

The first thing that grabs us is the clay. Old or young, handling the stuff sends a jolt up the arm, and we make a startling new connection between hand and brain. Soon, though, most who stay with clay long enough to find their own voice fall under the influence of a teacher. Because while much can be gleaned from books, magazines, and the Internet, the learning process in clay remains insistently *personal*. In this age of digital technology, the teaching of ceramics still depends on actual people working together in actual rooms.

Many years ago, when I taught at an urban community college, one of my students lingered after class to ask how I had decided to become a potter. When I finished telling my story, she shyly admitted that she had never met someone who worked at something she chose to do. I was stunned and humbled. Not since my own road was redirected by an important teacher had I felt so keenly aware of what a teacher can represent – the next step on a path, or a whole world.

We all know that teachers don't so much administer a course of study or transmit a set of skills as embody a way of life—a fact about our field to be both cherished and, occasionally, challenged. From their teachers, students absorb parts of clay's vast knowledge base, but also how to see, how to learn, and what to value. They encounter a way of thinking, through their hands and down the path of a particular material with enormous possibilities and freely chosen limitations. Faced with a teacher's example, students can be inspired to emulate, extend, or repudiate it.

Thinking about Warren MacKenzie's enormous influence on a generation (or more) of studio potters, a friend recently wondered aloud who would provide a road map for the next generation. Many more people than those Warren actually taught have found in him the personification of an idea they wanted the world to make room for – and a force to push against – and he has launched many a life in clay. Ideas in contemporary ceramics tend to be attached to people, and the ones holding the road map for future directions are beginning to be heard. Great teachers – and even, sometimes, ordinary ones encountered at the crucial moment – ask the questions that spur new inquiries. The articles that follow celebrate those transformative encounters.

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STUDIO POTTER is a non-profit organization which publishes journals, produces educational programs, and provides services to the international community of ceramic artists and craftspeople.

A professional journal, *THE STUDIO POTTER* is published twice a year and focuses on critical issues of aesthetics, technology, history and personal development. It is aimed at a discerning readership of ceramists, educators, and others committed to supporting work and dialogue. By fostering innovation and creativity as well as respect for tradition, the organization endeavors to improve the quality of life and work for studio potters.

STUDIO POTTER welcomes hearing from potters, artists, scholars and educators with special interests in writing and reporting on topics and events in ceramics.

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