

Selfridge Ceramic Art

The Aomori International Woodfired Festival and Carol and Richard Selfridge's Japanese Pottery Tour

In the summer of 2002, we were invited as artists to the Aomori International Woodfired Festival in Goshogawara, Aomori prefecture, Japan. Although this was Richard's first trip to Japan, Carol was revisiting Japan where she had spent 5 months (30 years ago) and had kindled her commitment to become a ceramic artist.

We decided not to limit our trip to the festival which lasted 11 days, but to include a whirlwind trip of pottery centres and visit Japanese potter friends and historic sites.



A spiral of the festival's emblem expresses both clay for pottery and A for Aomori. Also, an obi (a broad sash) on right and left expresses fire which spouts out from a kiln.

This image and a few of the others of the Aomori Woodfired Festival are from the Makigama web site <http://makigama.jp/>

The Hamada Museum grounds in Mashiko. Shoji Hamada was a "National Living Treasure". We visited Tatsuzo Shimaoka, his first deshi (apprentice), who is now also a "National Living Treasure", and had tea at his home and workshop compound next door to the museum.

What follows is first an illustrated description of the festival and then a travel diary of our nine day Japanese pottery odyssey. We wish to thank the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Edmonton Arts Council for funding which helped to make this wonderful cultural exchange possible.



Views from the fast train from Sendai to Aomori

Our first experience of Japan on this trip was a jet-lagged negotiation by train from Narita to Tokyo's central train station and a two-hour trip on the bullet train to a waiting hotel, The Mayflower, in Sendai. We couldn't have made the trip to Goshogawara, 800 km. North of Tokyo, all in one day from Narita airport. The next morning's train ride was a relaxing 3 hours of viewing the lush Japanese landscape, some of it rustic and some of it cultivated.



Aomori train station and harbor bridge



New Zealand artist Peter Lange, who showed us around Auckland in 1980

We were met on arrival at Aomori, about an hour drive from Goshogawara, by helpful organizers and we renewed acquaintances with some other attendees whom we hadn't seen since 1980 when we travelled to New Zealand.



Participants getting acquainted and watching the dome opening.



Yong Moon Kim, throwing tea bowls, has often hosted the Macsabal woodfired festival in Korea.

We made considerable preparations before the trip bringing many o-myagi, gifts which signify meeting, as well as work for an exhibition at the festival. A wonderful colour catalogue was awaiting us when we arrived with the images of every participant's work. The exhibition work was then collected by the Goshogawara-shi Museum. We also packed our tools, as we would be working with 60 other international ceramic artists from 17 countries as well as 20 Japanese ceramic artists.



Huge traditional coiled and paddled pot by Korean artist, Kook Hyun Park, was later fired in a specially built kiln.



Carol, on stage with the Canadian and Australian artists, speaking at the closing ceremonies. She said she felt Japan has changed much in the 30 years since her first visit but that the giving spirit of the people has remained unchanged.

All this work took place in a fantastic high-tech dome stadium called, "Big Wing". During the 8 days of demonstration, more than 40,000 visitors came to see all of us working. It was the classic Japanese integration of traditional culture and advanced technology. We had unseasonal rains

during the festival time, so the dome was often closed and the attendance was less than the expected 50,000.



View of the Dome from our hotel.



The Dome proved to be an excellent site for the exhibition.



With Dome open we had an outdoor gallery



Visitors looking at some of our exhibition pieces.



"Big Wing" open to the elements.



Carol with the designer / builders of the Dome. They wanted to buy our "Shinto Vision" plate, but it was already in the museum collection.

The president of the festival, Ryoji Matsumiya's stated the aim for the festival was to establish a place "where a community of international potters can reside as artists in residence and work together in an atmosphere where ideas are exchanged freely. Not only does this promote a creative environment for artists, but it also helps us (the hosts) as an island nation open ourselves to the international community."



A few of the 80 ceramic artist presenters. The potters in the first five rows are from Phillippines, U.S.A. (4), Greece (2), India, Wales, Korea and New Zealand.



Our "Shinto Vision " plate next to large woodfired vessel by Ryoji Matsumiya.



