

# **David Schlapobersky**

## **Biographical Timeline & CV**

This page presents a detailed biography and CV of David Schlapobersky, with a timeline showcasing key milestones since he and Felicity began their journey together in 1972.

Felicity and David are both descendants of European immigrants who fled their homelands to escape racial prejudice, persecution, and the threat of conflict. Their families instilled in them a deep commitment to humanity, social responsibility, and justice. These values have profoundly influenced their lives, fostering a fulfilling partnership built on their collaborative work in the pottery studio and active engagement in community initiatives.

### **Family Background**

Felicity is a first-generation South African. Her mother's family emigrated from Germany in 1928, and her father arrived from the UK. David is a second-generation South African; his grandparents emigrated from Lithuania in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

### **Timeline of activities**

The following timeline outlines significant milestones in David and Felicity's shared journey:

#### **1972:**

David and Felicity meet, marking the beginning of their lifelong collaboration in pottery and life.

Ongoing: Felicity's son, James, remains central to their home and work, receiving dedicated care and enriching their lives.

Early Studio Years: From the start, Felicity's paintings became an integral part of their pottery. David took charge of clay preparation, glaze mixing, and firing, creating a harmonious and productive partnership that has been key to their enduring success.

Felicity's son James remains within the family, being cared for at home and central to their life and work.

Felicity continues to explore her passion for painting, working with watercolour, mixed media, and design, which adds depth and inspiration to their shared creative journey.

#### **1970s / 2000s**

Care for James.

Camphill.

Working Pottery Studio.

Children's art teacher etc etc.

Various design and textile projects and commissions.

Periods of active involvement in community work.

## **1972**

Moved to Cresset House in Halfway House near Johannesburg. A Camphill School and Training Centre for Children in Need of Special Care, and part of the international Camphill Community.

All members of the community were voluntary workers receiving just their board and lodging and basic maintenance.

They became house parents to 12 young people and also worked as class helpers and taught art.

Approached in 1972 by the management to consider beginning a pottery workshop at the centre and met Gordon Wales, a founder member of the Association of Potters of Southern Africa (APSA), now known as Ceramics SA.

David had his first experience of throwing a pot on the potter's wheel under his guidance at that time.

## **1973**

Developing interest in studio pottery as a means of training and therapy for young people in need of care, and worked towards the development of a Pottery Studio at Cresset House as well as the establishment of a vegetable garden, bakery and small dairy providing fresh milk and produce for the centre.

Introduced to the activities of and joined the developing Association of Potters of Southern Africa, now known as Ceramics SA.

Became acquainted with the work of Tim Morris another founder member of APSA, the relationship went on for many years.

It was through this early relationship with Tim Morris that they became aware of and influenced by the work of many leading practitioners in the tradition of Anglo-Oriental high fired pottery both in South Africa and abroad, and they were among a large number of people who were influenced and inspired by Tim Morris, and others who were at the forefront of the Studio.

Pottery environment in South Africa during the very early 1970's, at a time when the Association of Potters of Southern Africa, now Ceramics South Africa, was in its infancy.

Tim was a founder member of APSA. Some of those whose names are connected to the early development of Studio Pottery in South Africa: Hyme Rabinowitz, Esias Bosch, Sammy Liebermann, Andrew Walford, Mike Kamstra, Gordon Wales, Bill van Gilder, Toff Millway, Molly Fish, Thelma Marcusson, Joyce Keyser, Pam Bass, Peggy Wolstenholm, Gail de Klerk, Wendy Goldblatt, Helen de Leeuw and Annette Lewis-Barr, Joe Faragher to name but a few.

The overriding impression for David and Felicity was that working with clay could become a rewarding and relevant means of expression, and also provide a way of life that both of them saw as desirable and achievable. It was also seen as a possible means of working from home thus being able to care for James.

It was a setting that also brought them into contact with the Studio Pottery environment abroad and the work of prominent producers of high temperature, reduction-fired pots at that time.

The work of people such as Bernard Leach and his sons, Michael Casson, Michael Cardew, Joe and Ray Finch, David Frith and Margaret Frith in the UK, Robin Hopper in Canada and John Glick in the USA; the list is endless and the influence on their own work profound.

Major art exhibition at the school by many prominent South African artists to raise money for a pottery studio & equipment at the school.

Another major exhibition, this time showing the work of their students from Camphill in the centre court of Sandton City.

## **1976**

Moved to Johannesburg, rented house & began first own home studio.

