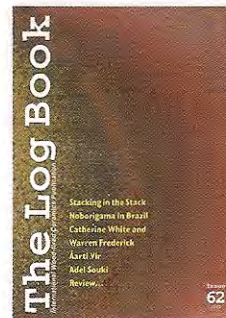


The Log Book

International Wood-fired Ceramics Publication

**Stacking in the Stack
Noborigama in Brazil
Catherine White and
Warren Frederick
Aarti Vir
Adel Souki
Review...**

Issue
62
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The Log Book

P.O. Box 612, Scariff,
Co. Clare,
Republic of Ireland.
Tel: + 353 87 0536894
editors@thelogbook.net
www.thelogbook.net

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Editorial

Three of the articles in this issue of *The Log Book* are from Brazil: Alberto Cidraes recounts how a traditional Japanese style climbing kiln came to be built in the small town of Cunha, in São Paulo State forty years ago, and Liliana Morais provides a historical background, as well as bringing the story of Japanese inspired pottery in the area up to date. Adel Souki explains why she decided to build an anagama at her rural studio in Minas Gerais.

David Zdrazil (USA) describes the thought process and technical progression that led to firing work in the chimney of his kiln. Also in the USA, Catherine White and Warren Frederick discuss their anagama-fired work in terms of clay, form, and firing. Aarti Vir (India) charts the evolution of her wood-fired work, created in the somewhat unexpected setting of suburban Hyderabad.

Working in diverse geographic locations and conditions, they have in common a commitment to exploring the possibilities within woodfiring.

Coll Minoque . Robert Sanderson
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Front Cover: Detail of *Velocity Plate* by Warren Frederick. (See page 18 for full image.)
Photograph: Warren Frederick.

adelsouki

an anagama in the brazilian countryside

The decision to build an anagama (in 1997) wasn't made overnight, but rather as the culmination of a journey of over 20 years involvement with ceramics, which gained strength in 1982, the year that I met the Japanese potter Toshiko Ishii. I had my first contact with high temperature woodfiring with Toshiko, using a Bizen type kiln built on the farm where she lived, approximately 40km from Belo Horizonte, capital of the State of Minas Gerais. I was very impressed by Toshiko's work and the woodfire process. Toshiko had lived on this farm with her husband Nobukane Ishii since the 1970s, when they left São Paulo, where they had first arrived as immigrants from Kyoto in the 1930s. I began to follow the progress of Toshiko's work, together with that of other potters I got to know at this time.

*Adel Souki's anagama,
in Brumadinho, Minas
Gerais, Brazil.*

Photograph: Adel Souki.





Toshiko, Eri Fantini – another potter, and I, formed a study group that worked together for twenty years. We studied different Japanese methods of firing in books and magazines which Toshiko's family in Japan used to send to her. We learned about different styles of high temperature pottery such as Ki-Seto, Tokoname, Tamba, and Bizen, which was Toshiko's main interest. The work fired in her Bizen type kiln was always surprising us with the unpredictable results, depending on – position in the chamber, types of wood used, and how long the firing lasted. She used to wrap her pieces in straw from the rice cultivated on the farm, resulting in a range of imprints and textures.

For me, Toshiko wasn't just a connection with pottery. We were bound by deep affection during the many years that I knew her, until she passed away. Following the meetings of our study group, collectors began to visit her farm, and Japanese pottery gained recognition and popularity in Minas Gerais. The same pieces were sometimes sought after by several buyers at the same time, who rightly recognised the rigour and poetry in the work of a great artist.

At that time commercially prepared clays were not available in our area of Brazil, so we studied local raw materials and began producing our own clay bodies from the good quality silica-rich grey clay found on Toshiko's farm. We carried out a lot of research, studied and discussed matters directly and indirectly related to ceramics based on that Bizen type kiln. The search for materials and formulation of glazes was difficult in Brazil, as there was very little literature to be found on the subject.

Earlier, when I was still a Fine Arts student, I had an opportunity to travel through Vale do Jequitinhonha, a region of Minas Gerais that is famous for its pottery, learning about low temperature woodfiring, studying the work of potters of indigenous tribes.

Through this research, my work gained depth



and I began to develop my own clay bodies suitable for my artistic experimentations using rock particles, selected soils, ores found all over Minas Gerais, a great deal of coarse sand, chamotte, coffee husk, and sawdust. I also started using laterite, limonite, manganese, phyllite and kaolin in my work, materials which are not difficult to find in the area where I live.

In addition to my local research, taking part in workshops abroad has also helped develop my training, notably one I participated in with Paul Soldner and Peter Voulkos in New Jersey, USA, in 1994.

