Renewal

by John Glick

Once upon a time, perhaps fifty years ago, a farmer built a 30' x 30' shed on a hundred acre farm in southeastern Michigan. He wasn't really concerned about the roof pitch so he built it with only minimum drainage, and he paid little attention to the grade level of the site so that parts of the foundation were below grade. None of these decisions seriously affected his use of the shed over the years.

In 1965 a young potter, who was intent on finding a place to establish a pottery studio, discovered and bought the shed and nearby farmhouse. Propelled by enthusiasm but not by concern for the practical issues of roof pitch and foundation, the potter and his father transformed the shed into a pottery studio which housed all the paraphernalia needed by a beginning potter. They lavished lumber, drywall, paint, and good intentions on that noble old farm shed. It served the potter well for seventeen years.

I was that young potter.

What first caught my attention was the water dripping onto my back during a rainstorm while I sat throwing at my potter's wheel. Later, I became concerned about the sawdust which fell through the gradually enlarging holes in the ceiling drywall. Tentative poking into the afflicted areas brought unwelcome results. The building had dry rot, wet rot, carpenter ants, rafter sag, and more.

A check of the lower wall plates revealed completely rotten 2×4's. (There was no Wolmanized lumber in the 1920s.) Ignore it! was the watchword of the spring of 1981. Patch it! was the byword of the fall and spring of 1982.

Eventually we faced the inevitability of a major repair. Three different roofing contractors pledged their allegiance to a fine new roof with proper pitch. All were willing to do the job for about $10,000. For a while I pictured a work crew of my friends and relatives working Sundays, with barbecues, beer, and crowbars. Somehow neither solution felt good, but something needed doing.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL VIGILETTI

John Glick and Susie Symons and their new studio. Opposite: Apprentice Gorg Niloak peers from a window. Right: Apartment showing radiant panels.

Photograph by Thomas C. Ford

A chance visit by my friend Walter Reddig, an architect, brought more poking in the walls. He looked up at me and said, "John, these wall members are gone. They can't even hold up a new roof. Don't put another penny into this building!" Was it that statement or his comment, "You are a fine artist, John. You deserve a good place to work," that got my attention?