First participation in a group exhibition at Helen de Leeuw Gallery in Hyde Park, Sandton.

## **1977**

Moved into own house and studio in Parkview, Johannesburg.

Built first big gas kiln in Johannesburg (working on town's gas)

Ongoing orders and commissions

## **1979 onwards ...**

Numerous solo and group exhibitions and workshops around the country over the coming years including:

First Solo Exhibition was at Ernst de Jong Studio Gallery in Hatfield, Pretoria.

Johannesburg – Potters Gallery in Hyde Park, Helen de Leeuw Gallery in Hyde Park, Akis Gallery, Everard Reid's Sanderling Gallery, Quadri, The Laura Collection and others.

Pretoria – Ernst de Jong Studio & Gallery, South African Association of Arts, Schweikert's Gallery.

Kimberley – Gallery 5, privately and William Humphreys Art Gallery.

Stellenbosch – The Dorp Street Gallery.

George – Strydom Gallery.

Also at Cape Town, Durban, Plettenberg Bay at the Lookout Gallery, Mbabane Swaziland, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, Nelspruit, Clarens, Ermelo, Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp, Lydenburg, Jan Kempdorp, Windhoek, Swakopmund, Paarl & Swellendam.

Continuing...

Television appearances radio interviews and coverage in various form of written media, newspaper and magazines, all still ongoing ...

Corporate and private commissions and orders from architects, designers and landscapers, ongoing ...

Greatly influenced by the work of Ruth Wolff who was Felicity's mother, and a very prominent designer, architect & interior decorator working in Johannesburg with many of their pieces being used in various design and interior projects.

Guest exhibitors and workshop presenters for A.P.S.A. (Association of Potters of Southern Africa), now called Ceramics Southern Africa, continuing for many years ...

## **1980s**

Feature article in 'Living' magazine, 1980, written by Heloise Truswell and edited by Roger Corfield.

Involved and active in township and community development for many years, with particular interest in the role and value of the arts, and active during various states of emergency and the events engulfing the country in general and Alexandra Township in particular; they were part of the original group instrumental in the establishment of the Alexandra Art Centre with Bill Ainslie and others from the Johannesburg Art Foundation and the broader 'progressive' arts community who were active at the time.

There were many community and arts activists involved in these developments, and among them were prominent people such as Lionel Abrahams, Ntemi Piliso and other members of the African Jazz Pioneers, Queeneth Ndaba, Mac Lekota, Joe Manana, Jingles Makoti, Sue Morrell, Bongi Dhlomo, Helen Sibidi, Tilly Gasela, Gcina Mhlophe, Ivan Schlapobersky, Henry Paine, Ivor Chipkin, Anthusa Sotiriades, Mzwake Mbuli, Meshack Masuku and several others, including Wally Serote and other returning exiles.

The patrons of the Alexandra Art Centre at that time included Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Beyers Naude, Dr Nthato Motlana, Nadine Gordimer and Curtis Nkondo.

An early priority for this initiative was a major group exhibition of work by many prominent South African artists titled 'Art for Alexandra' in the mid 1980s at Sotheby's in Johannesburg in association with Stephan Wertz, to raise awareness about and funds for the Art Centre.

David and Felicity remained active and involved through the dramatic changes taking place in the country at the time and well into the 1990s.

## **1988**

Exhibition at 'The Mall Gallery', in London with textiles by Coral Stephens.

Featured in the South African Potters Manual, "Making a Tea Set"

Felicity – Design work including consultancy, carpet design & textiles for head office of General Mining Union Corporation in Johannesburg in collaboration with Ruth Wolff.

### **1989**

Guest exhibitors and workshop presenters for A.P.S.A. (Association of Potters of Southern Africa), now called Ceramics Southern Africa, continuing for many years ...

Part of the original group stimulating the formation of the Johannesburg Studio Route with more than 20 artists and craft people & remained active participants for several year.

Felicity – Design work including consultancy, carpet design & textiles for First National Bank in collaboration with Ruth Wolff.

Felicity – Design work – textiles for Design Story, London.

### **1991**

Feature article in National Ceramics Quarterly, issue #18, December 1991.

Included in the book 'Contemporary Ceramics in Southern Africa' by Wilma Cruise and Doreen Hemp.

Johannesburg Studio Route – continued participation.

### **1992**

Appeared in the book 'Around Africa' by Peter Marshall, and then in the TV Series of the same name. Helped to facilitate and co-ordinate Peter Marshall's tour of Johannesburg and surrounds and interviews with prominent personalities at the time.

