

selling and buying ceramics in france



left to right: Lynne Haylock, Elizabeth Masters, Ellin Pooley, Jane Annois, Veronique Pengilly, Vicki Grima, Adam Cox and Carol Cox at the Lyon Potters Market; photo: happy customer

Vicki Grima reports on her recent travels

In September 2008, I joined a tour of southern France with Jane Annois and five other potters from Australia – Elizabeth Masters, Veronique Pengilly, Ellin Pooley, Lynne Haylock and Adam Cox. Adam's wife, Carol, completed our group of eight.

First stop was Les Tupiniers de Vieux Lyons, the Lyon Potters Market, on 13 and 14 September, in the area surrounding Lyon Cathedral (Cathédrale Saint-Jean-Baptiste). This was the 23rd annual event drawing 140 professional potters and ceramicists from all over France. No dealers or galleries are allowed. With only seven invited stands from outside France, space was highly competitive. Early in 2008, Jane submitted our profiles to the organising committee and, as rules have recently been tightened with a reduction in the number of stands, selection was tight. We were approved and Jane suggested we took about 30 pieces each. Some, who were more organised, sent work by seamount, with others of us relying on Express Post International.

We displayed a variety of work – hand-built and wheel-thrown porcelain, stoneware and raku, both functional and decorative. The weekend was full of activity, with a non-stop stream of interested market-goers despite cold, drizzly weather on the first day. A wonderful diversity of contemporary ceramics was displayed in Place Saint-Jean and in nearby cobbled streets and courtyards, with potters showing creativity in their unique displays, often protected by large white market umbrellas. We tried hard to converse with the market-goers about our techniques and decoration, calling on Jane and Veronique to translate when it

top: View of the Lyon Cathedral from our market stall
middle: A customer at the market
bottom: Pots for sale at a local market

became too difficult. We were impressed with the acceptance of pottery by the public in France. The ability for potters to live from ceramics alone is more common than in Australia as the tradition of handmade ceramics is more deeply rooted in their daily lives through their cooking and social enjoyment of food. We had good sales of our work with Veronique's smoked pebble forms being most popular.

Potters markets started slowly about 20 years ago in France when galleries were closing and potters were struggling to make a living. They are supported by the local municipality as a major cultural and tourist event, and are held in locations chosen for their ambience. Markets are held throughout the year, with potters participating in up to six per year. Jane Annois is now using this model in Australia for her Pottery Expos held regularly in Warrandyte and Federation Square in Melbourne.

After the Lyon market we toured southern France, visiting potters in Clionsclat, Dieulefit, Grignan, Caromb, Roussillon, Bonnieux, Valensole, Biol le Haut and La Cote St André.

Many potters live in rural areas, in or near the tiny villages that dot the countryside. Their homes are linked to their studio and gallery, enabling a simple life where they make and sell pots, entertain friends and enjoy food, all within creative, pottery-filled spaces. Most work is functional, with terre vernissée¹ and raku being common techniques. Some potters have recently noticed a decline in visitors as the price of fuel rises, limiting travel to studios that are 'off the beaten track'.

In the middle of a plateau of lavender and almond trees is Valensole, the home of Jean Nicolas Gerard (a guest artist at Clayedge in 2007, Gulgong). We enjoyed morning tea in

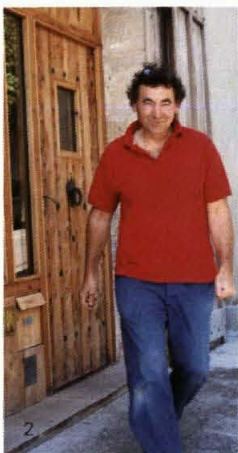


his rambling garden, watched him beautifully wrap our purchases in the studio shop, then concluded with lunch on his terrace. Jean Nicholas' ceramics are characterised by unconscious gestures – sgraffito lines drawn directly onto the clay with a sharp tool. Swirls and scratches decorate his platters, bowls, cups and planters, with the rims often playing the part of an integrated frame, with balls balancing playfully along the edge.

