

Apprenticeship: An Educational Alternative
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WHO'D BE A POTTER?

by
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I asked each of my former apprentices to write about what they liked and didn't like about their apprenticeship. The full text is too long to read, but is posted verbatim on my web site www.markhewittpottery.com, and today I will read a synopsis of their comments.

Apprenticeship is a chance. It a chance for a master to teach, and a chance for a student to learn. There is no guarantee of success. It is a close relationship between two people that can flower into something beautiful, or it can descend into an unworkable fiasco. Each apprenticeship is specific because of the intimacy of the working relationship. The outcome of an apprenticeship is dependant upon the character and talent of the apprentice and the character and talent of the master. The outcome of an apprenticeship usually seems set before it even begins. It is a one-on one, on-the-job training that ideally helps both the master and the apprentice. At their best, a mutual respect between the protagonists propels both parties forward economically, aesthetically and personally. An apprenticeship is only a start.

Former apprentice Charlie Pritchard comments, “in exchange for my labor and dedication, I was given access to a nurturing learning environment. The apprenticeship gave me a chance to really focus on becoming a potter – to be “blinkerred” – with my eyes on a goal.

Joe Christensen clarifies the relationship, “This should be the ultimate goal and cornerstone of a successful pairing; for the professional potter to grow his production while ensuring that the apprentice, through discipline and restricted boundaries, gains the skills to express his artistic goals.”

Economically, as a master, I give an apprentice a place to work, money, and all my knowledge, in exchange for an apprentice's labor and the products of that labor. Ideally it is a win-win situation. My wife, Carol, manages and administers the business, and we treat our apprentices well.

Matt Jones expresses this succinctly, “With seven years of hindsight, the good of an apprenticeship is blindingly obvious: I GOT PAID TO LEARN HOW TO MAKE POTS AND RUN A BUSINESS!”

James Olney, in contrast, observes that, “apprenticeship offers a less than modest salary, which makes it impossible to save enough money to even begin to think about setting up

a studio soon after working as an apprentice. Also, the structure of my particular apprenticeship sometimes made me feel more like a poorly-paid laborer than a student potter.” It must be noted that it is can be just as difficult economically to be a potter as it is to be an apprentice, and that education is often a financial struggle whether at an Art School or during an apprenticeship.

Aesthetically, a master might share insights into ceramic beauty either in a narrowly doctrinal manner, or more loosely, allowing the apprentices’ eye and enthusiasms to develop on their own. In my workshop there is a mix of both approaches, the balance determined by the strains of the economic imperative. A master is usually proud of their own work and glad, if asked, to pass on their ideas and vision to students, believing that what they know might be of some use to the apprentices, or at least, do them no harm. It certainly takes time for an independent eye to develop, often not until long after an apprentice has left, but it depends as much on the apprentice as it does the master to maintain an independent identity, and to keep their own separate aesthetic dreams alive. Nonetheless, apprenticeships tend to be narrowly focused rather than openly experimental.

Daniel Johnston writes, “One criticism of an apprenticeship is that the student pots only reflect the technical similarities to those of the teacher and do not have the verve of their mentor’s pots. This vitality is a nontransferable quality. While an apprenticeship provides a strong foundation, it creates a situation of “test by comparison.” The method is effective and promotes rapid technical growth but within narrow guidelines. It is the responsibility of the student to step outside this comfort zone, maintaining as well as challenging tradition in a less protected environment.”

Zac Spates writes similarly, “As an apprentice, I find it hard to generate fresh ideas about new pots that will fit within the studio’s confines. Creativity, which equates to the basic artistic emotions, seems lost. The most difficult barrier for an apprentice is to overcome the impression of lost originality or boredom. Beyond those borders, inspired ideas serve as a basis of character in the newly formed potter.”

On a positive note aesthetically, Chris Early says, “First, and foremost, Mark taught me to see. To see the often overlooked hollow spot in a knob, or that the bottom section of a pot could be more filled out. As Mark would often say, *“I think you would enjoy the pot more if... (you did such and such a thing).”* Nate Evans and Hallie Hite write, “An apprenticeship is not for everyone. If you need to feed off the stimulation of others with different ideas and directions working around you and want the freedom to experiment you would probably feel bound within the limitations of a fairly traditional apprenticeship..... It may take a while to find your voice after making pots for someone else for so long, but you should have the necessary skills to start looking.