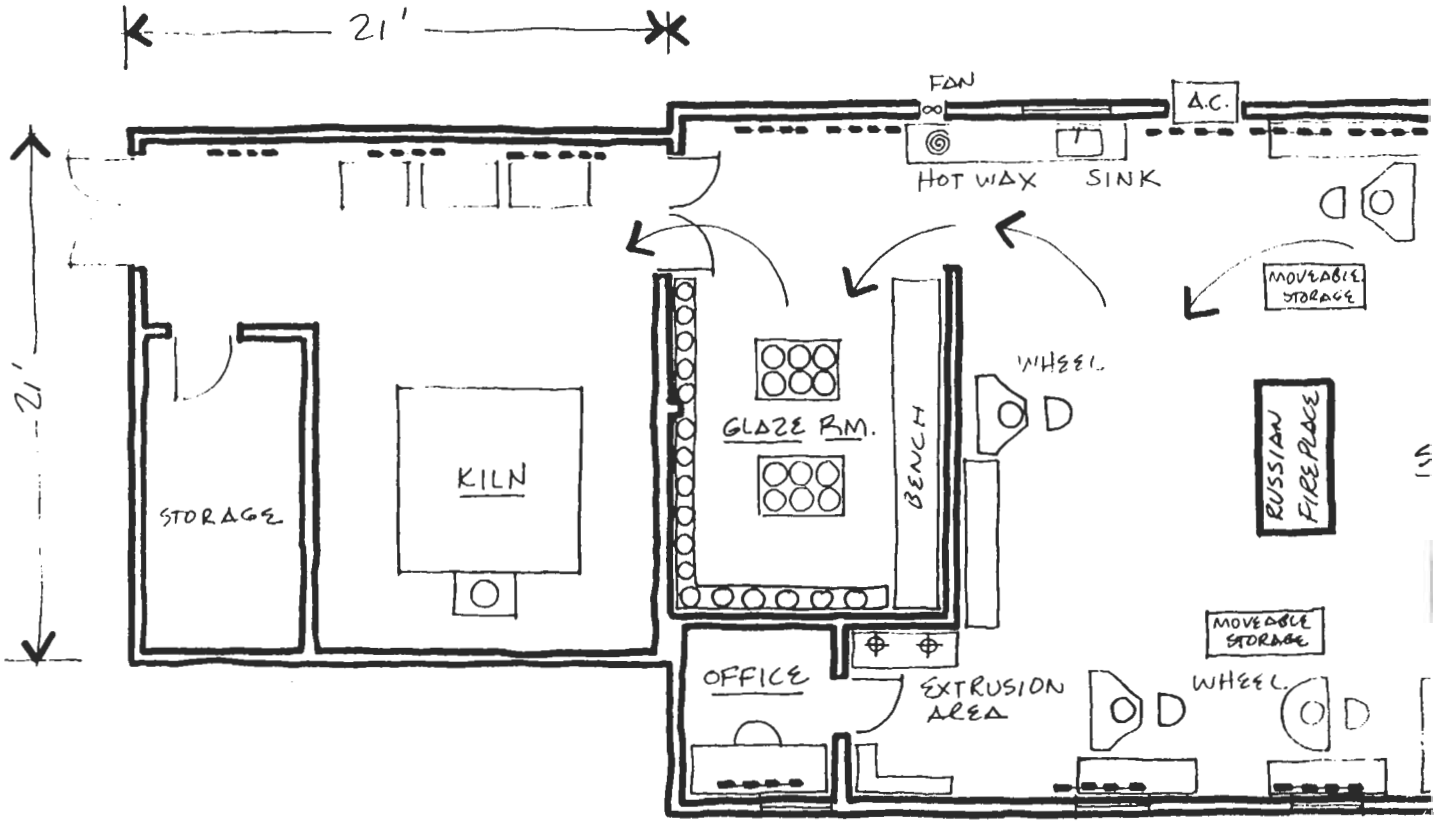
It took my wife Susie and me nearly six months after that to come to a decision to build. It was a time filled with anxiety over financial concerns, personal issues, the enormity of undertaking construction of a new studio, and a reevaluation of our life's goals. It was a time for soul searching.

AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

We vacillated. A new studio is simply out of the question. But a new studio is the only way to solve the problem. Before beginning any major steps, we needed to clarify some personal decisions. Susie had separate priorities; although a potter, she felt the need to establish an identity for herself separate from the Plum Tree Pottery. We talked extensively about what her move away from the studio might mean. For three years we had shared home and studio twenty-four hours each day, and it provided ample opportunities for play, work, companionship, and conversation.

As it turned out, we were able to begin building the new studio while she explored various career possibilities. Last spring Susie was hired as a ceramics instructor at a nearby independent school where she now teaches ninth to twelfth grades. We look forward to being together here in our own studio on weekends and during vacations.

A major concern was: was it fair to



GLICK STUDIO
FLOOR PLAN

put such a huge drain on our family and resources at a point when our newly blended families were just showing signs of surviving the process of coming together? We finally were able to resolve the issue by committing ourselves to building a fully workable studio, as we knew that was an essential foundation for a stable, solvent family life. We could acknowledge the enormous strain that would happen while we mobilized money, plans, people, and especially ourselves to invest in our goals. Our priorities were set: we would build, but not "at all costs." We would try to do it as humanely as possible by not turning our personal life into a shambles through putting project needs ahead of human needs.

CONTRACTING

One of the most pressing decisions was: who does the actual building? Both Susie and I had had prior experience with prolonged "do-it-yourself" projects. Neither of us felt a massive project could fit into our already complex lives, so we decided to function essentially as planners and contractors.

We approached local people who had had building done recently in order to find competent tradesmen for the various concrete, carpentry, and electrical work. Three bids were taken on each major phase of building. We interviewed the contractors to be sure our personalities would be compatible if we chose to work together. That turned out to be a worthwhile initial time investment, and we had smooth relationships as a result. We signed contracts with all subcontractors to itemize clearly issues of timing (start and finish), costs, obligations for any special material or design consideration, and so forth. This measure assured clarity and protected both parties from too casual dealings that easily could have jeopardized the project.