We also enjoyed visits to many of the potters who came to Australia in 2007 as part of a tour organised by Jane. The soft waxy celadons of Maryse Tavernier's gently altered porcelain forms were irresistible, with her finger indentations luring you in, allowing your hands to settle into place. Many made their way into our bulging suitcases. Brigitte Long's hand-formed raku sculptural forms were another favourite. After enjoying a wonderful home-cooked dinner, Brigitte took us down a few steps, below her home, to a small gallery and studio where we were full of questions about her unique work and her life as a potter.



- 1 Jean Nicolas Gérard's work in his studio gallery
- 2 Jean Nicolas Gérard at his front door
- 3 Jean Nicolas Gérard's garden
- 4 Yves Gaget, platter (detail)
- 5 Maryse Tavernier talking with Jane in her studio gallery





Here are a few comments from my fellow travellers.

Elizabeth Masters:

"It is difficult to summarise all that I have seen in France. Impressions abound that have stirred my own emotional connection to clay and pottery and ceramic art. The people we met were incredibly generous and hospitable. Potters and artists opened their homes and studios to us. In France, homes and studios seem intimately connected. Life is lived in the town or village. Work is made in the studio beside the house, and sold in the gallery beside the

studio. I saw a painting by Picasso in the museum at Grenoble. The painting immediately linked me to the spontaneity and energy of the pots of Jean Nicolas Gerard and Jean Noël Peignon. Both live a life intimately connected to their studio-based work. They work spontaneously and organically so that the utilitarian work they produce has a freedom of expression that is not confined by the forms they make."

Veronique Pengilly:

"Being French, the tour for me was the realisation of roots – memories of rich colours, simple forms and firing processes that seem to flow into a way of life. The French potters opened their homes, studios and hearts to make us feel welcome and being able to speak their language made the experience much more intense and emotional for me. I hope that the exchange will keep on growing; not only would it be nice to have a bit of southern France on our shores, but to also know that a bit of Australia lives among the lavender, the sunflowers and the vineyards of southern France."

Ellin Pooley:

"The thing that struck me was the tradition and pottery's acceptance. Potters are noticed more for the beauty they bring to their traditional forms, rather than for their unusual or exotic influences (as I think



top: **Jean Jacques Dubernard's** workshop and wheel
right: **Jean Jacques Dubernard** and some of his terre vernissée plates, one of which came home in Vicki's suitcase



left: POÉtic gallery in Bonnieux; right: the work of Timothée Humbert in POÉtic gallery

Australian potters are). Also, pottery in France is not just a thing to be squeezed in between other jobs. You can devote time and thought to it – envy!”

Lynne Haylock:

“I was impressed with the variety of surface decoration on terracotta using limited slips and glazes. The potters show a wonderful sense of humour and freedom when decorating their pots.”

Our unsold ceramic pieces are slowly making their way back to Australia, with the exception of a few special pieces we each kept aside. The night before we finished our tour with Jane, we joined a group of French potters for the opening of an exhibition at The House of Ceramics (La Maison de la

Ceramique) in Saint Uze. From 25 September to 23 November 2008, the work of seven French potters will be on display, along with a small display of our Australian work. Their visit to Australia in February 2007 has left traces in their work and *Ceramique Française – Australian Touch* shows these influences through imagery, colour, texture and form.

This wonderful exchange continues with more plans for more tours to and from Australia in 2009 and beyond. Stay tuned! ■

¹ See page 64 for a description of this technique.

Websites of interest:

Jean Nicolas Gerard: www.atelier-jardin.com

Zeste French Tours: www.janneanois.com

More of Vicki's photos: www.vickigrima.com.au
click on France 2008: ceramics and food

right: a sunflower for Jane
far right: Vicki's porcelain at
The House of Ceramics in
Saint Uze.

