

the ceramic

Whimsy

of Alexis Moyer

Whimsy, humor, color, function and fun - a few words that only begin to describe the ceramic art of Alexis Moyer.

Like many artists, Moyer's journey to her studio and gallery located just west of Philo, CA was a circuitous route. She was majoring in architecture at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo when she became exposed to ceramics. "My heart shifted and I ended up getting a ceramics degree at California College of the Arts" she explains. Moyer studied there with Viola Frey and Art Nelson. "They were both great teachers for me, Viola worked big, bold, loose and colorful while Art was much more controlled and really pushed the clay to its limits. I can see both of them somewhere in the background of what I do today."

Following college, Moyer visited Crete to study Minoan art history and ceramics. "I was very fortunate to have that experience. All these years later, I see how much my love of color came from that formative time." Her signature blue glazes are clearly inspired from her time in Greece.

Born in Castro Valley, CA, Moyer grew up with a backyard that had room to build things and play in ways that were fun and creative. She made perfume from flowers, mud pies decorated with the abundance of what nature



provided and forts from construction scraps scavenged from projects around the neighborhood. "My neighbor and I built what ever we could dream up in my back yard," Moyer recalls which eventually led her to take on the building of her own art studio in Pescadero, CA. She remembers it as a rewarding experience but found it was a much tougher job to do the actual construction than it was to design buildings on paper. Moyer now lives in Philo, enjoying the relaxed pace of life in the country.

Since 1988 Moyer has worked at The Pot Shop, her combination studio and gallery. An open door in the gallery invites visitors to peek into her large studio, filled with work in prog-



ress, racks of glazes, books, sketches and of course, her kick wheel and kiln. Projects from life-sized sculptural pieces to her signature dinnerware are spread on shelves, awaiting firing. Moyer enjoys showing visitors her works in progress and describing how the works will evolve as they progress. It is not unusual for visitors to return several times during the time a piece is being built to see how it is coming and to watch for the finished piece to show up on The Pot Shop's Facebook page.

"I always have two bodies of work going- a functional body of work and my sculptural pieces. The functional pieces help fill up the kiln, which brings my studio into balance" Moyer explains. She also feels that the functional works have led to the honing of her skills, providing the 10,000 hours of practice that lead to mastery. Frankly she says the first 10,000 hours are only the beginning and that the more she pushes what she wants to make the more practice it takes to make it happen.

Moyer picks up one of her coffee mugs festooned with a dainty frog perched on the handle, ready to jump. "I get as much satisfaction from creating one of my custom mugs as

some of my more complex pieces." Moyer has observed that when someone finds their special mug, they often hold it next to their heart. "You watch their hand fit where my hands were. It's very special, you really can feel where the artists fingers traveled over the clay". She likes to think that a little piece of the potter's spirit stays with each piece. "I know for myself there is a tangible connection when I look at ancient pottery in museum collections. If they would let me hold one of those objects I'd close my eyes and run my fingers along the ridges and be transported back in time to some long lost era," Moyer observes.

Moyer's style is on the whimsical side. She derives a lot of pleasure seeing people smile while they are looking at her work. "There is a theory that when you smile your outlook changes in a positive way so that is my little gift to everyone who comes across my work," says Moyer. It is also one of the reasons she enjoys welcoming visitors into her studio. People can meet her, watch how the work is made and get to see the whole process.

Most of Moyer's work is thrown on her old-fashioned kick wheel. Her bigger pieces are bursting with whimsy and play. Moyer's celebrated totem poles start on the wheel, get



altered and go up from there - featuring colorful, interesting shapes, evoking glass-like architectural forms and natural elements. The

totems take her back to her love of architecture. "It has to structurally stand up. It has to have a balance and design aspect. The animals that often populate them serve as a heart-warming way people connect to my poles" she smiles. "People often ask, 'how did you do that?' or say 'I've never seen anything like this', I think my totem poles set my work apart from other artists."

Frogs are an integral part of Alexis Moyer's work. "I frequently get asked why I do frogs. They hop into the studio and things just blossom from there. Over the years people have told me so many interesting things about frogs, and stories of how frogs have touched their lives. For myself, I like to think about how frogs transform and change from eggs into pollywogs and then into frogs. They remind me to keep growing and changing too."

Moyer accepts many commissions. "With commissions, I get to do things I've never done before. I created a pole that was all California sea life. The pole went from the ocean floor, up through the tide pools and finished above the water's surface with a sea otter diving into the ocean. I got to learn about a lot of ocean creatures while making the pole and it was fun to interpret those animals into totem pieces. Proj-

ects like that stretch my skills and challenge me," she says. As with all creative endeavors, Moyer insists on having the creative freedom needed to do her best work and create spectacular results for her collectors.

Moyer enjoys teaching workshops working with all skill levels. She especially enjoys helping new comers to clay discover their own creativity. "It is humbling to take art classes. You discover something about yourself and what it takes from you to create a piece of art." Classes with more advanced students seem to generate a symbiosis that leaves everyone making things they never thought possible when the class began. Friendships are formed and there is a camaraderie that is unique to the arts.

The largest body of Moyer's work is found at The Pot Shop. Her work is also shown at several galleries and art fairs throughout northern California. She is widely collected and her work has been published in *Ceramics Today*, *California Association of Clay and Glass Artists*, *Artists of the Mendocino Coast*, and the *Mendocino Travelers Guide* and *Mendocino Arts* magazines.

Alexis Moyer is one of the fortunate individuals who listened to her artistic calling and has been able to share her creative vision with thousands of people. "When I look back I can honestly say that I've had a really good time," she smiles.

For more information visit Moyer's website at www.AlexisMoyerPottery.com