It was determined that I would do all insulation, interior painting, exterior caulking (an all-cedar exterior meant no paint), and countless details of interior trim and the outfitting that each specialized work area would require.

STUDIO DESIGN

For years I have been developing groundwork for a book about potting. There was a time when I imagined my book would contain the accumulated wisdom of years of studio potting lore. It would probably tell about the ideal studio, or so I thought for a time. There is, however, no ideal studio, only what you find and what you make of it, what you create as you struggle to put into reality your accumulated dreams, opinions, knowledge, and your body's learning about what is needed in a workspace. I have to report that I was really shocked at how difficult it was to juggle the countless variables that knit into the physical shape of a studio. Often when I make a dinner set for another person, I find I am making pots I would love to keep and treasure; when I try to make beautiful dinner-

ware for myself, I find myself struggling. It has been a similar experience as I have worked toward a personal statement in a studio, especially one starting from the bare ground.

I am not, among other things, an architect. I do have a feeling for space needs and instincts for harmonious flow, patterns, and the body awareness of living in a workplace. I do, fortunately, have a friend who is both a good designer of space and a clear, cut-through-it thinker. Aleksis Lahti was, along with my wife Susie, indispensable in our search for a new studio form. There were existing guidelines taken from the old studio space and from the attached kiln building, which we would save since the latter is only fourteen years old. It was important to design a space that would allow convenient access to the kiln area directly from the new studio, since winters in Michigan don't invite remote kiln sites.

To refine space needs, I measured all the spaces I was presently using. The original work space was 1,000 square feet, 300 square feet of which was devoted to storage of materials, a wood shop, and a tiny office. The remaining 700 square feet held all potting activities, that is, five potter's wheels, benches, dough mixer, ware carts, and so forth. The full cycle of two potters' activities quickly filled the available space. The kiln room built in 1969 added another 350 square feet and housed our 100-cubic-foot kiln, a pugmill, and more ware carts.

The hours spent thinking and measuring paid off. What evolved first was a clear need to separate the glaze activity from the main potting area. For nearly twenty years I have made do with one space which either held wet pots in process or was converted to a glaze area by rearranging benches. I calculated that I wasted nearly six days each year cleaning up and making the changeover.

We also needed a separate raw materials and mixing room to isolate this dusty activity. Since space was at a premium and I could store some clays outdoors under proper cover, I allocated only 245 square feet to this need. A toolroom/woodshop was an essential carryover from the old studio. So much of the daily progress I enjoy during the potting process comes from ready access to my tools. I make or modify many ribs, dies, and so forth in the course of a week's work.

As seen in the blueprint, the logic of a flow pattern is used. Raw materials enter at the west end where storage and mixing occur. Tool making also occurs at that end of the building. Materials and tools then move into the large, central workspace and to the three major work sites. The dry pots move into the kiln room for biscuiting and then move back a short distance into the glaze area centered around the sink. Finally, the pots return to the kiln room for glaze-firing and eventual dispersal to showroom or storage areas in the separate showroom near our house.

The overall shape of the building reflected Aleksis' admiration of simple, open-floor plans with the maximum utilization of building economics inherent in a two-story structure. Just the thought of having seemingly endless storage space for the piles of potter's stuff kept excitement high through the planning stages.

Here is some advice I'm so glad I followed: Aleksis insisted on making a scale model of the building for us to study. It really made the sense of the building come alive and prevented us from choosing some less functional alternatives as designs evolved. The blueprints and full-size room shapes staked out on the building site were equally helpful in planning.

People would ask about space design issues during the building process. I would answer, "Space design is a private issue. Some people seem to need 4,000 square feet; some, 500 or less. Find out about yourself; give it time." The rectangular barn plan has classic simplicity and versatility. I feel sure there are probably many dozens of ideal variations on studio schemes. One needs first to serve those special and specific personal needs that can only be unearthed through a combining of experience, sensitive guidance, and painstaking trial and error.