My pieces have always related, and still relate, to the construction of houses and shelters – both for the living and the dead, the archaic and immemorial, belonging to the dryness of some Arabian Desert that is part of my history. It's a recurrent attempt to delve deeply into my own identity, still vastly unknown to me. My work has gone through several changes, in a process that had me perceive the material as the central axis of my poetic investigations.

Throughout the years, I have also produced a range of functional gas-fired work in my studio in Belo Horizonte, where I live. Since the start I have used recipes from the book *Clays and Glazes*, published by *Ceramic Review* in 1988, which has been my reference for glaze preparation.

When I decided to build my kiln, I was aware it was an ambitious project that would demand a lot of willpower, energy, money and the

Above: View looking down on the Palhano valley where Adel Souki's studio and kiln are situated, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Opposite page: Ritual Objects Series by Adel Souki, each approximately 16 cm in height.

Photographs: Adel Souki.



The late Toshiko Ishii who had a Bizen type noborigama on her farm near Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Photograph: Adel Souki.

Opposite page: From the Dwellings for the Desert Series by Adel Souki.

Photograph: Daniel Cury.

collaboration of many people. I acquired some land very close to the farm where Toshiko, who was over 80 by that time, lived with her family. As this type of kiln was unknown in Minas Gerais, the first step was to look for a Japanese potter who had one in São Paulo. I knew there was a group of Japanese potters in Cunha (a small town in São Paulo, near the border with the State of Rio de Janeiro), who had formed a potters' cooperative using Japanese techniques. Not having received a reply, in 1998 I decided to write to potters in La Borne, France. Eric Astoul replied to my letter and twenty days later I was in France, joining his April firing group. By the end of the firing I had already invited Landry Deese, an American potter from Montana, to come to Brazil and build my anagama. I also invited a friend, the Norwegian potter Linda Lid, who was doing an internship in La Borne at the time.

In November that year, the three of us – Landry, Linda and I – and a local builder, began to construct the kiln with second-hand firebricks. The kiln was named *Tatu* (Portuguese for armadillo) due to the nightly incursions made by an armadillo at the foundation, mixing soils of various colours. Each morning we had to start work by tidying up the section that the armadillo had disturbed overnight.

We didn't use refractory mortar to lay the firebricks, but rather a mix of red and yellow earth with sand extracted from a stream that crosses the land, in addition to cow manure. *Tatu* is 4.8m long, 1.4m wide by 1.4m tall. The chimney which was initially only 1.2m in height, was later extended to 2.5m to increase the draught and help achieve higher temperatures more easily.

We had the inaugural firing after a month of intensive labour. By November 2014 the kiln had been fired 27 times. I learned a lot from Landry and Linda during the first firing. Despite being ill, Toshiko was able to follow some firings and see the results. Nowadays, there are two other Japanese kilns – a noborigama and an anagama – located near my small farm, both belonging to potters from the study group.

I have only recently started using a pyrometer in my firings following the suggestion made by Arwed Angerer, a German specialist who came to Brazil to work with me in 2012. The invitation to Angerer is part

of several initiatives I have taken to keep on improving firings, that is, to learn more and more about managing *Tatu*. Thus, I have never ceased researching about oxidation and reduction processes, long flames, and other important details involved in firing. I choose the most appropriate type of wood for each stage of the firing, and celebrate each phase reached. The firing diagrams and cones always direct me. The ember quality and the flame glow and colour lead me to the next step.

I have a group taking turns during the 72 hours of firing. Nélio, a neighbour, has been with me for every firing since the first one. Students and other artists take turns working with the kiln, which consumes 5–6m³ of wood per firing – eucalyptus, wood collected from the bush, and construction scraps. Sometimes we have live music to cheer us up, and good food, as well as the exchange of experiences.

I use other organic materials such as banana, pitanga and bamboo leaves in the firings, so as not to be restricted to the traditional Japanese formulas alone. The kiln is a tool I use in my personal poetic and artistic investigation, and the consistency of the work with clay I develop is the most important aspect. Therefore, I am constantly investigating new possibilities. At the end of the firings, for example, I do not follow a set procedure for sealing up the kiln, modifying the reduction and oxidation times.

The fatigue at the end of the firing and the expectation of achieving the dreamed of colours and textures make waiting to open the kiln difficult. It is always astonishing, but I always expect it to be better, too.

I feel reborn at each opening of the kiln. Seeing the metamorphosis and transformation of the work developed over many months, is an encounter both with ceramics and my inner-self.

Adel Souki is a ceramic art teacher and researcher, living in Belo Horizonte, in south-east Brazil. She coordinates the Clay Culture and Research Group at the Federal University (in Belo Horizonte) and her work has been widely exhibited.

www.adelsouki.com.br