Featured in the book and the TV Series and a priority for Peter Marshall's visit to Johannesburg is David's brother John Schlapobersky who recounted his experiences at the hands of the South African Government's Security Police while studying psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg during the late 1960s. Imprisoned without trial in 1969, held in solitary confinement and tortured on suspicion of being involved in the activities of subversive organisations, John was deported and made his way to England where he became a psychotherapist and also worked for the Medical Foundation rehabilitating torture refugees from all over the world.

Ongoing orders and commissions.

### **1993**

Guest exhibitors and workshop presenters for A.P.S.A. (Association of Potters of Southern Africa), now called Ceramics Southern Africa, continuing for many years ...

Group Exhibition in London with the Craft Council of South Africa .

Included in the publication 'CraftArt – Focus on Clay' edited and compiled by Doreen Hemp Exhibitions, Kimberley and Klerksdorp, and commissions.

Ongoing orders and commissions.

#### **1994**

Started making plans for move to the country, bought historic house Bukkenburg in Swellendam and rented it out, started teaching evening pottery classes in Johannesburg to pay the bond.

#### **1995**

Craft Council Exhibition at Museum Africa, Johannesburg.

August – Decorex in Johannesburg.

November – invited to exhibit work on the 1st A.P.S.A. 'Prestige Exhibition' held at Schweikert Gallery, Pretoria (APSA – Association of Potters of Southern Africa, now known as Ceramics Southern Africa).

#### **1996**

Moved to Swellendam, 1 October 1996.

Feature article titled 'A Potter's Lunch' in the November 1996 issue of SA Garden & Home.

Group exhibition by local and regional artists in the historic Morgenzon House, Swellendam in November 1996.

#### **1997**

Renovations and alterations to the house Bukkenburg and to the outbuildings in order to establish the studio and showroom.

First glaze firing in Swellendam, 40cu ft oil-fired kiln, and first pots 'Made in Swellendam'.

Working Pottery Studio is open to the public in Swellendam.

First 'Open Studio Weekend' at Bukkenburg in November 1997 – these open weekends continue with three events a year.

Ongoing orders and commissions...

#### **1999 / 2000**

'Decorex Cape 1999', at Spier in Stellenbosch.

Exhibition in Westcliff, Johannesburg.

Became involved in local community development, interaction and tourism in Swellendam which continued until 2003

Decorex Cape 2000', at Spier , sharing a group stand with four other potters.

They were disturbed by the polarisation and fragmentation evident in the town and became increasingly active in local development, community interaction and tourism in Swellendam; they had been involved since their first open weekend.

During 1999 and 2000 these activities became the focus of an integrated initiative and comprised four main elements as its strategy – this is a brief outline:

### SWELLENDAM ALIVE !

The Swellendam Alive Initiative had been active since late 1998 in generating movement towards the stimulation of tourism, economic opportunity, skills development and community interaction. In the course of its activities, it has been investigating and developing various opportunities that would further these overall aims.

The process initially entailed the development of an initiative that stimulates the local economy (tourism industry) and is based on four (4) pillars:

Re-use of empty space at the Drostdy Museum by the private sector, comprising the 'Old Gaol Coffee Shop', the 'Bloukop Gallery' and the Swellendam Alive/ Morgenzon Craft Shop, within the broad national priorities of public/private partnerships, as well as other cultural activities likely to attract tourists to the complex and the town.

Re-activating an annual Cultural Festival, coinciding with certain annual sporting and agriculture activities, creating the framework and basis for a focal point for the stimulation of cultural and tourism (economic) related activities in the town and the region. The grounds of the well-known Drostdy Museum have been the venue for these activities over the past three years.

The introduction and gradual expansion of a series of community-focussed skills training programmes, combined with other cultural activities attracting tourists over weekends or for longer periods. Also included in this segment is the establishment of a number of craft workshops in the historic Morgenzon House (1751), which has been acquired from the Provincial Administration for this initiative.

Finally, the Initiative has also identified a need for the re-orientation of Swellendam's tourism marketing strategy from the conventional attraction, transit tourists (en route to and from Cape Town and the Garden Route), to the offering of a far wider range of tourism-focussed activities, including cultural and eco-tourism and the training in relevant skills.

Value added tourism and a destination in it's own right.

Each of the four segments to be managed in the most appropriate way, with the synergy between the segments being critical to developing the human and economic potential of Swellendam and it's people.