ZONING ISSUES

I work in a suburban setting where zoning variances are needed for me to have a "home occupation." Fortunately, my potting activity has always met with an extremely warm reception in our community. Farmington Hills considers me a valued resource, and I, in turn, enjoy sharing pottery experiences through studio tours and fund-raising efforts for community projects such as our Community Center. During the

period I have lived in Farmington Hills, an historic district has been formed. My farm site is part of this and is governed by certain restrictions pertaining to older structures. This meant that our proposed new studio had to be visually compatible with the farmhouse. Happily, I love English and American barns, and Aleksis, a Finn, loves Finnish barns. Our building reflects those interests and easily met the required local building standards.

A second consideration concerned the size of the new space. We were granted a variance that allowed for space beyond what the city laws permit for a secondary structure on a home site because it came down to either considering a move to another site or having special permission to stay and rebuild suitably. Fortunately, neither we nor the city wanted us to move.

SOME FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Anyone who has ever embarked on a building project would probably agree that despite the cleverest cost planning it always costs more than expected. Susie says her rule of thumb is, "It costs twice as much, takes twice as long, and is twice as hard as you initially anticipated." While it is always possible to do most of the grunt work yourself, we chose to do only planning, supervising, and such selected tasks as insulation, painting, and caulking.

This reasoning was basic to my philosophy of priority in time use. I can build, I cannot build as effectively as a skilled carpenter can. What it comes down to is that I am a better potter than I am a carpenter, electrician, or cement worker. During the project I was certainly heavily involved (and distracted too) during the more complex phases. I did plenty of hands-on work with the tradesmen as the building grew, and at times my advance preparations saved countless labor hours. But in spite of the drain on my working time, I still held to a moderately coherent studio potting schedule, which provided me with a familiar focus and kept the income-producing activity alive.

Still, where did the money come from to build? We had a raise-the-roof sale. Customers were notified and re-

sponded generously during an all-day sale. This helped get our foundation poured. Several outdated insurance policies were consolidated, and the cash value was applied to some needed materials. My mother, true to her pattern of lifelong encouragement, came to us with some financial support, and dear friends made the final stages of completion possible by a personal loan.

HEATING CONSIDERATIONS

I was tempted to equip the main studio with familiar gas forced-air heating. I did examine the use of hot-water baseboard heat, as well as electric baseboard types. Each had advantages, but the use of each was also complicated by circumstances inherent to potters' studios. Dust was a major factor. Dust clogs finned heat dispersion devices and blows around constantly in forced-air systems. Electrical systems are usually terribly costly to operate.

During a brainstorming session with architect Walter Reddig, a file on electric radiant heating was given to me for consideration. I read the file and immediately felt a surge of interest in this new/old approach. I called the engineering firm which sent a qualified field engineer to survey the building and make proposals.

What emerged from the study was encouraging. Since we had built with 6" stud walls (R-19) and had R-30 in the ceilings of the heated spaces, our situation was quite receptive to the benefits of radiant heating. The reflective envelopes formed by the aluminum foil vapor barrier of the insulation would greatly improve the radiant performance since the reflectivity would return the radiant energy to the interior.

The wonderful features of radiant heat continued to unfold. The heat is the same to our body senses as the warming rays of the sun. The body absorbs it and immediately feels warm; one is comfortable with a lower ambient (air) temperature than with the temperature from a forced-air furnace. Human skin ranks highest at .99 on a scale in absorption efficiencies for radiant energy. No air is blown about, and consequently no dust is stirred up or transported. I have also observed that pots dry evenly in this heat, so there is no more turning of the ware to compensate for hot air being blown from heat ducts.

Another important factor in my decision to use radiant heat is that it is zone controllable. The kiln room can be left totally unheated during most of the seven- or eight-month heating season in Michigan. With a 15-minute advance turnup of the line volt thermostat, the space can be ready for comfortable use. All infrequently used areas are treated in the same way by either leaving the thermostats set at their 40°F low end or, if feasible, by shutting the units off totally at the breaker. The main use areas all have low voltage thermostats with 50°F minimum settings, but of course they can be totally shut down at the breaker if necessary.

