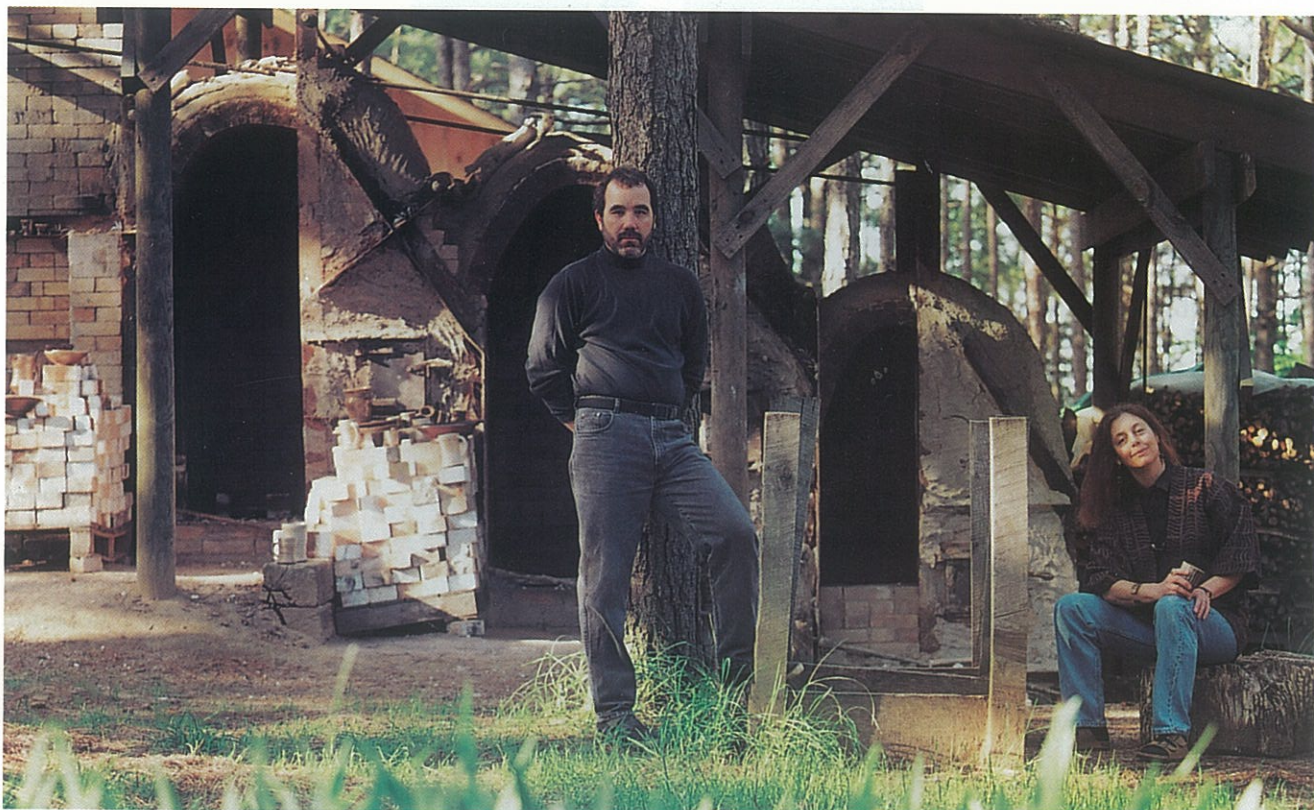


# Reflections on Wood Firing

by Terri Bruhin



PHOTOS: TERRI BRUHIN, LARRY MCSPADDEN, BILL PARSONS, KENNY SIMS

For Joe and Terri Bruhin, the rewards of wood firing are well worth the time and effort required to stoke three chambers to Cone 12 over a period of 2 to 4 days.

It is only a few days before the firing. Joe's attention has been focused toward this event for weeks now. Choosing pots from amongst a myriad of forms, deciding and executing any glaze or oxide work, strategically placing each in the kiln for maximum effect, and bricking up three doors require a tremendous amount of time and effort. This twice-a-year ritual—the firing of a wood-burning, noborigama-type kiln—seems all encompassing.

Once the fire is kindled, the kiln will be the center of our joint universe for anywhere from 2 to 4 days, 24 hours a day. Neither of us will have time to do anything else, or think of anything else, until all three chambers have been stoked to around Cone 12.