One of Ryoji's three noborigama kilns at Kanayama fired for five to six days with red pine found near Goshogawara.



Although Ryoji was very busy hosting 80 international artists, he was always ready to share information and explain the processes at his studio.

As Ryoji stated, "This festival, therefore, is not only an inauguration for the coming together of international potters for a week of celebration, but it is, we hope, also the inauguration of a vision for history. Aomori is rich in natural resources that lend to the making of wood firing pottery. Red pine, which is best for wood firing, thrives here despite the insect infestations found in other parts of Japan. Clay is also abundant."



Samurai to scare the ancient enemies.
Picture on left by Kinga Evelin Várbíró, Hungary.

Ryoji had organized the festival to dovetail with two other events and resources in Aomori: the first, the Nebuta festival, thought to be 800 years old, brings many tourists to the area to see the gigantic illuminated lantern sculptures, which are carried through the streets during the Obon week in early August; the second is the Sannai-Maruyama archeological site of the Jomon people. This is one of the most important sites in Japan. It is rich in pottery shards from 5000 years ago.



Reconstructed Jomon village at Sannai-Maruyama.



Museum collection of 5000 year old rope textured Jomon pots.

After we arrived, the day before the opening ceremonies, we helped to set up our studio areas in "Big Wing" Dome and checked into our hotel. We then tasted the local cuisine and went out to view the evening Nebuta Festival Parade.



Group photo of participants at Nebuta on left and 25 metre lantern emerging from storage garage.
Photo on right by Kinga Evelin Várbíró, Hungary. She is on left in black dress in left picture.

During the opening ceremonies we heard speeches from the mayor of Goshogawara-shi and the Prefectorial governor who had contributed substantial funding (we thought we heard one million dollars) for the festival.



Ryoji listening to Morio Kimura, the Governor of Amori Prefecture, during the opening day ceremonies.



Carol and Richard in the card exchange protocol at the closing banquet hosted by Mamoru Narita, the Mayor of Goshogawara.

The nine days of the festival flew by. Most days can be described as a routine that began with a buffet breakfast of local delicacies at our hotel followed by a short walk to the "Big Wing" dome where plentiful supplies of clay and other pottery equipment and materials were provided for us. We worked making our own art with breaks to view slide shows from the other presenters.



Richard putting porcelain slip on a thrown and constructed squared covered jar.



Carol drawing a figure in the slip coated thrown platter.

The visitors were a delightful mixture of young and old Japanese travellers, ranging from small school children often dressed in traditional kimono, teenaged girls in their school uniforms to aged grandparents. There was a special area set aside for children to work on clay and some of the younger Japanese potters had their children with them.



Local school children attend a tea ceremony in the Dome.



Helpful volunteers in their school uniforms.

There were other performers of traditional and contemporary Japanese culture for the visitors who also toured the exhibition and watched us work. They viewed a bonsai collection from all over Japan. The festival participants were treated to a new spectacular traditional performing art presentation every evening.



Traditional drummer leads parade at opening ceremony.



Traditional koto and samisen players at Kanayama.



A butto dance piece with the dancer interacting with some large thrown pottery forms.



Traditional Tibetan water drums played by Japanese percussionist. Photo from Kinga Evelin Várbíró, Hungary.

Each day we would break for lunch back at the hotel, usually accompanied by the many volunteers who were incredibly helpful and enjoyed practicing their English with us.



Mayor Mamoru Narita, Carol, Setsuko Mikami and city official. Mikami was a wonderful help as



Noriko, a festival volunteer, poses with some Korean paddle decorated large pots.

a leading volunteer for the festival. She facilitated the smooth transitions from work to meals to socializing. She had lived in New York and is very cosmopolitan. She became a good friend to us.

We improved our Japanese and Carol remembered enough Japanese from her previous trip to surprise and engage the visitors with conversations about our work and our interest in Japanese culture.



Naomi, a festival volunteer, watches Kinga making a sculpture. Photo from Kinga Evelin Várbíró, Hungary.



Carol throwing whiskey cups and chatting with her new Japanese friends.

