

# Ceramics

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Cover: Takashi Hinoda's  
"Alternative Muscles"

Spotlight: The Nevica Project,  
an online-only gallery

Clay Culture: The permanence  
and disposability of ceramics



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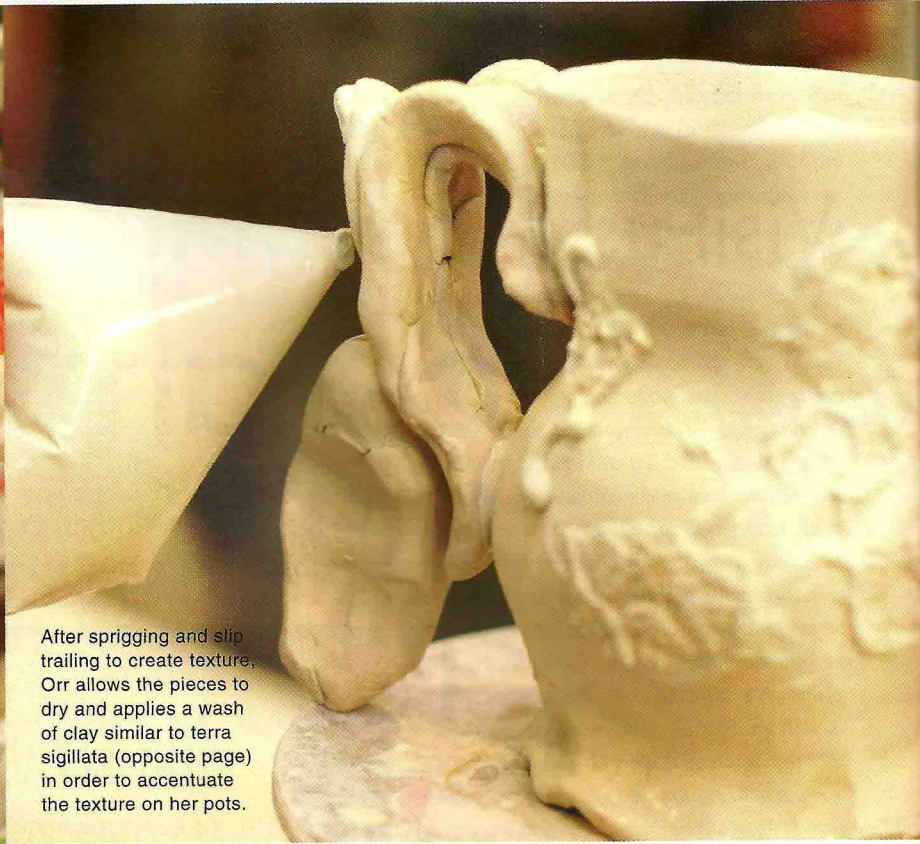
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## STUDIO VISIT

# lisa orr

Austin, Texas



After sprigging and slip trailing to create texture, Orr allows the pieces to dry and applies a wash of clay similar to terra sigillata (opposite page) in order to accentuate the texture on her pots.

## Just the Facts

Clay  
earthenware

Primary forming method  
throwing in bisque molds

Favorite surface treatment  
sprigging

Primary firing temperature  
cone 01 and 04 electric

Favorite tool  
Giffin Grip for holding molds  
to wheelhead

## Studio

My family and I live in an older, urban area of Austin, Texas, that is in a great location for walking and bicycling to many destinations and events offered in the city. We added the pottery studio to the house attached by a breezeway. Because it was designed as my pottery studio, it has several great aspects, such as a kiln room separated from the production part of the studio by pocket doors so kiln heat stays out of the studio in the summer or can be used to heat the studio in the winter. Also, it overlooks the backyard play area so I can keep an eye on children and hens, and it has floor drains for hosing it out. The trade off for this urban location has been that there is a limited amount of working and storage space. Larger-scale projects usually wind up outside on the breezeway and I have to stow one project before starting another. Building and firing a small low-fire wood kiln is out of the question in this area.

Though there are advantages to not having the studio in the house (I really think it can be a great idea to be off of work when away from the studio), it is such a pleasure to just drop by the studio. Being able to quickly check on kilns, drying pots, etc., is an advantage. Perhaps my favorite aspect about my studio, aside from location and utility, is a pottery shelf all around the top of the studio containing my collection of antique and interesting pieces that inspire me.



## Paying Dues (and Bills)

I was first introduced to ceramics at the University of Texas, Austin, while in art school, where I earned a BFA in 1983. Upon graduation, I worked for other potters, learning how they made a living. At the same time, I set up a garage workshop and began doing craft fairs. Later, I rented a small studio and store in a busy location in downtown San Antonio. Hungry for information on how to become a better potter and artist, I took ceramics workshops at the Southwest School of Art and Craft. After seven years, I realized I needed a teacher for a longer period of time than a workshop offered, so I took continuing education classes at University of Colorado, Boulder, and at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. I later earned an MFA from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in 1992. The next year was spent studying village ceramics in Bulgaria and Macedonia on a Fulbright. After that, I came back to Texas and re-established my business by opening another studio and store and by doing wholesale and retail shows. Almost all my waking hours

had me working at the business in some way, definitely more than 40 hours per week in the studio.

