

Elisa Helland-Hansen

Seimsfoss, Norway



Just the Facts

Clay

stoneware and porcelain

Primary forming method

wheel throwing

Primary firing temperature

cone 10 gas reduction

Favorite surface treatment

wax resist and slip trailing

Favorite tools

my hands, the silent Shimpo wheel, and a green Mudtools rib

Playlist

silence or the Norwegian broadcast-ing radio NRK-P2.

Wishlist

not a single thing

Studio

In 2012 I had the opportunity to build a new ceramics studio near the small town of Rosendal in western Norway. The occasion leading up to this was having found a new life-partner through Internet dating a few years earlier.

Having worked as a potter for 30 years in the attic of a shared barn space near Bergen, I was aware of my needs and what kind of improvements I wanted to make for an ideal working situation in the future.

Architect Helge Schjelderup designed my new studio. I cherish the quality of the building every day and consider it a homage to the architect who sadly passed away before it was completed.

The studio is a separate building situated at a right angle to the house and creates an undisturbed inner garden space with a panoramic view of the Hardanger Fjord. The studio measures 18×50 ft. (5½×15 m.) with glass panels on one side facing the garden. The building is transparent, with a light axis going through the whole length. The studio has three sections—the first is a show and storage room, which is connected to a smaller room with a top-loading kiln. The following section is the working space. The end room is a combined office, library, and guest room. The 17½-cubic-foot gas kiln and storage for clay and materials are situated in an adjacent garage.



My favorite aspect of my studio is the high lofted working space with a skylight and—depending on the weather and time of year—an astonishingly beautiful view. The inner walls are painted plywood, which makes it easy to hang things. The rack for drying and storing work was the only furniture I moved from the old studio due to its practical construction and volume efficiency. The round metal bars can be moved around and the incorporated plywood damp box allows for slow drying. Aside from the wheel, one sturdy table on wheels is my only working space. When I need to photograph my work, I simply move the table against a wall, cover it with a photo back drop, and use natural light from a window. My habit is to completely clear this table after each working day. Having previously worked in the same studio for decades where dust and mess entered every corner and slowly nearly choked me, I was quite deliberate about establishing better habits in the new studio. After three years of working here it is still clean and orderly. Having a separate show room for the first time in my life has increased my direct sales to customers. I don't keep regular open hours—people ask for private appointments to visit the studio.

Paying Dues (and Bills)

My first introduction to clay was a stay at Kunsthøjskolen in the Danish town Holbæk in 1972. After some additional schooling in Norway, I spent three years studying ceramics at Bergen School of Applied Arts. My most influential learning experience was having Takeshi Yasuda as a teacher and supervisor for three months.

The 1970s was a period of great importance for establishing a new paradigm for crafts in Norway. The establishment of new public grant programs and the right to negotiate with the government resulted in studio crafts becoming a clearly defined field. This again led to new activities such as an independent craft magazine, seminars and workshops, new sales outlets, and an elevated and formalized identity of the profession.

I have been running my own business as a potter since 1978. I work full time in the studio, but the hours spent increase beyond full time ahead of upcoming exhibitions. My schedule varies—for the time being I often go fishing in the morning and



work in the afternoon and evenings—sometimes past midnight (a regret to my husband). I have no side jobs, but worked as a professor in ceramics from 2000–05 at HDK (School of Design and Crafts) in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Marketing

I sell my work mainly through four channels: directly from my showroom, from exhibitions, from craft fairs, and through consignment with four gallery shops in Norway.

My customers are people who enjoy using handmade pots. Since I started making pots 35 years ago, I have arranged a yearly sale at my studio one weekend in December. This event has grown to be an attraction in the local community and represents approximately one third of my annual income. Keeping a mailing list from previous customers has helped me reach out to individuals to notify them about upcoming events and exhibitions.

Promoting my work through Instagram has also increased the interest for my work on an international level. I consider my website as a site to document activity, but find Instagram and Facebook more

efficient in promoting events. Up until now, I have not sold a lot of my work internationally due to the shipping costs and customs regulations. For the upcoming group exhibition in May 2016, “The Woody Girls,” at TRAX Gallery in Berkeley, California, with Linda Christianson, Jan McKeachie Johnston, and Lindsay Oesterritter, I am excited for the opportunity to produce the work in the US at Linda Christianson’s studio. In addition to this show, I am also thrilled that I will be participating in the 24th annual pottery tour and sale organized by the Minnesota Potters of the Upper St. Croix River from May 6–8.

Mind

My home has bookshelves filled with songbooks, novels, and many books on history, nature, ceramics, and art. I must admit they have become more like silent friends than actively used items. Though I like holding a physical book in my hands, I seem to grab my computer more often to obtain knowledge through the Internet whether reading news, articles, or searching specific topics.

Over the past year, Instagram has been my most frequently used application. Being able to share photos of pots and landscapes



justifies my passion for taking pictures every day. Following potters from all over the globe has given me new insight into the world of ceramics. The feeds from CFile ([@cfileonline](#)) and Pots In Action ([@potsinaction](#)) have proven to be rich archives of both historical and contemporary information. The weekly thematic challenges on Instagram from Pots In Action are creative triggers and have caused new ways of using and seeing pots in real life environments.

Moving to the countryside has resulted in a slower pace of life. The time spent in nature both fishing in the fjord and hiking in the mountains on a regular basis in addition to working in a new studio has definitely added to my wellbeing. In addition, the following help me to recharge creatively: Being at the Venice Biennale watching and discussing art all day with colleagues, the satisfaction of understanding a YouTube tutorial, and the excitement opening a kiln with unexpected results. I also love going downhill cross country skiing on silky snow, crawling along a frozen river with my beloved pocket camera at hand, discussing a well written novel, digging Jerusalem artichokes in the garden, throwing dinner parties, and sharing a loud, unrestrained laughter. Lastly when it comes to taking care of

my physical health, I have a strong appreciation for the health-care system here in Norway.

I enjoy mastering the craft of throwing clay and handling this incomprehensibly plastic material. My work evolves slowly and is all about investigating variations of volumes, edges, surfaces, and colors within the range of utilitarian work. I make work in small series, where the handmade aspect is visible. I aspire to achieve simplicity in form and work with minor changes and processing. I find that the best way of challenging myself is working toward exhibitions.

Most Important Lessons

An increased awareness of the importance of art practices in society. Having to learn over and over again that glazing requires twice as much time as anticipated.

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