Every day after lunch, we returned to the dome and worked until 5:00pm. Then we cleaned up and boarded a bus at 5:30pm., proceeding to Ryoji's studio and workshop complex at Kanayama. There we enjoyed a buffet dinner with sake. We then experienced wonderful traditional and contemporary Japanese cultural performances by Ryoji's many talented friends. These friendship evenings provided a time to relax from the day's work and visit with our international colleagues. At about 9:30pm. we bussed back to the hotel and often continued our discussions into the late evening. In talks fueled by drinks in the hotel lobby, languages were often mixed, but we all spoke a common patois of ceramic art. We really felt at home as representatives of Canada in this cultural interchange.



Kanayama gallery showroom. Photo from Kinga Evelin Várbió, Hungary.



We were able to follow the ongoing process of the woodfiring, including the introduction of charcoal to give the traditional Bizen effects during the evenings at Kanayama.

After the first four days we had a day off and were taken by bus as tourists to visit the Jomon site and the Nebuta Lantern making and storage complex.



These "rolled rope" decorated shards from the Jomon site are similar to the decorative work of many contemporary potters. We use it in our own work.



The armatures for the Nebuta sculptures, traditionally bamboo under the rice paper surface, are now done with modern materials and illuminated with high-tech lights. The old one in the parade, illuminated with candles, was accompanied by people with fire extinguishers. Photo from Kinga Evelin Várbió, Hungary.



Natural setting at the studio where they make the Nebuta sculptures. We painted a goldfish sculpture to take home.



The Nebuta festival is all about drumming and we were given a demo.

We had a delightful o-bento lunch there and then continued on the bus to a traditional onsen (nude Japanese hotspring bath). This was in the mountains and afforded us a wonderful view of the Japanese countryside. We finished the day with a spectacular feast of teppen yaki (food grilled by you at your own table).



Asami Noriaki, the leader of the volunteers and our host master of ceremonies and Ryoji Matsumiya, potters from Aomori-ken and Bruce Martin, our potter friend from 1980 in New Zealand, are talking at next table.



Carol, Shinobu Kanayama, Steve Williams and Bonita Cohn enjoying teppen yaki and drinks.

The last four days were much like the first with the working and friendship parties, but it became much more interesting as we saw the work of the others progressing toward its finished form. We explored the production studio. The workers at the cooperative were very helpful and allowed us to visit their studios. Another aspect of the festival for us was the contact with our many

international contemporaries and tentative invitations to work with them in other countries in the future. The non-competitive camaraderie was wonderful.



The last day of making with pots drying in the sun with open dome.



Carol with Hideto Monai, a former apprentice to Ryoji, with his wife and teenaged daughter in the gallery at Kanayama.



Japanese visitors observe John Baymore from New Hampshire, as he fits a handle to his thrown basket form.



Some of our rubber stenciled work drying in "Big Wing" dome.



Our work made with excellent Shigaraki clay provided by the festival.



Our finished pieces waiting to be transported to the kiln.



One of our double nude slipped and carved platters.



One of our teapots being loaded into the kiln a few weeks after the festival at Kanayama.

This work was not fired while we were there, but was subsequently fired in Ryoji's noborigama kilns. He had an exhibition of some of the first fired work at his studio showroom in November, 2002. The remaining work will be fired in February, 2003.



This is most of the work made by the Selfridges during the eight days of the festival and later fired at Kanayama.



Our piece on the right was displayed next to the work of Korean artist Hyung Seok Lee in the November, 2002 show at Kanayama.

Our Nine Day Japanese Pottery Tour

After our eleven-day stay in Goshogawara we left early in the morning to catch the train from Aomori to Utsunomiya, changing at Morioka and Sendai. This was a pleasant four-and-a-half-hour trip and even though it was a heavy travel day at the end of the obon festival time, the early trains were not overcrowded.

We travelled for the rest of our trip mostly using two Japan Rail passes which were a great way to get around. We could not have done all of the things or seen all of the wonders of historic and contemporary Japan without the help of our fabulous Japanese friends. We have great debts in the favour bank.



The Shinkansens, sleek sculptures on tracks, travelled at 280km. per hour. They were just a blur to see when passing at speed.



