

# Ceramic Review

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## PRACTICE

Artificially Reduced Celadons  
Developments in Raku  
Electric Kiln Basics  
Arts and Crafts

## PROFILES

Svend Bayer  
Anna Silver  
Annie Hewett  
Michael Rice

## Johnny Heath



## Happy Accidents

**POTTER** – MICHAEL RICE set up his pottery a year ago. He describes the journey from art school to making pots that celebrate a normally accidental defect.



As a child I loved to draw, creating imagined three-dimensional landscapes full of shadow, light and depth. Over and over again I would create almost the same scene with subtle differences. When my bemused parents asked why I kept drawing the same things I assured them that they were not the same – they were all different.

The first time I used the wheel in my foundation year at the Belfast Institute I was immediately mesmerised by its potential, its ability to structure and shape large lumps of earth into solid beauty. Instantly, I realised I had to get to know it better. A week after graduating from the University of Ulster in 1997 I went to Hong Kong, where I worked and learned in several studios before travelling further in Asia. From there I went to Australia, spending a year making highly decorated hand-made domestic tableware in the Bush Wa Zee ceramic studio in Bondi Beach. Back in the UK in 2001 I decided to start my masters at the University of Ulster, where the comprehensive business element course began to focus my idea of setting up a studio. Although this was still in the first year, I was

sure it was the right time to start, the tutors assuring me that if I left the course at the end of the first year I could resume at a later date.

My studio is situated in the picturesque seaside town of Newcastle in County Down where my father kindly donated his messy garage for my even messier pottery. My local business centre helped with funding and I have been up and limping since December 2003. The first few months were fraught with difficulty as my new kiln, clays, slips and entire studio seemed to

conspire against me, collectively mocking my attempts to appease them. Everyone had warned me that this was quite usual, but it was little comfort in the cold winter months, and at times I found myself staring at the wall and wondering if this was really what I wanted to do with my life. Luckily my family were a constant support, and gradually things settled down.

### CURRENT WORK

My work follows directly from my concerns as a degree student: although

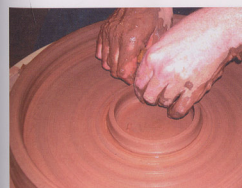
my experiments with terra sigillata stem from postgraduate studies, I am still primarily interested in exploring form, beauty and symmetry. The forms are curvaceous and full and, I hope, contemporary, although influenced by classical pottery. I am aware of the impracticality of some of the pieces, but the form dictates 'good continuation', a Gestalt principle and one that I consider to be correct even if this does not lend itself to being pragmatic. Balance plays a significant role in the pieces and my need to understand it has led me to consider balance in a wider context, to research its manifestations in philosophy and physics, where I consistently find insights that

**OPPOSITE PAGE INSET:** Michael Rice. **FROM TOP:** White raku fired terra sigillata bowl, Ø38cm. **Scrubbed terra sigillata form, H45cm. White terra sigillata over terracotta slip form, H38cm. Juddered terra sigillata form, H35cm. THIS PAGE:** Juddered terracotta form, H38cm.

### Michael Rice – Throwing



**FORM BASE:** Pulling up the walls. Pushing the walls out after the second pull. Creating the top angle before wiring the form off the wheel.



**TOP OF FORM:** A lump of clay is opened out and the centre is opened. The outer walls are thrown up and over the inner circle. The inner and outer walls are joined.

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have implications for my work, myself and my understanding as a whole.

Glaze is used sparingly, if at all, and in most cases I am happier using slips. I still like to draw but in the last few years I have started using a three-dimensional computer package as a drawing aid. I can now apply ideas for surface, colour and finish to quickly rendered forms, which, while being no substitute for the real thing, can help to vet large numbers of possible combinations. Ideas in progress are then transferred to the wheel where the final decisions are made. As most of my work is non-functional I throw quite thickly, preferring to turn the entire profile. I enjoy turning more than throwing and have developed a distinct style that came to me completely by accident.

