And that all of you and your families will return home safely for another successful year.

All the best

~Jacques~

Message from the Chair

The last month of the year is nearly over and I'm sure everyone is getting ready to tie up the last loose ends at work or at home before they leave for their well deserved holidays. I hope most of you are lucky enough to be able to go on leave and don't need to do any 'standby' over Christmas.

PAN's year has also come to an end too, and it was a very busy and exciting one at that. We can look back on successful events like: the workshops presented by Jacques in Swakopmund and Windhoek. Many enthusiastic members enjoyed being taught how to make mugs, saucers and also teapots, decorate these to have wonderful pieces. In May we had the first "Raku on the Beach", which will definitely not be the last one. This beach firing inspired some of us so much, that we want to organise this again and this time get the public involved a bit more. So keep an eye out on the events calendar to see when this is happening in Swakopmund next year.

PAN had a stand at the Kidz Fun Fair in September. There we were visited by many ecstatic and thrilled children who enjoyed a fun day filled with clay. Thanks to a number of loyal members who helped attend to the children and made this was a great success again. This year we were sponsored with clay, by Reinders Pottery Supplies in Cape Town and Hüster Machine Tools who brought it to Windhoek for us, free of charge.

The biggest event this year was our 5th National Ceramics Biennale. John Higgins, from England was our invited judge and workshop presenter, who was a great pleasure to host. I am also sure everyone who had the chance to meet and talk with John, agrees that he is a very interesting potter and person to share time with and 'talk pottery'. The workshop presented by him, after the opening of our exhibition, was well attended and we will hopefully see some creations influenced by his methods.

Furthermore I would like to thank my committee members, who throughout the year, stood by my side and assisted wherever. I am sure they will assist me in the future as best they can.

Please diarize all the events for next year in the beginning of the year and plan everything else around it. We will have a French potter visiting Namibia too. There will be another "Fill a Bowl" evening in Swakopmund, for fund raising purposes. This fundraising event is very important, and we once again require the support from our generous members to make soup bowls and mugs. It would be nice to welcome some Windhoek potters at the coast for that evening, Swakopmund can be quite nice in winter…and then there will be much, much more.

Herewith I wish you all a blessed, peaceful Christmas, enjoy the time with your loved ones and have a good start for the new year. To those who have to travel, do so safely and return home well rested and in good spirit.

Yours in Clay

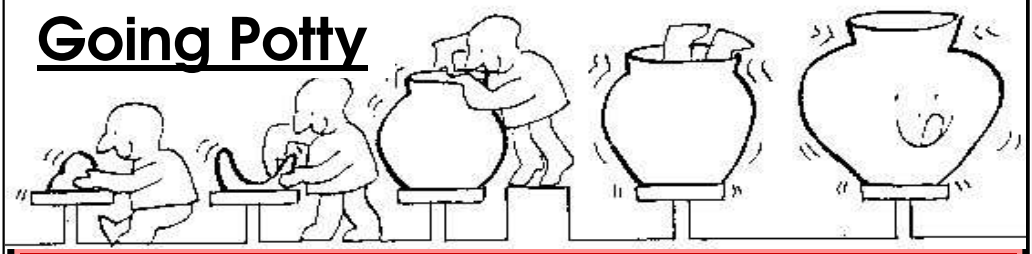
DISCLAIMER:

Neither the Editor, PAN Committee members, nor the contributors to this newsletter will be held responsible for any errors that may creep in unnoticed and the personal opinions freely expressed are not necessarily those of the Association!

We welcome, and are most grateful for any contributions to this newsletter!

However, the Editor retains the sole right to edit, and/or refuse unsuitable material, submitted for publication.

Going Potty



KILN BUILDING AND WOOD-FIRING JAMBOREE - A GREAT EXPERIENCE - by Sarie Maritz

Robert Sanderson travels the world teaching potters the much neglected ancient art of building and firing wood fired kilns.
Paul de Jongh and Nina Shand of Millstone Pottery hosted a week's workshop led by Robert in McGregor recently.

Imagine a cluster of thatched white cottages on a gentle slope against pale blue high mountains, and green gardens filled with pink and white roses. Millstone Pottery reminds one of Mashiko in Japan, where great stacks of split wood are carefully hoarded under kiln sheds next to the anagama. There also, understated historical buildings and nature are cherished together in the spirit of shibui.

Our main object was to build, fire and unpack a small train kiln from Monday to Sunday. Paul and Nina had already built the chimney and most of the chimney stack, so we had to build the chamber and fire box. Further participants arrived on Friday for the firing jamboree of two train kilns and a huge pit-firing. Talks and demonstrations by Robert, Christina Bryant, Kim Sachs, David Schlapobersky and Felicity Potter were held while stoking was taking place.

The participants were artists, professionals, young and older retirees, computer whizzes - all loving clay and the self-expression and meditative time it allows.