A typical relationship is seen in the main workspace serviced with five, 1,000-watt cove-mounted (upper wall) panels controlled by one thermostat. The units face inward toward the center of the room and serve all parts of the room equally well due to the broadcast nature of the dispersion of radiant energy which bounces continually around the room and its contents, all the while being absorbed. A space served with radiant heating has a much slower cooldown, in the event of a power outage. Everything in the room is charged with stored energy. When outage does occur, the stored energy is re-emitted to the space gradually and thus gives a leveling effect.

Another appealing feature of radiant panels is that they are extremely quiet in use. For nearly twenty years I have put up with the sound of a noisy furnace blower. From now on I'll listen to music and talk without competition. Maintenance is virtually nonexistent with radiant heat, as there are no motors, belts, pilot lights, chimneys to fail. True, thermostats can fail but this is minor compared with chasing spiders out of pilot light orifices seasonally, replacing heat exchangers, and so forth.

Having an eye toward back-up systems, I remembered the obvious: what if there is no electricity due to a storm or a breakdown from the Edison end? We therefore designed the main studio space to hold a heavily reinforced 60×96×12" foundation for an eventual Russian (masonry) fireplace. These extremely efficient, massive space heaters are proven performers. To anyone who has lived with the gentle heat coming off a cooling kiln in midwinter, the prospect of thousands of pounds of firebrick and tile radiating heat into the workspace is surely a pleasant one.

In this proposed use, the electric radiant heat would be turned down in proportion to the productivity of the Russian fireplace. Paddle fans located in the three skylight wells would stir the room air to eliminate stratified, heated air. Wall-mounted room-to-room

Radiant Heat

There is a substantial difference between radiant and warm air (ambient) heating methods. Good radiant home heating systems tap the infrared segment of this spectrum. This is the same segment as the solar radiation that heats the earth. It is perfectly safe. We are exposed to infrared rays constantly (such as in sunlight, body heat, light bulbs), and infrared is not to be confused with X rays or ultraviolet rays.

Radiant energy is beamed through space virtually undiminished and becomes thermal energy upon striking physical mass. Thus, it has a basic efficiency for heating people as the human skin has the highest absorption efficiency. We can be comfortable at lower temperatures with a radiant system. And the air is not baked and dried out.

Heat rises? NO! Warm air rises. The difference in weight between hot and cold air is the basis for warm air or convection systems. This results in hot air above our heads, and cold feet. In a radiant environment the warmed objects gently heat the air surrounding them.

The technology now exists to heat an average home in this climate for less than the wintertime light bill. This is also done with simpler and more affordable techniques than with solar retrofits and huge amounts of insulation.

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fans would help to shift heat to adjacent areas where heat flow may not be served by convection. The heat storage of a massive (10,000 pounds or more) Russian fireplace has a prolonged twenty-four-hour emission cycle. Its firing is usually accomplished twice a day in one-hour intense burns which charge the entire structure with a sufficient heat load to radiate for eight hours or more. There are no slow creosote-producing burn sessions such as those associated with typical cast-iron woodburners. When tiled with handmade tiles, this warm companion is something I look forward to living with when time permits its construction.

A question could be raised about the risks involved in choosing radiant heat over other systems. I do feel that risk to some extent. I have weighed the risk against available data in the United States and Europe. I am aware that risk-taking is part of my nature as a craftsman. Perhaps it begins at the wheel, being adventurous with form. The risk-taking continues at glaze time as I seek new colors and expressive relationships with each pot. Kiln firing is a risk familiar to all potters, so it seems natural to consider stepping into a risk situation in studio construction too, but only against a background of accumulated knowledge, observations, and possibly intuitions. But, as we face an energy future where gas and liquid fuels are projected to have astronomical cost increases, electrical resources seem attractive.