### JUDDERING

As anyone who has ever turned a pot on the wheel knows, juddering can be a

frustratingly common defect and can change a relaxing turning session into a stressful and demoralising exercise. But, in the final year of my BA, what seemed to be a rather bad day at the wheel ended with a revelation. Several pots had been ruined prior to the one I was turning and I decided, like it or not, that this pot would be mine. The pot had other ideas, and, just as I thought it had succumbed to my will, my turning tool unearthed a small stone in the surface and within seconds a nasty judder appeared. This was the last straw and in a moment of madness I decided to turn the bowl into oblivion, letting the wheel rotate at full throttle and randomly attacking the surface with my teardrop turning tool. Such was my rather ridiculous anger I even hacked at the smooth areas I had just lovingly encouraged to an almost burnished sheen. Within minutes it was all over and the wheel came to a slow and awkward stop. For a

further moment or two I muttered darkly, cursing the pot, until I began to realise that an unusual pattern had appeared. Quickly I set another pot in the chuck and, with a growing curiosity, repeated my prior actions. I spent the rest of the day seemingly assassinating all my pots by juddering their entire surface at high speed. Later, tools such as power drills and even a small chainsaw were experimented with, but I now favour the simple turning tool. To do to the effect I use a technique taught to me by my tutor, Clive Fiddis, which involves brushing casting slip onto a piece of plaster to thicken it further and then layering it on the surface to amplify any detail below. The combination of the two techniques creates a swirling linear action that appeals more than the juddered surface alone.

### RAKU

Next on my 'to do' list is to revamp a



large old electric kiln and fit it with a gas burner suitable for large raku and saggar firing. I have always enjoyed the raku process and am eager to continue experimenting with the numerous glaze recipes available. Recently I have started to hold evening classes at the studio and have several highly enthusiastic regulars, two of whom are pensioners and who are already raku devotees. I am also working with local cross-community groups in projects aimed at healing old wounds and slowly but progressively I am exhibiting and hope to be involved in shows outside of Ireland soon.

My father is still baffled by my work and regularly calls in to see if I need anything, and, in what has now become a bit of a joke between us, I sometimes ask him which piece he likes the best. His response never changes: 'They all look the same' Michael, they all look the same'. **CR**

**Stockists:** Tom Caldwell Gallery, Belfast; The Fountainhead, Downpatrick, County Down; The Loft Gallery, Hillsborough, County Down; The Whichcraft Gallery, Dublin; Celtic Crafts Gallery, Dundrum, County Down.

**Forthcoming exhibitions:** On CraftMark stand, *Craft in Cultural Venues*, St Patrick Centre, Downpatrick, County Down, until May 2005; Tom Caldwell Gallery, Belfast, June 21 – August 31; Down Arts Centre, Downpatrick, County Down, October 7 – November 26.

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**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Terra sigillata form, sawdust fired, Ø33cm. Juddered black and white bowl, Ø34cm. Terra sigillata form, sawdust fired, H40cm.

### Technical Notes

#### CLAY BODY

PF 520 made by Scarva Pottery Supplies, County Down – good for raku and sawdust firing.

#### TERRA SIGILLATA

3.2kg of Potclays' powdered red earthenware clay is mixed with 14 pints of water and a teaspoon of sodium silicate.

#### BLACK SLIP

China clay	50
Hyplas ball clay	50
Manganese dioxide	10
Black iron oxide	8
Copper carbonate	4
Cobalt carbonate	4

### Michael Rice – Turning



The top of the form is fully turned on a pre-thrown chuck. Before being turned on the other side. The bottom of the form is offered up and a line is marked.



Both pieces are incised and joined with paperclay. The bottom piece is turned. The finished form, after smoothing and burnishing with an old credit card.

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### Michael Rice – Juddering



As before, the piece is placed in the chuck. The surface is tapped to encourage juddering. With the wheel rotating at high speed the piece is juddered.



Casting slip is further thickened by brushing on plaster. The slip is brushed on the juddered surface.

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