Robert told us of his revelation at Winchcombe Potteries about once-firing, of the idea of recycling free fuel from the mills, of wood being a renewable resource and of the aesthetic of wood-firing, a slower process. The design of this train kiln relies on an efficient and user-friendly fire box, called the Bourry box, developed in France in the 17th Century for firing porcelain to 1300°C. It was rediscovered by Michael Cardew and used in his kilns in West Africa and eventually applied all over Australia, then transferred to the USA where its principles were implemented in a kiln used as a teaching tool.

John described the properties of various kinds of fire brick, how to source second hand materials and the principles of this three-part kiln. A text-book would be necessary to explain it all, but Robert imparted his enthusiasm and belief in the re-discovery of old skills and knowledge.

He demonstrated the craftsmanship of a master bricklayer in his meticulous approach to planning each layer of bricks, careful measuring and setting-up, constantly checking with spirit level, straight edge and set square, and repeatedly measuring to keep everything square. Bricks were grooved to accommodate steel angle iron bracing and much cutting of the different kinds of old and new bricks was necessary to fit them together. The constant supervision resulted in a beautiful and perfectly performing train kiln.

Paul and Nina demonstrated glazing and showed what ash and heat could do to the clay body. We dipped and poured their celadon, ash, shino and chun glazes, hoping for great results.

On Friday the new kiln was finally complete. The glazed pots were packed and the slow warming-up was started at 6pm. This continued to 12pm when the fire box was sufficiently hot for stoking to start. We had to do shifts, but Robert and Nina were always there to supervise. Stoking continued until 4pm Saturday when all the cones had dropped, after which Robert continued stoking until 7pm.

We watched flames erupting from the chimney at dusk. Robert visibly relaxed when firing stopped, dampers were closed and the cooling could be left to the kiln gods. Now only the unpacking and assessment remained for Sunday afternoon.

In between we spent time forming, burnishing and applying terra sigillata to articles for the pit fire. These were biscuit fired to withstand the intense and sudden heat of layers of dung, set alight by burning armfuls of brushwood on top. Coarse salt, vermiculite and copper carbonate were sprinkled on for spectacular effects.

We learnt a great deal. Robert's advice to potters wishing to start on their own, is to investigate local bricks and local clays, to try firing them to see what temperature they would withstand, and to discover wood-firing, which covers all the temperatures from about a 1000° to 1300°C degrees. His philosophy is to return to a quieter art of firing, to escape the noise and aggression of our modern technological world. It now seems very achievable and desirable to me.

Where to Get More Information

The Log Book International Wood-fired Ceramics Publication >>www.thelogbook.net

"***Wood-fired Ceramics - contemporary practices***"
by Coll Minogue & Robert Sanderson
A & C Black - London 2000
ISBN 0-7136-4621-7

Google "***The Kiln Book***" by Olsen

"***Pioneer Pottery***" by Michael Cardew
A & C Black, London 2002
ISBN 0-7136-5945-9

Publishers of books on ceramics:
Krause Publications >>www.krause.com
The Ceramics Society of America
>>www.ceramics.org

5 th National Ceramics Biennale

Premier Award: Mariki Grobler

1. Wheelwork: John Hunter

2. Wheelwork: Jacques Jansen van Vuuren

Wheelwork Merit: Rosi Praetorius

Wheelwork Merit: Uschi Bauer

1. Sculpture & People's Choice Award: Birgit Graefen

2. Sculpture: Lesley Crawford

Handwork Merit: Val Garber

1. Handwork: Sharon Flewellen

2. Handwork: Betsie van Rensburg

Decorative: Val Garber

Decorative Merit: Carola Lorck

Functional: Betsie van Rensburg

Most Promissing Beginner: Stienie van Rooyen

New Signature Award: Maryke Maree

JOHN HIGGINS' Workshop and PAN'S 5TH BIENNALE EXHIBITION

As the lengthening October days start warming up, and the first rains make an appearance, potters all over Namibia are closeted in their studios, putting in the last extra hours of work. November 2011 is once again time for the Potter's Association of Namibia's (PAN's) Biennale exhibition. This prestigious, judged exhibition strives to showcase some of the best ceramic work Namibia has to offer. This year PAN has invited UK potter John Higgins to judge the exhibition and present a workshop, after the opening of the exhibition on Thursday the 3rd of November.

It's 2pm on Friday and the potters are gathering at Rosi Praetorius's studio in Suiderhof , Windhoek. The participants are from Windhoek and Swakopmund, as well as one from Okahandja and we enjoy catching up with old friends and looking forward to the workshop ahead. Congratulations are shared with the prize-winners of last night and a quick discussion about the opening ensues before we all find a seat, pull out the notebooks and cameras and finally settle down.

