

David Schlapobersky and Felicity Potter

A Partnership that Works

By Gail de Klerk

David and Felicity are not only life partners, two highly principled people with an unquestionable integrity, a great love, compassion and empathy for all people, they are also partners in producing wonderful pots, pots made within the strict discipline of reduced, high fired stoneware and porcelain.

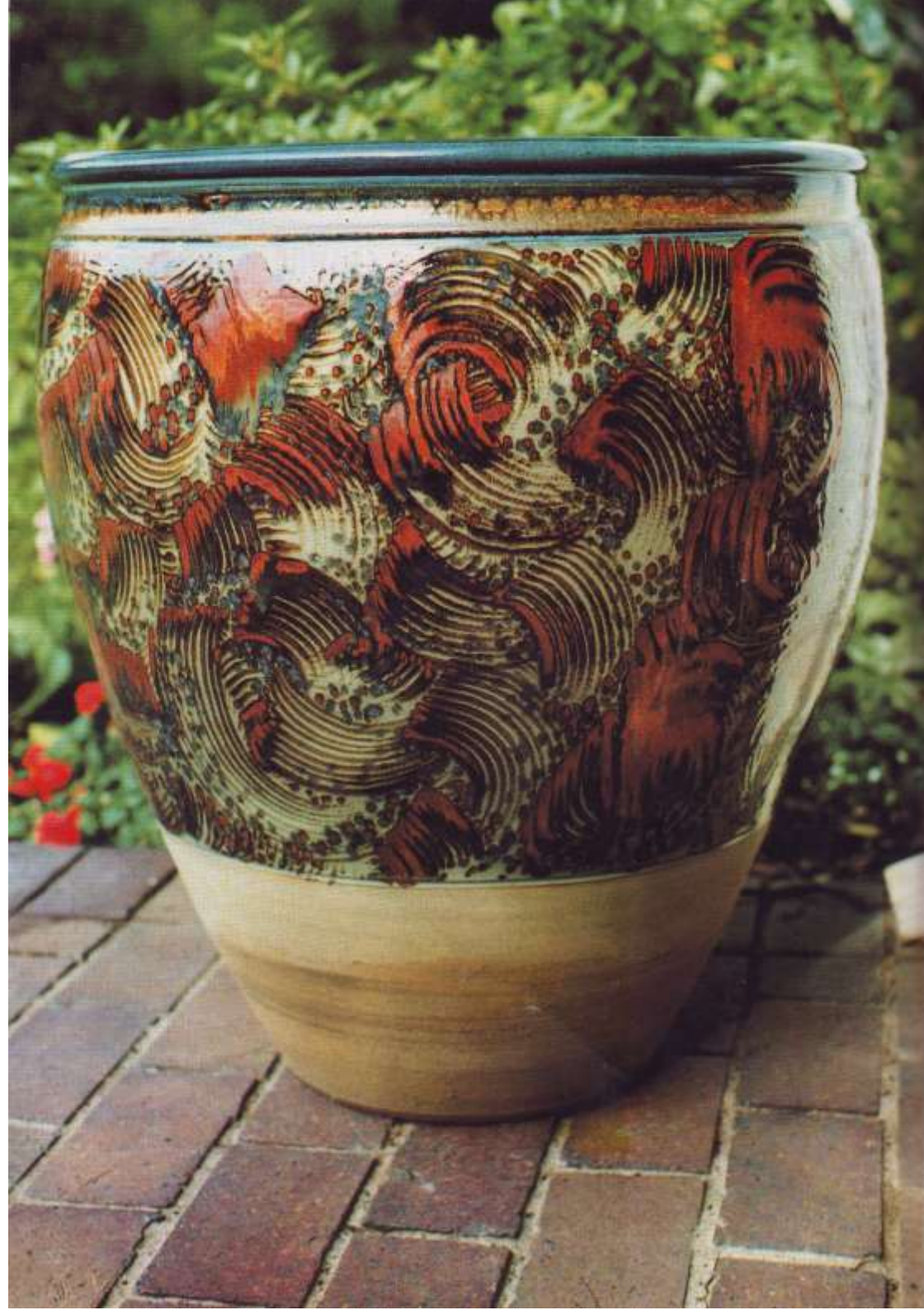
All the throwing is done by David and the superb decorations by Felicity who studied Art and Textile Design at the Technikon. Cups and saucers, jugs — large and small, large platters, casseroles, planters, vases — all finely crafted, have attained an honesty and finesse through a process of evolution — a cycle of progress gained from discussing shapes and decoration together, working ideas through on paper and being ever mindful of the needs of their customers. For David and

Felicity making pots that enhance the everyday lives of their owners is of prime importance, especially as they are truly professional potters whose livelihood depends on sales.