On a personal level, a master invites a whole person into their life, someone eager and vulnerable. There are often no legally binding contracts determining the boundaries of the relationship, apprenticeships often operate instead on good faith. Apprenticeships can, regrettably, be exploitative and abusive, and should be walked away from immediately if they are. However, an apprenticeship can be a time of personal growth, both for the apprentice and the master, if the conditions are right. As a teacher I have enjoyed observing an apprentice's development more than I ever imagined, and daresay have learned as much from the relationship as each apprentice. Some I have been able to help more than others. Some I count among my closest friends. It is on the personal level that my former apprentices had the most to say.

Matt Jones talks about his time with both me and Todd Piker, "It is an ugly thing to own up to, but on a deep level, I was looking for weaknesses in their work, or in them personally, that would help justify my jealousy of their abilities and soothe my anxieties about my own shortcomings.

James Olney writes, "The greatest difficulty for me has been dealing with the tension sometimes created between three independent and dedicated potters, each with a unique personality, work ethic, and creativity all working in the same limited space. For me, this tension makes work more tedious and can interfere with concentration and creativity. Secondly, one person's working rhythm may not match the pace of another person's studio. Mark's intense pace suits some and often accomplishes jobs more quickly, but I prefer a slower, more conscious pace where my mistakes are less frequent".

However, on a positive note, Eric Smith writes, "The nature of the apprenticeship was an incredibly intimate one. There were jobs to be done, pots to be made, and very few distractions. Our relationship with one another both individually and collectively blossomed slowly, quietly, and very sweetly. We found our rhythm in one another and it was good, it worked. At the end of the day you might reflect on personal accomplishments or frustrations but there was always a sense that you contributed to the whole moving forward."

And Matt Jones comments, "Hardly a day passes when I don't think of something I learned, working alongside my mentors. The petty jealousies and nagging doubts have faded as my confidence has grown and my personal vision has come into focus. I realize that my mentors are now, and always have been, just friends, people who have shared their time, knowledge and experience with me."

A novice apprentice arrives voluntarily, with minimal skills, many uncertainties and most importantly, big dreams. Gradually, after their initial intimidation diminishes, workshop routines are learned and skills begin to develop, typically this takes about a year. In the second year an apprentice has mastered many of the smaller pots, understands the materials, knows the production cycle, is finessing the rhythms of the workshop, is listening to the kiln, and is beginning to aspire to larger and more complicated shapes. Their dreams are also bigger.

At the end of the second year they think they know it all, and often leave.

When these fledglings leave the nest, there always follows a period of uncertainty as each person struggles to find their voice and place in the world. Usually after a couple more years in the wilderness they find a place of their own to set up a pottery and begin their own careers. Joe Cole, currently in the wilderness, comments “While working under an established potter on a day to day basis, one cannot help being disproportionately influenced by him or her. After a few years of this intense experience it can be quite disconcerting setting out on ones own. You can not help comparing every pot you make and every decoration you apply to the pots of your former employer. Everything that you do is suddenly broken into two categories: pots and pottery-related actions and ideas that your boss would have approved of and those that your boss would not have approved of. I do not know the solution to this problem, but I suspect the answer comes with time.”

Chris Early writes, “The downside of an apprenticeship, for me, was nobodies fault but my own. After leaving college I was able to put off “real life” for a few more years. After I was done with Mark there was nowhere left to go but into life. I cannot set up as Mark did, I am not him, so I have to find my own way, and it will probably take a while.”

After a while the lessons learned as an apprentice are assimilated and new directions are taken. While a family resemblance remains visible, new styles, permutations and inflections distinguish one member of a family of potters from another, in the same way that actual brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts all differ from each other. There may be a similar genetic or aesthetic coding, but it only takes a minor twist of that material for something new and unexpected to emerge.

I have dwelt on the negative aspects of apprenticeship slightly more than the positive. As a balance, here is a comment from Joe Christensen, (to cheer me up), “My apprenticeship with Mark Hewitt) was the opportunity of a lifetime. It was the chance to live years beyond my talent and maturity. It was the chance to grow up.”

Apprenticeship remains a viable alternative educational route to becoming a potter. It is an ancient, rare, and highly specialized form of education. It does not suit everyone, and may be more suitable to some types of pottery than others.

(Show slides)

(Sing song “Who’d Be a Potter?” after discussion)

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Apprentices comments on Apprenticeship – listed in sequence of their time spent at the W.M.Hewitt Pottery.

Charlie Pritchard, from Richmond, VA, had been in the National Guard and was working in restaurants in Raleigh, NC, and taking classes at the Craft Center at North Carolina State University before working for me. He is now making pots at the Luling Icehouse Pottery, in Luling, Texas, (between San Antonio and Austin), with his wife Holly Hall. Charlie worked at the M.L. Owens Pottery in Seagrove after leaving here, before moving to Texas.