The reactivating of an annual cultural event calling it the Swellendam Alive Festival with Hanli Matthysen and others.

Working together with the Swellendam Municipality, the Trustees of the Drostdy Museum in Swellendam, Provincial Government of the Western Cape and their Investment & Development Agency, Wesgro, and others on the tender procedures and requirements, and

selecting a suitable private anchor tenant for The Old Gaol Complex at the Drostdy Museum in Swellendam.

The 'Tender Call' as advertised, required that bidders for the lease demonstrate their commitments to implement a meaningful empowerment and capacity-building programme. This was for the establishment of a coffee shop, restaurant and art/craft outlet at the Museum, for work produced at Morgenzon and others, as well as working space for selected producers in the arts or craft industries in order to facilitate the establishment of the first empowerment businesses in Swellendam.

It was understood at the time that working towards the achievement a "Living Museum" environment would help in stimulating and increasing 'critical mass' in the Museum Complex and the historic heart of Swellendam; attract more visitors to the town and the Museum and also to identify additional sources of income for Museum operations, which was facing a decline in funds from visitors and subsidies.

A partnership comprising Judi Rebstein of Jan Harmsgat Country House, and Hanli Matthysen of the Swellendam restaurants, No 1 Baker Street and Mattsens were awarded the first tender in 2000. Lobbying and then arranging for the transfer of the historic Morgenzon House from the provincial government of the Western Cape to Swellendam Municipality to be used as a community art, craft and skills training centre, as well as providing access to main stream tourism for marginalised communities, with special emphasis on stimulating new activity in local and regional tourism. Many young unemployed people were trained at Morgenzon in a variety of disciplines.

Finally, these efforts included working towards the reorientation of Swellendam's marketing strategy – from simple stopover between Cape Town and the Garden Route, to more of a destination approach and lobbying for a professionally prepared tourism and marketing strategy with particular emphasis on building capacity, the creation of jobs and the alleviation of poverty in the region. These activities attained great prominence and received several awards during the early years.

During the development stages of this initiative while they were busy with much of the administration and planning with others in Swellendam, Felicity was instrumental in the creation and development of the textile screen printing studio including product development and design.

Sadly, and under pressure from within and also outside the project, by mid 2003 it was necessary for them to resign. With their resignation they were able once again to get back full time to making pots in their own studio and begin catching up on outstanding work. Their own studio had been severely disrupted and even neglected for several years and they were now able to focus on their own work again.

## **2001**

Exhibition at Dorp Street Gallery in Stellenbosch and in Melville, Johannesburg.

Work began on building a large oil-fired (paraffin/kerosene) kiln of about 100 cu ft.

## **2002**



Joined Cape Overberg Meander at its launch, Group Exhibition at William Humphrey's Art Gallery in Kimberley.

## **2004**

Wrote and published own website: [www.pottery.co.za](http://www.pottery.co.za).

Exhibition in Parkwood, Johannesburg.

Feature article titled 'Not Just Pottering Around' in the November 2004 issue of "South African Country Life" Group Exhibition at William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberley.

Group Exhibition in Swellendam.

Ongoing...

## **2005**

Group Exhibition in Swellendam.

Exhibition in Parkwood, Johannesburg.

Cover story & feature article in National Ceramics, issue No 71, Autumn (March) 2005.

Ongoing...

## **2006 / 2008**

Orders, commissions etc and open weekends at the studio in Swellendam continue.

Workshops given in Swellendam.

## **2009 / 2023 & beyond ...**

Potter's Lunch and Open Studio Weekends in Swellendam.

Commissions and orders

James celebrates his 50th birthday in Swellendam!

Work continues to be shipped to several destinations abroad including UK, USA, Spain, Middle East Feature

Article in National Ceramics, issue No 87, Autumn (March) 2009.

Feature on 'Throwing Big Pots' in the May/June 2009 issue of the US magazine 'Pottery Making Illustrated'.

Commissioned to make large Amphorae for Hamilton Russell Vineyards in which to mature their wine 'Ashbourne Sandstone 2009'.

David & Felicity's Facebook Studio Page launched.

Feature article in National Ceramics No 87, 2009 – Bukkenburg Pottery, Gail de Klerk visits David and Felicity in Swellendam.