Adversity introduced the couple to pottery. Felicity's son, James, was hit by a car in Jan Smuts Avenue, an accident which left him severely handicapped and in 1972 David and Felicity moved with James and his brothers to Cressett House, a home for the handicapped, as house parents, as it was a matter of prime importance to them that James received the love and support of his family. It was felt that many of the residents of the home would benefit from doing pottery and David enrolled for classes in an effort to start the facility. His first teacher was Gordon Wales, a founder member of

Below, David with some of their large pots showing a feldspathic glaze with cobalt and iron decoration.





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Felicity and David with some of their beautiful work. Below, a detail of the rich glazing on the large planter on the facing page.



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A.P.S.A. who later emigrated to Canada. German measles proved to be a turning point in the lives of David and Felicity. James' two brothers contracted this childhood illness and as there were a few pregnant members of staff the family were asked to move out of the home until they were germ free. Taking the opportunity of being free from the responsibility of the home, Felicity made contact with Tim Morris whom she met some years earlier and was impressed by his work and a visit was arranged. They discussed with Tim their plans to start a studio at Cressett House and with the enthusiasm and generosity for which Tim was known, he embarked on organising a major art exhibition, with contributions from leading artists, to equip a studio. Tim also shared his knowledge with them and in David's words, "Tim lit a fire beneath them, a fire that still burns." One of the important lessons he taught them was the value of repetitive throwing — a discipline so necessary to refine a potter's skill and this is a discipline that they still practice today and is reflected in their cups and saucers. Porcelain cups and saucers that have evolved into enormously sound shapes. Thin rims for a pleasing drink, handles that are well balanced, they sit well on the saucer that is also easily lifted. Cobalt decoration over a white feldspathic glaze or an iron pigment over a warm celadon glaze before firing.

By 1976 having established the studio at Cressett House whilst overseeing the farm and bakery and being house-



Below, Felicity decorating a planter with cobalt, iron and rutile pigments, and above completed ware ready for firing.



parents to 12 children exhaustion forced them to reconsider their lives and wanting to fulfil their commitment to provide a family life for James, they made a major decision to move into their own home and start their own studio. It was important that this venture succeeded as it would be their only income. After a short period in a rented house they acquired their present home studio in Parkview.

Another influence that has been important in the development of their work is that of Ruth Wolff, Felicity's mother, a well known interior designer.

The large planters and vases, which enhance many homes reveal this input. The harmony of shape achieved by masterful throwing and superb decoration are evident in these pieces, a harmony that can only be achieved by the close collaboration of these two artists.

Encouraged, once again by Tim Morris following the success of the Crocodile Ramble, David and Felicity were, with other Johannesburg artists instrumental in starting the Johannesburg Studio Route. By opening their studio to the public, David and Felicity feel that they can give back to the community by allowing them to see the potter at work and thereby educating them in the process of making pots. They especially enjoy the contact of other potters visiting their studio and are always willing to present workshops in which they generously share their extensive knowledge of pot making.

The generosity of spirit that burns within them has also led them to be involved in the Alexandra Art Centre. This centre was started by the community of the township to encourage the development of their artistic talents.

Working Notes

David throws all the pots in either stoneware or porcelain which they make themselves with the assistance of Lukas Kutu. For his large planters up to five coils are added and pulled up in sections until the planters are approximately 80cm high. Platters, casseroles, lidded jars, large free standing vases are but some of their stoneware repertoire. Tea sets, dinnerware and small lidded boxes are usually thrown in porcelain.

After the bisque firing the pots are glazed with a basic feldspathic glaze, a celadon or a cobalt glaze. Felicity then applies her sensitive brush decoration using either a cobalt or iron and rutile slip over the dry, unfired glaze. The work is fired in a reduction atmosphere to cone 11 (1315 degrees centigrade) in a 90 cubic foot gas kiln.

Being on the Studio Route their studio is open to the public on the last Sunday of each month between 10h00 and 17h00. Should you be visiting Johannesburg at any other time call them on (011) 646-1170 for an appointment to view their superb work.



Top, bisque ready to be glazed and below, David packing their 90 cu. ft gas kiln for a glost firing.