The overview of the energy situation in the coming decade, combined with the very strong appeal which radiant heat offers in terms of quiet, gentle heat, clean operation, extremely low maintenance, and initial installation cost combine in my view to offer an excellent pottery studio primary heat source. Large numbers of individual users, businesses, public institutions are all converting to radiant heat; I feel reassured that the risk is acceptable.

STUDIO MANAGEMENT REVISITED

Many issues related to studio management have come into a different light as the studio project has moved from painful birth to tangible activity.

Adequate light of the right type for the work process is something often taken for granted. In my first studios I simply hung up industrial fluorescent fixtures with cool white bulbs and went to work. For years I experienced eyestrain without question. In the general reevaluation of the whole studio I met lighting designer Ron Harwood. He suggested a lens-diffused, 4-tube daylight fluorescent fixture for all main use spaces. In the glaze room I have incandescent fixtures for better color rendition. In the main workspace three 30×50" Velux skylight/windows bring in large amounts of natural light.

KILNS

I've worked with my 100-cubic foot catenary kiln for over fourteen years. It has served well and still functions. However, I don't function the same way as I did when the kiln was built in 1969. So, even though too much is going on with the studio building project, I nurse little schemes of how I will tackle the kiln updating when that time rolls around. The problem, as I experience it, is one of flexibility. With an 100-cubic foot kiln, it is often feast or famine with finished pots. To a great extent, changes in my personal lifestyle have altered the seemingly nonstop flow of pots that used to fill the kiln at least once a month. Now I care more about a broader range of life's mix—people and things beyond clay alone—and the flow of pots comes with less predictability.

I see the need for a 60–70-cubic foot kiln. Probably it will be a car kiln; cer-

COST COMPARISON OF VARIOUS CONVENTIONAL HEATING SYSTEMS **(Detroit Area, 1982)**

	For Main Floor 1600 sq. ft.	For Second Floor 375 sq. ft.	Costs
Gas, Forced Air	Conventional, 100,000 BTU furnace	Two small wall-mounted space heaters	$5,000–$6,000 depending on efficiencies desired
Hot Water	Boiler and zone system for all areas	Zone controlled for second floor	$6,800 (approx.)
Electric	(13) separate panels, all zone controlled	4 separate panels, all zone controlled	$4,800 including special wiring to serve units

STUDIO SPECIFICATIONS

Length:	58 feet
Width:	28 feet
Main floor:	1,540 square feet
Second floor:	1,000 square feet
Foundation:	Pad on 42" footings with 2" rigid insulation, 24" down and 24" under pad.
Walls:	2×6" (with R-19 fiberglass, foil face)
Second floor deck:	2×10" (R-30 insulation with foil)
Exterior:	Cedar bevel siding and trim
Windows:	Pella wood, aluminum clad, thermopane
Skylights:	Velux, thermopane
Doors:	Therma-tru, insulated, thermopane
Heating system:	Electric radiant panels
Space use:	
Main studio space	820 sq. ft.
Glaze room	150 sq. ft.
Clay mixing and raw materials	245 sq. ft.
Woodworking and tools	270 sq. ft.
Office	50 sq. ft.

tainly it will have some ceramic fiber. I will look for more gas flow regulation and monitoring equipment in general to control combustion processes as discussed in Regis Brodie's book, *The Energy Efficient Potter.*[1] Another improvement will be the use of V.B. ware setters from England, through Keith Company of Pico Rivera, California. Potters Jonathan Kaplan and Tom Mason both use these setters, and I am thoroughly attracted to their economical setting of dinnerware pieces.

FAMILY AND WORK RELATIONSHIPS

Someone reading articles I wrote ten years ago about studio work[2] might conclude I had very few family connections. That was largely true at the time. I've done a great deal of prioritizing since then. I have also been divorced and remarried and have discovered a new world of enjoyment and reward with those dear to me. I have learned to give up time formerly devoted to studio concerns because of a desire to share in a close family unit. In the past, I would become involved in the family's needs only when I was too tired to work in the studio any further. I had been one of those work-obsessed people who thought that personal connections didn't matter. I find to my delight and relief that they do. The benefit is that I'm learning and expanding in a richer way than every before.