Helpful uniformed conductors enabled the trains to run fast, smoothly and always on time.

Our first two days were spent in Mashiko, the historic pottery town with about 400 full time potters and many kilns, galleries and museums. We had planned to visit Tatsuzo Shimaoka who was Shoji Hamada's first deshi while in Mashiko. We had met him in 1983 when he gave a two-day workshop in Edmonton. He and his then deshi, Ken Matsuzaki, had toured our home and studio and had lunch with us then.

We had arranged to meet Lee Love and his charming wife Jean at the train station in Utsunomiya. He is now a very busy deshi at Sensei Shimaoka's workshop, but because it was Sunday and his day off, they offered to pick us up and drive us to Mashiko an hour away. We had contacted Lee before our trip, after we had received a formal invitation from Sensei Shimaoka.



Lee Love, an American of Japanese ancestry, poses in front of a traditional Mashiko pot at the train station. He will soon finish his apprentice and set up a pottery in Mashiko. We actually met on the internet where he is a frequent helpful contributor to the Clayart newsgroup.



Jean and Carol at the entrance to the Hamada museum compound.

Lee and Jean gave us a grand tour of Mashiko, including the Hamada Museum which would be closed the next day. It was an almost spiritual experience to see Hamada's work and the folk craft work he had collected from around the world. We next saw the best galleries, a fine soba noodle lunch spot and had a great rave-up about pottery, Japan and life as potters in North America. Lee and Jean are both from the American mid-west. A few of the other Aomori participants were in Mashiko at this time and we crossed paths while seeing the sights.



One of Hamada's ladle pour decorated large plates at the museum. We had seen Sensei Shimaoka demonstrate this technique in Edmonton in 1983.



A restored Hamada chambered kiln at the compound.

Lee and Jean dropped us back at our ryokan where we connected with John Baymore. He had won a prize in 1996 in an international juried pottery exhibition in Mashiko. Sensei Shimaoka had been one of the jurors and had presented John's award. John had arranged to visit Shimaoka as well and Shimaoka had decided that the three of us would have tea with him, tour his studio and see his latest work and new tea house the next morning. Lee Love had told us to show up sometime after 9am.

Two of John's friends from Tokyo, Tsuji Shigetoshi and his wife had come to Mashiko to meet with John. Tsuji had won the first prize in the 1996 competition. They stayed in our ryokan and we had sake and beer in our room after our evening bath and dinner. We exchanged o-myagi, cards and catalogues and discovered that Tsuji had been in a few of the same international juried shows as us. We agreed to meet at the other museum at noon and then go to lunch together.



Sensei Shimaoka's noborigama with secret chamber.



Sensei Shimaoka and his cat pose with Richard and Carol in front of his house.

Shimaoka gave us a tour of his workshop after we had tea and exchanged o-myagi. He seemed particularly proud of the new traditional tea house which he showed us. He said that when we were finished with our visit, Ken Matsuzaki would pick us up to visit his home and studio.



Tatsuzo Shimaoka and Ken Matsuzaki in front of our two chamber gas and woodfired kiln in 1983.



Shimaoka Sensei opening o-myagi in his dining room.

We had written to Ken, but had not received a reply before leaving Canada. We were pleased to re-connect with him. Although John had not met Ken, he was included in this excursion.



Shimaoka's new work ready for his upcoming exhibition.



Shimaoka Sensei pauses on his way to the workshop.



Shimaoka Sensei giving Carol and John his latest catalogues while we wait for Ken Matsuzaki.



Ken Matsuzaki and his wife Yoko in their tea room.

When Ken Matsuzaki showed us his kiln and studio, we were amazed at his firing process. He fires for eight days and finishes with 25 large bags of charcoal. His shino and oribe work is receiving international renown for good reason.



Tea room of Ken Matsuzaki.



Traditional form with rolled rope.

Ken took us for a guided tour of the Togei Messe Mashiko Gallery where we saw their incredible collection and a retrospective show of the work of Gouda Yoshimichi. We were able to introduce Ken Matsuzaki to Tsuji and his wife. It is often only when westerners come that an opportunity is afforded for famous Japanese potters to meet each other. We found Japan to be welcoming but formal in many areas.

