

## Lunenburg potter builds business with bare hands



Nothing is more basic than a pot—even the womb takes its shape from this simple design. You mix a little earth and water, enliven it with an idea, let it bake for a while, and send it out to perform some service.

Christy Drews Dunn is a potter who never “throws a pot” that doesn’t follow this

simple formula: “I like my pottery to hold something or cover up something; you can put flower in it or drink out of it,” she said as her hands deftly carved a forest motif in the soft clay of pitcher just shaped on her wheel.

For the last three years she has been building a successful business, called Sylvan Studios, on her family farm on Route 49 in Lunenburg Country. She calls herself a traditional potter because of her interest in keeping her pottery functional. Most contemporary pottery in the art magazines “looks like they threw it and sat on it,” she said, using one of her mother’s descriptions of pottery that strays away from being useful.

The morning sun peeked across her shoulder as she worked and fixed its light on this new form she had just created. Soon it would be sent to one of the retail stores that sells her pottery. Mrs. Dunn said she works late into the night during the busy season to keep up with orders and her inventories for craft shows. She has displayed her pottery in the Blackstone Arts and Crafts Festival.

But she is also a multi-talented artist, who picked up a pencil and began drawing as soon as her hand could hold it. Her well stocked studio attests to her creativity. Stained-glass windows hang next to silk screens; pottery mixes with framed drawings.

“But people seem to think if you do more than one thing, you can’t do any of them well...which is a bizarre idea, if you ask me,” she said. So last year, in deference to the customer, she began doing only pottery for craft shows and stores, and has been doing well. “I could have sold twice as much as I had last Christmas,” she said. Her pieces run from \$6 to \$80.

Her pottery, drawings and stained-glass reflect the theme of nature as a spiritual place. Most of her pen and ink drawings are of Indians and animals. “I like Indians because they were true caretakers of Mother earth,” and not like western man who “wants

to make nature change to suit him...I've always been rather irritated with man's arrogance in that respect," she said.

The farm she lives on with her parents, daughter and grandmother also puts this philosophy to work with beautiful results. The farm, which her parents bought ten years ago, is a fenced in compound where fields, woods, sky, ponds, gardens, and human buildings balance naturally with each other. A canning house is next to a green house where collards grow knee high in January. The garden is heavily mulched for winter. A herd of large brown goats run like the deer that roam the pastures and feed in the evening. Several ponds and streams surround this idyllic place where everything has a beauty that comes from not adding anything that is not needed. Even the old well out front has a rope and a bucket that works, just in case the electricity goes off.

The sun is also put to work. The house is heated by alternately opening sun porches so solar heat can flood the house. During very cold weather, a wood stove is used. The principal of cooperation with nature is practiced everywhere.

But cooperation with nature requires a creative act. Just as the clay is the basic stuff of the pot, imagination is the essence of this farm and studio and the pool of creativity never seems to dry up. You must learn to work with your own energies, she pointed out. "That's why I use so many mediums. It keeps you stimulated. If you do one thing all the time you can't stay creative."

"And when nothing seems to work, don't sulk. Turn to something else...That's where these finger puppets came from," s he said, pulling out some tiny ceramic unicorns just bigger than thimbles.

At Sylvan Studios there is a sense of what true peace is and the recipe seems easy to follow when it's demonstrated. Imagination is like well water; Just pour it on your world and let new forms of beauty take shape. But Sylvan Studios has a warning:

"Don't make a piece that doesn't fee right or has a chunky shape or is fat or thin in the wrong place," says the potter.