After getting married and having children, actual studio time is far less because family demands are great. I get about 15 hours per week actually making work, and the rest is spent on computer tasks, teaching lessons, workshop travel, film projects, or working on a public art mural.

## Body

As a human pug mill for another potter, I developed carpal tunnel syndrome and had discomfort in my wrists for years while sleeping, driving, and of course throwing. Even when I lived in Europe for a year studying pottery but not making any, the problem did not abate. Acupuncture gave a 95% recovery from the problem, but throwing always exacerbated it. Ram pressing plates and bowls eased the pressure somewhat. Finally, a massage therapist who was a hand

1 Oyster plate, 12 in. (30 cm) in diameter, earthenware with slips, sprigs, and polychrome glazes, fired to cone 01 and cone 04.

2 Bathing Cap Vase, 13 in. (33 cm) in height, earthenware with slips, sprigs, and polychrome glazes, fired to cone 01 and cone 04.

3 Orr's line of house numbers are sold primarily through catalog companies, and they provide a base level of stable income. She employs studio assistants to produce them to her specifications and standards so she can spend precious studio time on her larger work.



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specialist suggested that often the carpal tunnel problem originated in muscles that tighten under the arm, squeezing nerves going to the hand. Massage helped, but it still flares from time to time. I take two probiotic supplements (*Saccromyces Boullardi* and *Ness 416*) that keep my hands from becoming arthritic. Also, X-rays show my spine angling to the right from leaning while throwing. Clockwise throwing might also help, because one leans to the left usually. Instead, I have taken up hot yoga, which is bringing back flexibility, symmetry, and better posture. I think of it as an insurance plan so I can keep working and living comfortably as I age. My organic garden helps us avoid pesticides and GMO produce.

Because my spouse works creatively in high tech and changes his employment from time to time, I teach pottery lessons at a private school for the availability of health insurance as a backup in case my husband's job or insurance coverage for the family changes. When I was single, I bought high-deductible insurance and negotiated fees or traded art for doctor visits. As a parent responsible for the well-being of children, I feel trapped by health insurance companies into buying (or having a job that buys) their exorbitant coverage or risk being bankrupted by a health crisis.

## Mind

Attending the NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts) conference recharges me because I get to see so many friends and new works there. It is the same with workshop teaching; I really enjoy the intense little community that develops. In addition to subscribing to CM, I maintain subscriptions to several ceramics periodicals. The history of ceramics has always been a passion of mine and I love to read show catalogs and research monographs. Museums that house historic ceramics and glass are exciting to visit.

## Marketing

My husband built a beautiful website for me in about 1997 for selling individual pieces. It actually was a bit too early. Not many people trusted online shopping, and most of my customers did not know how to make online purchases. Also, the process for uploading scanned prints of my pieces was arduous and cumbersome. It was not worth all the time it took to deal with it. Driving traffic to it was hard. Many people have this all figured out now, and it gives me hope for creating a website that is informative and as easy to change content as it is to email.



I have chosen to diversify my income in case one source should falter. Currently, I have six income streams—pottery sales, DVD sales, teaching workshops, teaching ceramics lessons, a public art mural, and selling house numbers in several catalogs. I make less than half the pots I used to before I had children, but I am supplementing my income in other ways. I make the most of the hours I do get, but I have more ideas than I can get to.

It is great having the house numbers, which I designed and have made by assistants. Starting this was accidental, as I made some temporary numbers for our house when we moved in. After making numerous sets for friends, I began to wonder if it could be a business, and presented them at some wholesale gift shows. They are now carried in garden boutiques, gift shops, and several catalogs. Some years they outsell my pottery. This type of base income allows me to spend more time with family.

Because I am very invested in promoting studio pottery as artistically significant and meaningful, I cofounded the Art of the Pot studio tour (now in its eighth year) with five other potters. We invite nationally known potters to come show with us in our studios. We highlight the event with lectures, a cookbook, additional

shows, and slow-food events. This project is very gratifying and I hope it will add to future income as awareness and appreciation in our region expands.

I feel that part of my work is to be a steadfast advocate for the art of studio pottery. Now, in the days of the blogosphere, I think many artists my age know it would be advisable to publish and promote all of our projects more often—just need to find the time. I do think the Internet has recently become the best place to be an advocate for studio pottery because everyone searches there for information about everything. My one objection is that there can be a huge perception difference between virtual pieces and those experienced in person. Of course, the big potential for gain is the exponentially larger dialog you can have online. As much as I enjoy all the virtual ceramics world has to offer, as an artist I am still most motivated by the idea of making little changes in pottery forms that can barely be seen, mostly felt when in the hand, and by bringing garden color not to a screen, but to a table.

[www.lisaorr.com](http://www.lisaorr.com)  
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