After lunch, we went in Shigetoshi's car to visit another famous Mashiko potter, Hirohisa Ogawa who had just spent two years building a large anagama.



Lunch in Mashiko with John Baymore and the Shigetoshis.



A hobby kiln (Shigaraki-style anagama) of a Tokyo school teacher friend of the Shigetoshis in the third day of an eight day firing. The kiln is in the next prefecture, a short distance from Mashiko.



Wire cut stoneware plate 19cm. by Hirohisa Ogawa, Mashiko, Japan, now in our collection.

We toured Ogawa's studio and showroom, exchanged o-myagi over tea and cakes and he discussed the need for real heart in contemporary ceramic art. He said that the rim style on his wire cut plates was inspired by his viewing English slipware in Hamada's collection.

After our visit we went with the Shigetoshis to see the firing of the anagama in the next prefecture. They dropped the three of us back at our ryokan after a whirlwind of visits, tea and fast driving on rural Japanese roads.

That evening, we enjoyed beer and sake in our room with Lee Love, Jean and John Baymore. Lee told us about the arduous work as a deshi at the workshop and the invaluable experience he had gained in his three years at Shimaoka Sensei's. He also shared some shards of the glazes at the pottery, which filled in some technical questions for us.

The next day, we visited more galleries on the main street of Mashiko buying work and viewing some special Hamada pots owned by the gallery owner, which she brought out specially to show us. We also went to the pottery supply and found some special items not available in North America. We visited the indigo dye works and purchased some fabric dyed there in the traditional manner.



Carol with the grand daughter of the woman potter who inspired Shoji Hamada to make pots in Mashiko. We bought one of her landscape painted tea pots for our collection.



Grandmother's (Mrs. Minegawa) tea pot in the Hamada Museum Gallery in Mashiko.

At mid-day, we bussed to Utsunomiya and took the Shinkansen to Sakudaira in Nagano prefecture to visit our old friend, Hiroshi Ikehata. We had not seen him since 1988, when we spent the summer together as residents at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana. We have been in many international juried shows with Hiroshi since that summer and we were looking forward to connecting with him once again and meeting his wife, Chieko and son, Kousuke. We had planned to stay two nights at his home in the mountains and to give Tokyo a miss on this trip. Hiroshi called us before we left Canada and said he would like to take us for a one day tour of Tokyo.

Hiroshi picked us up at the train station about an hour from his home in the mountains and took us to visit his good friend, Hokozaawa Shigao. He also lives in a beautiful mountain setting.



Nagano prefecture area near Sakudaira in the mountains.



A porcelain bowl thrown by Nobuhiko Sueoka with his painting of thistle and live subject.



Nobuhiko Sueoka, who was a deshi to a national living treasure, with his own high fire porcelain painted work.



Nobuhiko Sueoka and his pottery partner wife with one of his superb floral porcelain pieces.

We had not expected to meet so many other excellent ceramic artists, but through the generosity of our potter friends we met several new professional colleagues. After visiting Hiroshi's friends, we overnighted with his family and saw his studio and kiln. His wife Chieko was welcoming, fun and a great cook. Early the next morning we headed off to Tokyo on the Shinkansen for a whirlwind day of museums, galleries, temples - the whole works.



Shortly after tea, Nobuhiko Sueoka suggested that Carol paint three plates with him.



Hiroshi Ikehata by his anagama wood kiln near Sakudaira.

Our first stop was the National Museum at Ueno Park for an Edo period laquerware writing box exhibition of national treasures. Next, we went to the restaurant supply district for a soba lunch and to purchase some plastic sushi. These are great sculptures. From there we went to the famous Asakusa shrine and then on to the National Craft Museum.



Plastic food display in the restaurant supply district, Tokyo.



View of Hiroshi Ikehata's anagama wood burning kiln.

At the museum, Hiroshi told us to go upstairs and that he would meet us there. After he showed us around and explained the treasures that we had seen only in books previously, we started to leave. He said that we wouldn't leave just yet as he had arranged for us to meet the chief curator for tea. We exchanged cards and showed him the catalogue from the Aomori Woodfire Festival and talked about his new appointment as director of the museum complex in Mino.