John starts introducing himself by giving us a bit of background on the area he hails from and how he got into the business of clay. He comes from Stoke-on-Trent, an area known as the Pottery Towns in the midlands of England, which is famous for names like Wedgewood, Spode, Poole, etc. It's where the Industrial revolution officially started due to the availability of clay, coal and the canal-system which flows through the area. It's recently seen a revival of some of the factories with the arrival of newer pottery names like Emma Bridgewater. Even Prince Charles is investing in the revival by supporting the Middleport factory as one of his heritage projects. It's an area so steeped in the business of pottery that old kiln shelves are recycled to build the supporting edges of the canals.

As a child John and his friends played in clay slip – in large areas where clay had been extracted called marl-holes. Coming from such a background it's no surprise then that ceramics became John's choice of career and now he primarily teaches in adult education, is an adjudicator and also produces pots for exhibitions.

Then finally it's down to work and we start by wedging large blocks of clay. He demonstrates how to use unusual wires – the more twisted and kinked the better – to cut the slabs. Beautiful twisty, wavy patterns are left by the wires and these slabs are carefully placed to one side to dry a little.

After tea break it's over to the wheel for more slab throwing. 'Slab throwing on the wheel?' I hear you say – there must be some mistake!
First he demonstrates a tip to those of us not so familiar with wheel work, that our clay ball should form a cone-shape underneath, in order to sit more compactly on the wheel head and prevent those annoying S-shaped cracks in the bases. With no need to make a base, he pulls up large straight-sided cylinders. Before cutting them free at the base, he drags a few wires and found objects over the pot in a random, seemingly uncontrolled fashion! Next he cuts straight down the middle of the cylinder with a wire cutter and lays the two halves flat on boards to dry and harden up a bit. We spend the rest of the afternoon throwing slabs – everyone using different types of clay.

Saturday morning begins with a talk and slides on John's early work and the influences that shaped his style. Great artists who contributed to the development of his personal style include William Scott and Robert Motherwell, the American expressionist, to name a few. John's early works were concerned with combining 2D and 3D elements to create almost flat vessels that appeared to have great depth to them. At the end of the talk he finally reveals his own pots which he has carried all the way from England.

John then starts to throw the cut slabs of yesterday showing us how to be aware of the unusual things going on in the clay. An air bubble can create an unusual feature, and the thrown-edges of the wheel slabs create gorgeous folds. Any slab which gets torn during slapping down on the table, is deliberately patched with clay from the inside and thrown down some more! Accidental folds or creases from the fabric on the table should be kept and cherished. He encourages us not to get 'precious' about the slabs but rather to look ahead at what the potential might be. 'Find the hidden value in your slabs' he suggests.

So we start throwing our own slabs and are delighted by the new patterns that emerge in the wire imprints. John encourages us to look for the unusual marks left behind by this procedure and not discard something that we'd normally consider imperfect. It's also a skill to know when to stop and just 'let it be'!

At last it's time to start putting the slabs together and at first, our collective experience of always knowing how the finished product will look, inhibits most of us a bit! But with a bit of practice we start thinking differently and experiment and let the slabs dictate what the pot will look like. Quite freeing for most of us!

Large slabs are draped on newspaper over cylinders and every surface and corner of the workshop space is filled with emerging works of art. The studio becomes quite an obstacle course. The Windhoek potters remind the rest of the group (who hail mostly from the damp coast) that the air is exceptionally dry here and caution must be taken not to let pots dry out too quickly! All sorts of weird and wonderful objects emerge, with no function whatsoever other than being interesting to look at, like enormous teapots with non-functional spouts and vase-like vessels in every colour of clay that's available. As John remarks, the more one looks at these pots, the more you start seeing unusual forms and textures and hidden delights! He cautions us not to overwork the clay and inadvertently remove the natural folds and textures. Some odd-looking and irregular thrown feet are added and for those working with flat bases, John has an idea for us. He suggests leaving about 2-3mm around the base slab, then working it upwards at an angle and around in sweeping movements to seal the base and leave a rough and interesting upper edge.

The last project for the weekend is throwing some unusual plates, which John informs us we are going to 'abuse' later on! After his initial demonstration, we take up 2 – 4 kgs of clay and throw thick flat plates with an extra inner ring close to the rim, rather like a saucer gone wrong. These are set aside to stiffen slightly for finishing the next day.

John Higgins
demonstrating his plate-making technique

Sunday morning we gather for the final session and we are now thoroughly getting into the swing of 'perfectly imperfect' potting. Our plates are removed from the batts and we all starting bashing them down on the tables. 'Throwing plates' takes on a whole new meaning! John shows us how to manipulate them into square plates and delights in the finger marks which emerge around the edges! Then the plate is turned face down onto a hump mould and returned to the wheel where a thick coil is added and a foot ring thrown.