He writes:

Pros

First I want to say that the opportunity to work with Mark was a chance to become part of something good. I have always valued pottery first as a craft of utility and second as an art form. My favorite pots are those made efficiently and beautifully, and a phrase that comes to mind in describing Mark's work is "Sophisticated Primitive." I liked the straightforward concept of apprenticeship Mark laid out: in exchange for my labor and dedication, I was given access to a nurturing learning environment. The apprenticeship gave me a chance to really focus on becoming a potter – to be "blinkered" – with my eyes on a goal.

Cons

Two and a half years was only enough time for me to begin a foundation in pottery making. I was only able to learn some basic forms in this amount of time. I have learned since then that in order to be competitive in today's functional pottery market, an apprentice needs to know how to make a wider variety of shapes and glazes. I have also come to learn that there are few places like North Carolina for its cultural appreciation of pottery. The only real negative I can think of about working within the WM Hewitt "paradigm" was the expectation that after I left, the buying public would be ready to beat down the doors to buy my pottery.

Joe Christensen was raised in Minneapolis, and came to me after graduating from St. John's University in Minnesota, where he studied in the ceramics program run by Sister Dennis, and had work experience at Richard Bresnehan's pottery at nearby St. Ben's. He is now living in Minneapolis and making pots just across the Mississippi in Hudson, Wisconsin. He is married to Molly and has a young daughter, Stella.

The apprenticeship with Mark Hewitt was the opportunity of a lifetime. It was the chance to live years beyond my talent and maturity. It was the chance to grow up.

Apprenticeships are essentially personal. While some characteristics of apprenticeships are universal, most are defined by the unique qualities of the individuals involved. I came to the Hewitt's with an eagerness to learn and a desire to excel. Mark shared many invaluable skills and talents with me. However, the ones that spoke most to me at the time were his patience, his focus on family, and his success in a field marked by self-determination. As a live-in apprentice, I witnessed the delicate act of balancing self-employment with family life. While mastering the art of wood firing large-scale pottery, Mark not only made time for family, but seemed to prioritize it above all else. This lesson has been especially important for me to recall as I have recently become a husband and

father. I was Mark's apprentice and he was my mentor. This part of the relationship was my favorite. It enhanced my self-confidence that a successful, prolific potter entrusted me to play such a significant role in his studio. Through the apprenticeship I gleaned many skills from working day to day with Mark, but in the end, was able to develop my own aesthetic voice and build a business for myself. This should be the ultimate goal and cornerstone of a successful pairing; for the professional potter to grow his production while ensuring that the apprentice, through discipline and restricted boundaries, gains the skills to express his artistic goals.

Mark and Carol took me into their family for one year. It was the best fed year of my life. While running 100 miles a week (*Joe was a marathon runner*), Carol and Mark served up mounds of organic cuisine, more than they ever thought possible to consume. From Mark's egg soufflé to Carol's numerous soups (and the occasional scrap of meat) the meals were my favorite part of the day. However, one morning I began to wonder if the food was laced with an organic hallucinogen, as I awoke one to find a purple cow staring at me through the misty haze of the Plexiglas "windows" of my "cabin" (a delapidated greenhouse). In the summer, the Hewitt's provided four fans for my comfort during the 100 degree evenings of the North Carolina bayou. Winter months were cozy as I snuggled among six hefty quilts that protected me from the damp air of Pittsboro. Living conditions aside, what I most carry with me from the experience was the feeling I got from being surrounded by a truly wonderful family and getting to know an artist who possessed integrity and conviction for how he lived.

Daniel Johnston, was born and raised on a small farm in North Carolina, and did not graduate from high school. Even while at school he worked long hours in menial jobs, to help keep himself and his family afloat, many of those jobs were in the construction trade. He was jobbing at some of the production potteries in Seagrove when he came to work with me at age 19, and worked with me for four years. After leaving he continued working as journeyman in Seagrove, and along the way acquired more construction skills. He also took a two month trip to work at a pottery North East Thailand on the Mekong River bordering Laos, where he learned to make traditional large jars. The trip was organized with help from Louise Cort and Leedham Lefferts. Upon his return Daniel built a two story log-built pottery and a big kiln shed and wood kiln on a hilltop near Erect, North Carolina, just outside Seagrove, on ten acres of land he had bought when he was sixteen. His father is his immediate neighbor on one side, and his brother and sister-in-law live on the other. Daniel lives with his girlfriend Paula Smith.

He writes,

There is plenty to be said on the positive side of an apprenticeship as an unparalleled method of training. The apprenticeship offers time for development and refinement of technical skills. The refinement of technique provides a greater understanding of materials. The ability to understand and skillfully control your materials is the ultimate tool in executing ideas. The study of technique and the aesthetic values that a tradition offers is an important foundation in building a career that constantly enriches and contributes to the tradition.