Carol and Hiroshi Ikehata, long view of his anagama wood kiln.



Asakusa shrine in Tokyo.

We also visited a restaurant/gallery and met some other ceramic artists and gallery curators. All of this in one afternoon and then the Shinkansen ride to Sakudaira, 250km. away. We met Cheiko for and incredible sushi feed and returned exhausted to a comfy futon.

The next morning's train ride took us to Nagano and then to Seto to visit Yasuo Terada and his family. Yasuo is a fourth generation potter who has been in Alberta and visited our studio with his son Teppie. Yasuo gave us the grand tour of Seto where the 2005 World Expo will take place. Seto

is the industrial ceramic heart of Japan and has an incredible museum which we toured with Yasuo and Teppie. We also went to the International Work Centre and Chukyo University, where Yasuo has built five amazing woodfired kilns.



Yasuo Terada in a pottery shop in Seto. Many types of Seto pottery were available there.



A water garden in the Terada family's back yard.



Yasuo Terada and his son Teppie with Carol in front of their 14 chamber noborigama which they are currently building in Seto.



Looking down from the top of the 14 chamber noborigama kiln of Yasuo and Teppie Terada.

Yasuo also contributed to our spiritual education by showing us a Buddhist shrine. He then showed us the school and workshop that he and Teppei run in their family complex.



Buddhist temple and yard in Seto.



Yasuo Terada and Carol purify themselves at the Buddhist temple.

After returning to their house, we met Yasuo's parents, wife Yuki (an accomplished painter) and two daughters Ori and Ayumi. We viewed the work of his father and grandfather. This is a 150 year family ceramic legacy. We had a wonderful o-bento sushi dinner, courtesy of the president of Chukyo University. He is one of Yasuo's pottery students.



woodfired stoneware shino sake cup with gold repair, 7cm., Yasuo Terada, Seto, Japan



The fourth generation pottery family, Terada.

Yasuo and Teppie wanted to meet our friend, Michio Sugiyama. Michio is the director of the workshop at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park. We worked with Michio in 1988 at the Archie Bray Foundation where we were resident artists together. Yasuo and Teppie drove us to Shigaraki by way of Iga, another famous historic pottery centre.



One of the kilns of Yasuo Terada in the kiln park at Chukyu University, Seto.



A view of the lush landscape on the way between Seto and Iga.

At Iga, we toured the museum and interpretive centre, buying a sake bottle and cup. Next, we went to see the historic kilns and the factory operation. Teppie had been there the previous year and proved a knowledgeable guide. His English is very good, as he studied at university for a year in Oregon.



An old multi-chambered noborigama kiln in Iga, now unused.



A water jar in the museum, Iga.



A wood fired basket in the museum at Iga.



A waster from Shigaraki at the cultural park complex. It shows the wonderful texture of the Shigaraki clay, with its feldspathic inclusions.

We toured the museum at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park and were given a tour of the workshop and grounds with many sculptural pieces made by visiting international artists.



Three terra cotta horses at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park.

After meeting with Michio, we checked-in to a ryokan that he had arranged for us. Before dining with Michio and his assistant, another former Archie Bray resident, we explored pottery supply houses and galleries.



A stack of wood fired plates in Shigaraki in a back lane storage area. Pots were everywhere.



A view of Shigaraki from the steps up to the Ceramic Cultural Park Museum. To the left is the large ceramic factory.

We were able to view real tanukis (Japanese coon dogs) in the back garden outside the window of the teppen yaki restaurant. The staff fed them a dinner of meat scraps.



Carol with her tanuki friends in Shigaraki.



Our ryokan room with futon in Shigaraki.

We caught the early morning train from Shigaraki with school kids in their uniforms. The train wound through the mountains where we saw the outcrops of Shigaraki clay. We made our way to Kyoto and then to Kurashiki to stay with Setsuo Watanabe and his wife Kinue.