Once dried to the leather hard stage we take them up again and start applying coloured slips to the upper surfaces, with a touch of under-glaze for accent. Here again John shows us how to take 'found' objects to trail the slip on with and to just let the object dictate the pattern that the slip makes. We should not 'force something which has its own direction' he says!

All too soon it's time to clean up and pack away, but first John calls us to gather round for a little discussion. We share our ideas about what we have learnt from him and he too, feels that he has learnt from watching us run with his ideas! He says what comes across very strongly for him is the achievement of the Namibian potters in managing to create what we do, in relative isolation, from each other as well as from pottery suppliers and the pottery world in general.

He has had an extremely busy week with long flights, judging, arranging the exhibition, the workshop and getting to know the potters but, he assures us, he has thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity to have a glimpse into the Namibian potter's world. We too, have certainly relished the chance to learn new techniques and have our pottery horizons broadened. We have really enjoyed John's company and learnt from his expertise and we look forward to seeing him in Namibia again in the future.

Annabelle Venter - Windhoek

Membership Fees for 2012!!!

Ordinary Single Members: **N$ 320.00**

Couple: **N$ 370.00**

Bona-fide Students and Pensioners: **N$ 200.00**

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

A big thank you to the following renewals received:

Beate Schindler, Scott & Judy Hurd, Sabine Cronjé, Birgit Graefen, Coral van der Plas, Mariele Hlasek, Antoinette Warren, Uschi Ahrens, Carola Lorck, Val Garber , Petro Hayman

The following renewals are due:

November 2011

Christiane Hilbert – Okahandja

January 2012

Uschi Bauer – Windhoek, Lesley Crawford – Windhoek, Mariki Grobler – Swakopmund

February 2012

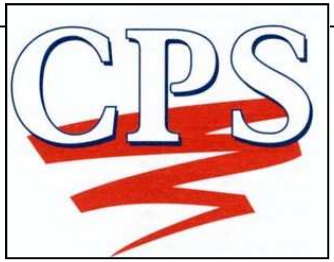
Karin Grellmann – Windhoek, Rosi Praetorius – Windhoek, Betsie van Rensburg – Swakopmund

Welcome to the new members:

Sakkie Namis – Swakopmund, Anja Kurbirske – Windhoek, Ujama Kuhungi – Windhoek, Johannes Tjizoo – Windhoek, Maryke Maree - Windhoek

OVERDUE: Sarie Maritz – Windhoek, Wilma Wilkinson – Windhoek

Classifieds



WE ARE OPEN if you're visiting Cape Town during the festive season for your convenience – check the website for times and dates!

POTTER'S CHOICE GLAZES have become increasingly popular and we have extended the range as well as extending the colour range of LOW FIRE glazes and other products from AMACO. Come and see the new and exciting texture tool from AMACO now in stock at all 3 branches.

We wish you all safe travelling and wonderful festive season and we look forward to welcoming you to our showrooms!

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Shop Hours

Monday to Thursday - 8am to 5 pm

Friday - 8am to 4pm

First and last Saturday of each month 9am to 1pm

Factory Shop

We have opened up a Factory Shop in Brackenfell industrial just off the N1, on the opposite side of Cape Gate shopping centre, Okavango road. The new Factory Shop has room for a studio and we'll be sending out notices of workshops and product demonstrations. Call us or mail us on reinders@kilnsandclay.com so that we can add you to our mailing list.

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For your Information

Please note our events for 2012

March

Pottery Demo: Carola Lorck SATURDAY 17th, 09:00,
Waterbank Str. Swakopmund
(Carola's House)

Annual General Meeting SATURDAY 17th, 15:30,
50 Turmalin Str. Swakopmund
(Mariki's House)

April

Raku on the Beach, SATURDAY 21th, Somewhere on the beach in Swakopmund (Venue to be Confirmed)
Email pan@iway.na for more info

Exhibition: Jacques Jansen van Vuuren, TUESDAY 24th, Studio 77, Windhoek

May

Pottery Workshop: Val Garber,
Date & Venue to be Announced, Windhoek/Okahandja

June

Fill-a-Bowl, FRIDAY 1st, Swakopmund

July

Exhibition Opening: Carola Lorck & Betsie van Rensburg, SATURDAY, 14th Fine Art Gallery, Swakopmund

CSA National Exhibition Entry Submission, VIA Photos, SATURDAY 14th

For your Information Cont.

September

Pottery Workshop: Daphne Corrigan, Saturday 8th,
Venue to be Announced, Windhoek

Bank Windhoek Kidz Fun Fair, Windhoek (Helpers needed, please contact Betsie v Rensburg Tel. 064 - 462930)

October

PAN Themed Exhibition Opening, Swakopmund

CSA Council Meeting, SATURDAY 6th, Pretoria

CSA National Exhibition Opening, SUNDAY 7th, Pretoria

Happy Potting