SHOWROOM MANAGEMENT IDEAS

I began potting in 1964 with a strong desire to have a showroom to exhibit and sell my pots. I continue to display and sell this way. My showroom has fortunately always been a steady and reliable source of income. Additionally, I sell in outside situations – galleries, group invitationals, and so forth. During the 1960s and 1970s I sold at art fairs on a yearly basis. These experiences taught me a lot. However, what remains strongly intact through the last nineteen years is a steady contact with a large and increasingly knowledgeable following through my showroom.

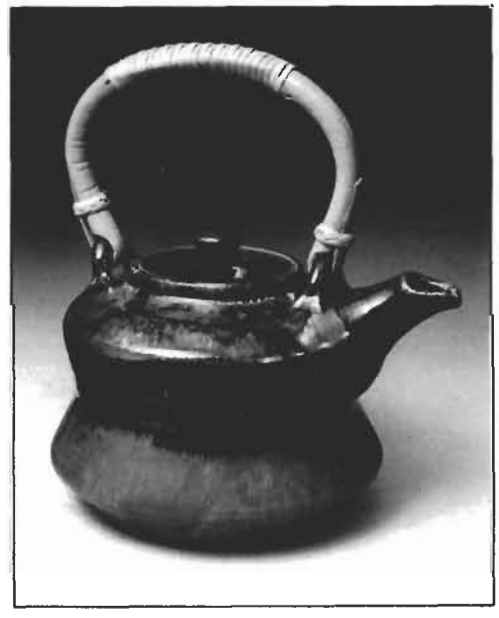
One major change in the last few years is to employ a showroom manager. When people visit our pottery, it is essential that my concerns as a potter are conveyed to them as clearly as possible. The showroom manager keeps accurate sales records, packs and ships gifts and exhibition pieces via U.P.S., does follow-ups on special customer problems, and acts as a combination secretary, phone call screen, and general jack of all trades – no easy task! Ann, our present manager, is a pleasant woman from our community. I continually call her in to the studio to observe and take notes about phases of work so that she can answer questions asked by our customers.

SOME THOUGHTS ALONG THE WAY

During the past year the studio project has been a big part of our lives. There

Clockwise starting at top: Porcelain boxes with walnut lids, by John Glick. Porcelain plate with slips, by John Glick. Stoneware teapot, by Susie Symons. Stoneware teapot, by John Glick.

Photographs by Bob Vigiletti



are perspectives that were not observable at first. Now I'm seeing things from a "sawdust" vantage point. I have been planning and building interior space for several months, and my own interior space has been filled with broodings. I find it remarkable that shaping wood and outfitting the workspace has many parallels with potting. It is the same search for forms, the same need to refine and adjust relationships of parts—all familiar mental and physical activities. I say to myself, "One more day, one more day," and the days add up to weeks. Yet it should not surprise me that the inclinations to find a clay form of perfection are exactly the same as those to build a harmonious workplace.

Years ago I salvaged some huge, storm-downed pine trees. I recently discovered the pile tucked away under cover and took the aging boards to be planed at a nearby mill. The years had mellowed those wonderful boards, and a dark stain (I suppose from bacterial action) had richly colored their sides. Somehow the rediscovering of those noble boards and the decision to include them in parts of the building describes the state of mind I am in these days as I see the possibility of potting draw close again. It is the joy of discovery and unfolding. Just as there was no struggle to decide to devote several days (in a time of pressure) to refinishing those pine boards, there need be no haste in the process of making pots.

If impatience ever was a part of my nature, this time of rebuilding and renewal has put healthy light into dark places. A time for rebuilding has caused me to take a good look at my values and decide once again that devotion to what I value is what makes life worth having.

Maija Grotell, my teacher at Cranbrook, instilled the idea that questions were the basis for a personal growth process. She made us understand that the excitement of looking for answers would propel our artistic process to the end of our days. Thank you, Maija!

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1. Regis C. Brodie. *The Energy-Efficient Potter.* New York: Watson-Guptil, 1982.
2. John Glick. Studio Management," *SP,* Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 4-10; *SP,* Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 46-53.