

Kevin Akhurst

Wood-fired pottery/ceramics



I started making pottery when our children left home to go to university. I had always liked modern pottery and, with a background in materials science, I was also curious about how the huge variety of possible glazes and surface effects is created. I chose to focus on stoneware, in part because the high temperatures that stoneware is fired at allow a subtle interaction between the glaze and the clay body which results in more complex and interesting surfaces. I am not only interested in the surface of a pot though, but also its form. The long tradition of pottery is mainly associated with functional vessels, such as bowls and jars, and the idea of a pottery vessel is deeply embedded in human culture, allowing us to see not only functionality but also beauty and other allusive qualities in a simple pot. My work has always been based on the vessel form, not only for functional use but also as an object of beauty.

The surface appearance of a fired pot depends not only on the clay and the glaze, but also on how the pot is fired. After starting with an electric kiln I quickly moved to firing with gas, which allowed a greater variety of subtle surface effects. More recently I built a wood-fired kiln and started to glaze with salt and soda. These techniques introduce more complexity into the surface of the pot, which changes around the pot from one side to the other. The wood for the kiln is sourced locally from the people who manage Newtown and Burghclere commons and the Herbert Plantation.

Fortunately I don't have to earn my living by selling my pots, and this allows me to work slowly and experimentally. I like to try new forms and glazes, developing and changing what I have made before, in the constant search for the mysterious elements that make an object beautiful and interesting. I have become increasingly interested in pottery from Japan and China and also

ancient pottery, and the forms and effects that I have seen in these have had a strong influence on my own work. Recently I have been taking pots that I have thrown on the wheel and, while they are still malleable, manipulated their shapes into more complex forms, inspired both by Japanese pottery and by natural forms, such as the shapes created by water flowing over ice.

I have put photographs of much of my work on my website, www.kevinakhurst.com , where you can see how it has changed and developed in recent years. If you want to see, and maybe buy, my pottery, and also see my workshop and kiln, the best time to visit is at my annual exhibition each May as part of the West Berkshire and North Hampshire Open Studios scheme. I tend to plan my work with this event in mind and I usually have several other local artists exhibiting with me at Adbury Holt. I also usually exhibit at the annual exhibitions of the Southern Ceramic Group (in Chichester) and West Forest Potters (near Henley) – for details see my website. If you would like to visit my studio at other times of the year please e-mail me at kevin.akhurst@btinternet.com .