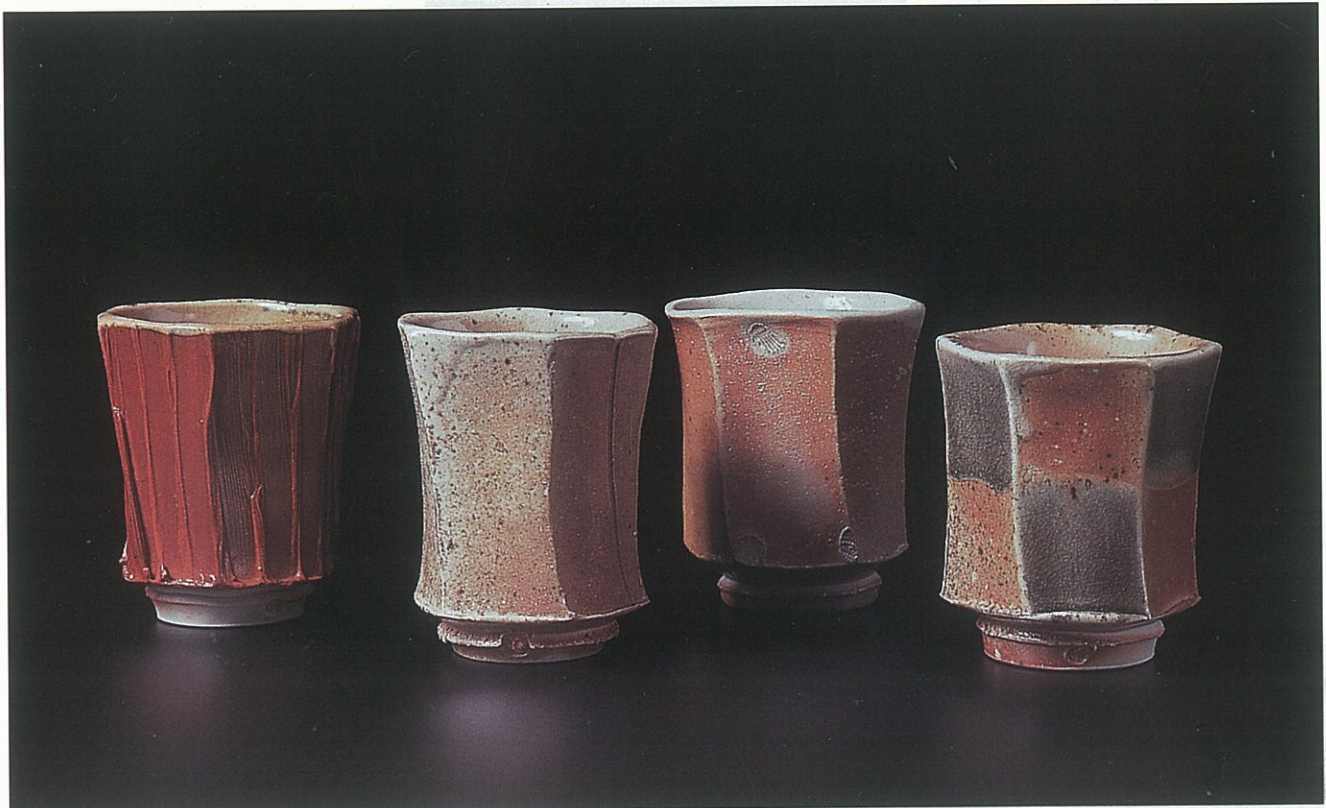
Afterward, we have a few days of resting and waiting, then the open kiln reveals the fruit of months of work. This special time always seems to have the feel of “a moment of truth” to it. We, full of wonder and expectations, are especially vulnerable to the raw power that pours out of the doorways, brick by brick. Sometimes whoops of joy fill the air; sometimes groans of anguish. Whichever, the pots must be quickly inspected and cleaned, boxed up and carried off to market, the anguish and joy still fresh in our minds.

What is it that makes wood firing so different from gas, electric, raku or even salt firing? Surely it is more than just the resulting surface effects. The flashing and ash deposits are very beautiful, but there seems to be more at stake here than just a pretty face.

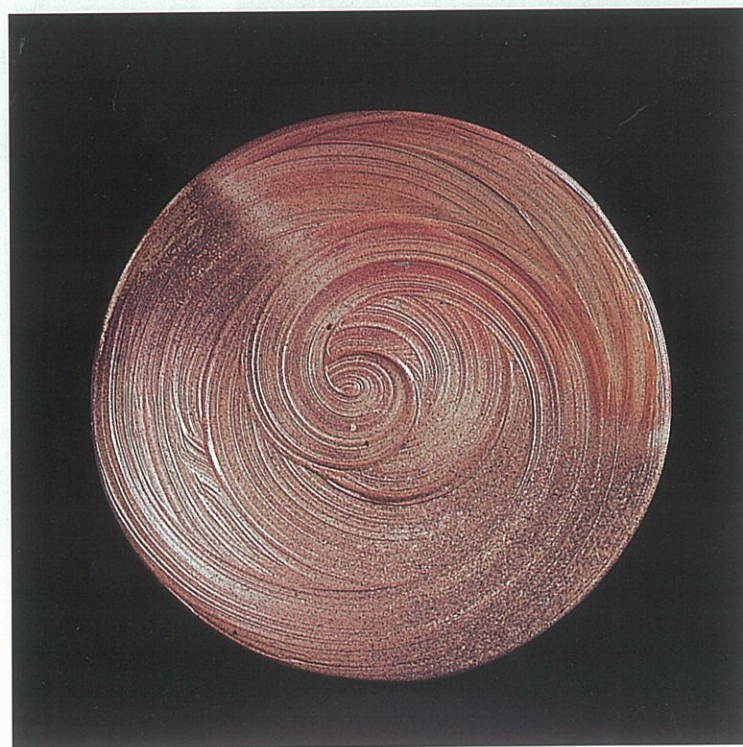
We were told that we wouldn't be able to sell this type of pottery at craft and art fairs, but we do. We enjoy the one-on-one interaction with the people who eventually take these pots home. We can gauge their reactions and feel their response first hand.

Of course, wood-fired ware may not sell as well as some other types of pottery. But sell it does. And the people who do respond to its subtle, quiet and deep variations tend to react as would a person who has not eaten for a week when suddenly presented with a bowl of steaming minestrone and a loaf of freshly baked bread. These people are starving, but what for?

There is a lot that could be said about the shallowness and meaninglessness of most people's lives. Our modern existence is filled with antiseptic environs, smooth surfaces and cushioned spaces; it pulsates with vibrant colors and sounds shot from all directions. Wood-fired pottery seems to be the



Wheel-thrown and faceted porcelain cups, 4½ inches in height, with glazed interiors and primarily unglazed exteriors, wood fired to Cone 10-12.



White stoneware platter, 16 inches in diameter, wheel thrown, with brushed slip, flashing and fly ash deposits, fired to Cone 10-12.