Richard had met Setsuo in Athens, Ohio and then again with Carol in Iowa City, Iowa at the Different Stokes woodfired conference. Setsuo makes Bizen yaki and is very knowledgeable about this traditional pottery style. They met us at the Shinkansen station and kindly took us to Bizen. Our first stop after lunch was the site of a huge anagama kiln under construction.



The Bizen clay is a combination of refractory mountain clay and dark organic clay from under the rice fields like the ones pictured here. This transported clay fluxes the mountain clay and gives it the dark colour in a long reduction wood firing.



One of the large jars at the site of the new kiln, like the vessels from 400 years before.

These kilns require 30,000 man days of labour and a small forest of wood to complete their 40 day firing up to temperature and 40 days firing down to cool. There were two older somewhat smaller kilns at this site.



View of 100 metre anagama kiln of Mori Togaku under construction in Bizen.



Carol in front of new kiln under construction in Bizen. Note the bamboo poles and split bamboo lattice to support the structure.

After we viewed the new kiln, we went to the Fujiwara Kei Museum. He was a national living treasure from Bizen. Next, the Watanabes took us to the studio and gallery where Setsuo worked for seven years, twenty years ago.

After viewing the work there and having tea, we drove through historic Bizen to visit an antique dealer in an amazing old thatched house. He was an antique himself, sitting at his hearth fire in 40C. weather with 90% humidity in his longjohns. The house was crammed with treasures. We bought a hundred year old Bizen side handled tea pot and six "aka-e" (special red) laquerware bowls and the Watanabes bought some old Imari low bowls.



Kinue and Setsuo Watanabe and the kiln building foreman at the chimney outlet for the smaller, older anagama kiln.



This is a view into a smaller gas kiln where Setsuo achieves Bizen yaki effects by using rice straw and charcoal introduced at the end of the firing. Setsuo has a large anagama kiln, perhaps about 10 metres in length, also at his Kurashiki studio.

We had yet another fantastic Japanese restaurant dinner and then retired to their seashore traditional and western style home after a quick tour of Setsuo's adjacent studio. We were able to talk into the late evening with the help of Setsuo's teenaged son acting as interpreter and our rudimentary Japanese.



Flower arrangement in one of Setsuo's vases in the tokonoma of our traditional style bedroom.



Setsuo and Kinue in their western style dining room and kitchen.

We left Kurashiki in the early morning taking the Shinkansen to Kyoto. We proceeded by cab to a wonderful traditional ryokan, Yoshimizu Inn, behind Maruyama koen (park). This ryokan, a short walk from the Kiyumizu temple, was reserved for us by the Watanabes and is where they stay when in Kyoto.

After having coffee in the garden of the ryokan, we set off on foot for our last tourist day in Japan. We knew that Kyoto was the historic cultural centre of Japan. Carol had spent a month in Kyoto thirty years before and we knew that with over 2000 temples, we could only hit some high spots in one day. We wanted to see three things: The Kiyumizu temple complex, the Kiyumizu-dera which is shopping street known for its pottery shops and galleries and the home and museum of the deceased national living treasure, Kanjiro Kawai. Anything more than this would be a bonus.



A view from our ryokan room of the garden in Kyoto.



The wife of Kasho Morioka performs a tea ceremony for us using bowls made by her husband.

When we explored the Kiyumizu-dera, we entered a gallery which had superlative pottery. We were greeted by a Japanese woman beautifully dressed in traditional summer kimono. We told her that we were ceramic artists from Canada, showed her some of our postcards and the catalogue from the Aomori Woodfire Festival. She showed us the work of her husband, her son and her daughter and then we briefly met her son. After giving us one of her husband, Kasho Morioka's catalogues, she invited us to sit and have tea.

She then performed a traditional tea ceremony for us using her husband's beautiful tea bowls. After offering a second cup of tea in yet another tea bowl, she said she was going to call her husband. She whipped a cell phone from her obi(sash) and gave him a call.



Carol admires a wonderful green tea ice, bean and mochi dessert at the Moriokas gallery.]



Kasho Morioka in front of a display of his Shigaraki work.

