

Report on "Gundaroo Woodfire '05" Hosted by Ian Jones and Moraig McKenna at "old Saint Luke's Studio Gundaroo.

Report...

Gundaroo Woodfire '05
International Conference and Exhibitions
Gundaroo, NSW, Australia
22nd - 25th April.

Vigorous and exciting, woodfiring in Australia enjoys a large and enthusiastic following, like no other I have ever seen. It is not just about firing with wood. It is much deeper than that – a reflection perhaps on those pioneer Australian potters in the 1950s and '60s like Ivan England, Harold Hughan, Ivan McMeekin and Peter Rushforth, who built simple woodfire kilns, and prospected for local minerals for clay bodies and glaze materials. Until the recent financial cuts in education, woodfiring was a major study area within the ceramics departments of third level colleges and universities in Australia. Today the aesthetic values of woodfiring still attract many to the process. This woodfire conference, the fifth to be held in Australia within the past 20 years, was hosted by Ian Jones and Moraig McKenna at their 'Old Saint Luke's Church' studio, close to the small town of Gundaroo, New South Wales.

On the Friday evening guest demonstrators Hervé Rousseau (Fr.) and Linda Christianson (USA) were introduced by the master of ceremonies for the conference – Paul Davis, Head of Pottery at Sturt Craft Centre, Mittagong. Each gave a personal and enlightening resume of their working practices and philosophies to the 150 participants packed in the Gundaroo Hall – venue for lecture presentations and panel discussions during the conference. During his talk Hervé was assisted by a translator, however his work did not require translation: powerful, challenging and self-confident. Linda gave a sideways and often humorous glance at her influences, her home and her work.

The following morning Peter Rushforth gave the conference opening address in the large marquee adjacent to the studio, before Hervé and Linda began their individual demonstrations that continued throughout the weekend. Peter observed that compared to when he first started out, at a time when there was little information available, by contrast there is now an information explosion, and a generosity of spirit that will no doubt continue to

Gundaroo Woodfire '05

The Log Book No. 22 2005 21



inspire gatherings such as this in the future.

In addition to the demonstrations by Linda and Hervé, six Australian artist/potters – Malina Monks, Kirk Winter, Virginia Jones, Ray Cavill, Steve Williams and Petra Svoboda gave demonstrations of their individual working practices. Outside, and undaunted by the blazing sun, Daniel Lafferty, aided by a willing group of helpers was building a small Bourry box kiln. Also outdoors Chester Neale created a ground plan of the front section of an anagama firebox to illustrate his methods of tumble-stacking.

On Saturday evening Janet DeBoos, Head of Ceramics at the Australian National University in Canberra, opened the delegates exhibition *A Delegate Situation* at the Uniting Church in Gundaroo. This was an informal opportunity to see the work of all those attending the conference.

Presentation of papers began with Ray Cavill, Steven Harrison and Gary Hill all concentrating on issues relating to kilns and various aspects of firing. Later during the conference Barbara Campbell-Allen chaired a lively panel of speakers – Yuri Weidenhoffer, Steve Williams, Virginia Jones, Malina Monks and Moraig McKenna – who addressed the topics of woodfire sculpture and installation. On Monday Gail Nichols discussed woodfiring, often humorously, from the perspective of a non-woodfiring soda-glaze ceramicist; Robert Sanderson gave a short history of the Bourry Box kiln and Robert Barron described the effects he has achieved on work fired in the firebox of his climbing kiln.

On Sunday afternoon all the participants travelled to the Watson Art Centre in Canberra, where Coll Minogue gave a slide presentation about women woodfirers, prior to the closing reception for the *Australian Woodfire Survey 2005 Exhibition*.¹ Curated by Dr. Owen Rye, this was a magnificent show revealing the diversity, vitality and creative skills of 40 outstanding woodfire artists/potters. Next was the ANCA (Australian National Capital Arts) Gallery, where the exhibition *Woodfire Journeys* was opened

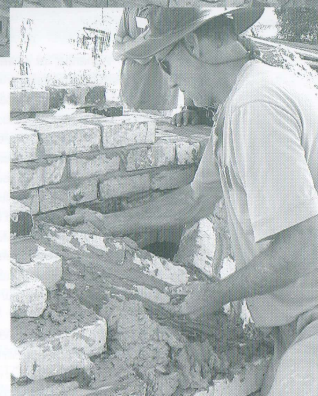
Top: Linda Christianson (USA), firing the rim to give strength and definition, gently persuading the clay to respond, always giving her pieces life by gentle alteration. Below: Hervé Rousseau (Fr.), working boldly and dexterously, built hollow forms resembling decaying wood or ancient rock.



22 The Log Book No. 22 2005

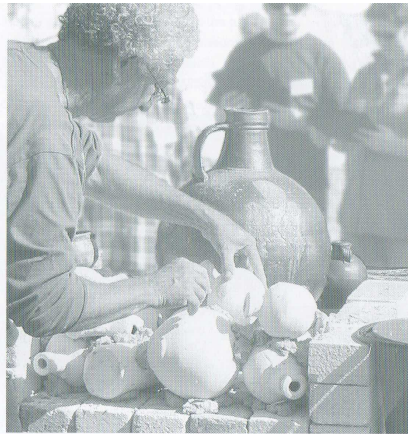


The Bourry-box kiln built by Daniel Lafferty and enthusiastic assistants. Daniel's objective was to build a squinch arch that sprang from the corners of the square chamber, similar to early mosque structures, using no framework or scaffolding. The result was rhythmic patterning of interlocking bricks, with the dome locked in place.



The Log Book No. 22 2005 23

Chester Nealie built a mock-up of a firebox, to demonstrate his ideas and methods of loading, emphasising the importance of the wadding material and its placement, the subtlety of salt halos from packing shells, and the balance of those marks in relation to each other.



by Catrina Vignando, of *Craft Australia* magazine. This was a further opportunity to view the work of Australian woodfirers.

When the last of the presentations had taken place and the demonstrations were completed, Janet Mansfield eloquently gave the closing remarks to the conference. Later a Potters Market took place in the adjoining old church cemetery. Prior to the conference those attending had been invited to send pieces for firing in Ian and Moraig's anagama. The concluding event of the conference was the unpacking of this firing and inspection of the results.

Thanks to Ian Jones and Moraig McKenna for their hospitality, energy, enthusiasm and determination to make this conference such a successful and memorable event. **RS.**

With thanks to Judy Boydell for text for photo captions.

Note: [1] The Australian Woodfire Survey 2005 Exhibition was presented by Canberra Potters' Society Inc. All the work from the exhibition may be viewed on-line at <http://www.australianwoodfire.com>