Article in SA County Life, September 2009 – Swellendam's Potters

Published Facebook Memorial Pages to three pioneers of high temperature, reduction-fired studio pottery in South Africa (please click on their names to visit the pages):

Tim Morris – Memorial Page on Facebook

Hyme Rabinowitz – Memorial Page on Facebook

Esias Bosch – Memorial Page on Facebook

Exhibition – Gallery at RCHCC, Great Park Synagogue, Johannesburg – June 2011

Workshop presenters and guest exhibitors at the Clay Festival organised by Ceramics SA in Johannesburg, June 2011.

Article in National Ceramics No 99, Autumn 2012. Wine Jar Journey, an update on the wine jars being made by David and Felicity at Bukkenburg.

Appeared and quoted in the article 'Red-hot roots' by Ronnie Watt, in the 100th edition of National Ceramics, Winter 2012.

Video on YouTube – David Schlapobersky Throws Big Pots at Bukkenburg, uploaded 31 July 2013. Filmed and edited by Maria le Roux

Potter's Lunch and Open Studio Weekends in Swellendam

Commissions & orders – including USA, UK, Europe & Australia

Workshops

Article in National Ceramics, No 103, Autumn 2013, 'Salute to a Partnership – The Synergy of Bukkenburg'

David Schlapobersky and Felicity Potter, Life partners and studio potters for 40 years, dited by Sue Whybrow

Exhibition at Anteros Arts Centre, Norwich, UK – August 2013

...and on & on...

Potter's Lunch and Open Studio Weekends in Swellendam

Commissions & orders – including USA, UK, Europe & Australia

Workshops

Exhibition 'Old Friends' at Oude Libertas Gallery, Stellenbosch with retrospective of work by renowned architect and artist Hannes Meiring. October and November 2014

Ceramics SA Group Exhibition, Cape Town – Anglo Oriental, Connecting Past to Present. November 2014

Ceramics SA National Exhibition, Cape Town. November 2014

'The Potters Cast', episode number 82. 'For the Love of James'. David and Felicity in conversation with Paul Blais, posted online 5 February 2015

Major overhaul and upgrade of Website – January 2016

Cover Article – Ceramics SA, issue 02/2015 – Summer. Bukkenburg – Zen and Now and Felicity Potter at 80' by Joy Savage

Some corporate work including pots, tiles & wash basins etc for:

Goldfields

General Mining – Gencor

Anglovaal

Grinaker

Shell

Conservation Corporation, hand washbasins, tableware etc for several of their game lodges in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Nigiro Tea Merchants, Cape Town in collaboration with Paul de Jongh.

Amphorae, Wine Jars for Hamilton Russell Vineyards – large hand-made stoneware jars, to be used for maturing wine.

Coopmanhuijs Boutique Hotel, Stellenbosch

Moonlighting Productions. Big pots for a film set

Cape Nature, Grootvaersbosch Reserve

Amphorae, large handmade stoneware Wine jars for Sijn Wines, Malgas Winery

Amphorae, large handmade stoneware Wine Jars for maturing wine, commissioned by De Trafford Wines, Stellenbosch, SA

Amphorae, large handmade stoneware Wine Jars for maturing pomegranate wine made for The Pomegranate Corporation, Pretoria.

Ongoing open studio weekends, orders, commissions and workshops...

Exhibitions

David and Felicity have exhibited their work widely and frequently and have always felt that exhibitions were and remain important opportunities to introduce work to the market.

Their first solo gallery exhibition was in 1980 at the Ernst de Jong Studio Gallery in Hatfield, Pretoria.

Other major galleries featuring David and Felicity and now occasionally the name Bukkenburg also, include:

The Potters Gallery

Helen de Leeuw Gallery

Ernst de Jong Studio Gallery

South African Association of Arts Gallery

Akis Gallery

Everard Read Gallery

Sanderling Gallery

Quadri

Binnehuis

Leephy Studios

Art Gallery 88, Sasolburg

The Carriagehouse Gallery

Lookout Art Gallery

The Laura Collection

Schweikert's Gallery

Gallery S

The Mall Gallery, London – with Coral Stephens Handweaving

Sotheby's

Craft Council of South Africa – Group Exhibition in London

Museum Africa

William Humphreys Art Gallery

Gallery 5

Die Blou Galery

Dorp Street Gallery

Strydom Gallery

The Gallery at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre

Rust en Vrede Gallery

The Gallery at Grande Provence

Oude Libertas Gallery

Gallery at Anteros Arts Foundation, Norwich, UK

Outside of Johannesburg and Pretoria, their work has been on exhibition in all of the major cities and towns in South Africa, as well as neighbouring countries: Namibia, Botswana and Swaziland.