When Kasho arrived, he admired our catalogue and cards and signed his catalogue for us. He then told us a bit about his kilns in Kyoto, Shigaraki, Korea and Jingdezhen, China. We were then offered a refreshment on this 40C. day with 90% humidity. After the green ice tea dessert, he took us in a small elevator to the upper floor to see his special work. He let us handle these extraordinary pots and explained their making and significance. Next, we were shown into his special tearoom where he opened the shoji (screen) to reveal a view of modern Kyoto and the mountainside in the distance.

After telling us about the tearoom, he invited us to his studio nearby to view his "collection". The main floor was a teaching workshop studio, where his son was instructing. We took an even smaller elevator to the second floor to another showroom to see his collection of ancient pottery. He let us inspect and handle this work and explained to us the process and significance of these treasures, many as good as any we had seen in the museums.



Kasho and Carol in the 400 year old tea room of the 1000 year old house in the Kiyomizu area of Kyoto. This building contains their Kyoto gallery and a collection of Kasho's extraordinary range of pottery styles.



Kasho's work shows his mastery of almost all Japanese, Korean and Chinese pottery styles.

We were anxious that we might miss the Kawai visit as the museum closed at 4:30pm. Mr. Morioka knew we wanted to go there and told us to leave our bags with him, go to the temple and when we returned, he would drive us the two miles to Kawai's. When we returned from the temple, he was busy trimming the last of a dozen tea bowls which he handed to us to inspect and admire. Then he slipped on his shoes and handed us about five pounds of excellent Jingdezhen porcelain saying, "Good clay, take this with you to make work in Canada."

We got into his car, a huge, tan 17 year old, left-hand drive Mercedes Benz and he beamed as he said, "New York car, I like New York car." He dropped us off at the museum with a smile and a wave.



The inner courtyard of Kanjiro Kawai's house and studio which is now a historic site and museum.

One of the reasons we were excited to visit Kanjiro Kawai's house was that our eldest daughter, Marion had been there at age 13 in 1982 and our friends who had taken her for five months to Japan had given us the gift of a beautiful book of Kawai's work. There is a serenity and strength in his art and his writing which has nurtured our work since that time. He was a friend and contemporary of Hamada, Yanagi and Tomimoto, all giants in 20th century Japanese pottery pantheon.



One of Kanjiro Kawai's sculptures showing his interest in spiritualism and peace.



The throwing room with tools and glaze test tiles of Kanjiro Kawai.

Stepping into the museum was like going back 75 to 100 years into the home and studio environment of another Japan. The tranquil feeling and the beauty of the objects in the museum was meditative and refreshing.



Kawai's multichamber noborigama kiln in the heart of Kyoto.



One of Kawai's thrown and constructed bottle vase forms with trailed porcelain decoration.



An antique treasure chest in the upstairs writing room at Kawai's home and studio.



A view of the firebox and the secret chamber with the stirring rods ready to tend the fire.

Leaving Kawai's tranquil street, we entered the bustling 21st century rush hour Kyoto. We took a bus to Takashimaya depato (department store) where we marveled at the food floor delights, viewed the upstairs ceramic galleries and admired the Japanese women wearing the latest fashions.

Strolling through the kabuki theatre neighborhood, back toward Kiyumizu, we looked in shops and admired the traditional architecture. Kyoto is still a predominantly low-rise city. We stopped for a snack before returning to our traditional bath at the Yoshimizu Ryokan.



The bridge near Gion corner and the old kabuki theatre in Kyoto. We had a snack from the Takashimaya department store food floor in the late afternoon on the river bank.



Our friendly okonomiyaki chef in the Kiyomizu area of Kyoto, cooks "Japanese pizza" on the counter/grill. We enjoyed practicing our Japanese with our jovial host and fellow customers. It was very much like a corner neighborhood bar.

The next morning, we boarded a bullet train which took us through Tokyo to Narita and our long flight home. Once home, we sorted through our collected treasures, gave a slide lecture at the Edmonton Art Gallery for the Alberta Society of Artists, and returned to our life as makers. We have photographed the work we collected in Japan and created an educational study collection web page on our web site. Since returning, we have received grants from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Edmonton Arts Council. We wish to acknowledge and thank them for their kind assistance.