On the negative side,

One criticism of an apprenticeship is that the student pots only reflect the technical similarities to those of the teacher and do not have the verve of their mentor's pots. This vitality is a nontransferable quality. While an apprenticeship provides a strong foundation, it creates a situation of "test by comparison." The method is effective and promotes rapid technical growth but within narrow guidelines. It is the responsibility of the student to step outside this comfort zone, maintaining as well as challenging tradition in a less protected environment.

Matt Jones was born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina. He went to Earlham College, a Quaker school in Indiana, and studied ceramics under Mike Thiedeman, a former student of Warren MacKenzie. Matt worked for Todd Piker for three years before coming to me, staying six months before moving to Big Sandy Mush, a valley half-an-hour north of Asheville, North Carolina. He too has a big wood kiln, and is married to Christine Balgoyan, another Earlham graduate, and they have two children, Linden and Mary Frances.

He writes,

Apprenticeship: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

(the knowledge and skills, the nagging internal questions and the petty jealousies)

I had overwhelmingly positive experiences with my apprenticeships. I was an apprentice for three and a half years, and have had two apprentices work here with me at my own pottery. With seven years of hindsight, the good of an apprenticeship is blindingly obvious: I GOT PAID TO LEARN HOW TO MAKE POTS AND RUN A BUSINESS!

Schools are great as a means of being introduced to the materials, the ideas, and the history of pottery making. The passion for making pots (or anything for that matter) comes from within: it simply is or isn't a part of your psychological composition. Apprenticeship is where your introduction and inspiration are put to the test.

I voluntarily put myself into close working relationships with potters I held in high esteem who had a fifteen and twenty-five year head start on me. In my mind, I was competing with them personally, while trying to win their respect and affection. It is an ugly thing to own up to, but on a deep level, I was looking for weaknesses in their work, or in them personally, that would help justify my jealousy of their abilities and soothe my anxieties about my own shortcomings. I wanted to measure up to the high quality I saw them pursue in their own work, and this drove me to test myself and ask questions about my own vision. I was awed by their ability to make difficult pots look simple and faced doubts when I discovered the complexities of making simple pots well. Because of my mentors and the long line of excellent craftsmen that came before them, I pushed myself harder than I would have on my own.

It has taken a lot of time, but with desire, determination and persistence, skills have come. The nourishment of these apprenticeships continues to unfold even now as I work. The significance of a comment, or piece of advice, reveals itself in a new way, or some casual remark pops into my mind right when I need it most. Hardly a day passes when I don't think of something I learned, working alongside my mentors. The petty jealousies and nagging doubts have faded as my confidence has grown and my personal vision has come into focus. I realize that my mentors are now, and always have been, just friends, people who have shared their time, knowledge and experience with me.

Nate Evans and Hallie Hite both worked for me for two years after they graduated from Luther College in Decorah in north-east Iowa. Nate is from Madison Wisconsin, and Hallie is from rural north-west Minnesota, not from Fargo North Dakota. They returned to North East Iowa and, together, now operate the Allamakee Wood-Fired Pottery near New Albin.

They write,

After college we had a very specific idea of the direction we wanted to take with our pots. An apprenticeship was the only option we felt would teach us the necessary skills to become full-time wood-firing potters.

An apprenticeship is not for everyone. If you need to feed off the stimulation of others with different ideas and directions working around you and want the freedom to experiment you would probably feel bound within the limitations of a fairly traditional apprenticeship. During most apprenticeships you learn only one very focused way of working. This would be seen as a drawback by some, but it is also the biggest strength of the system. If you are able to choose your working situation and work for someone who works in a similar genre and with methods you are interested in, then this focused education will teach you very specific skills and techniques you will need when you branch out on your own.

The only way to understand what it takes to run your own pottery, is to work at one every day. You learn what is required both mentally and physically without being flung headlong into running it yourself. You can learn by observing what the potter you work for has earned through years of experience, and no doubt lots of trial and error. You learn what type of numbers need to be made to stay afloat, the skills and patience required to perfect the forms and make the numbers, and the amount of physical labor that must be put in before a single pot is made. At our own pottery, we count ourselves lucky if we are making pots one third of the time.

In most apprenticeship situations you also learn how to be involved in all the marketing aspects of the pottery, whether it be gallery sales, wholesale orders, art fairs and shows, or how to build up a mailing list for home sales.

In our minds, all of the practical lessons far outweigh any drawbacks to an intensive apprenticeship situation. It may take a while to find your voice after making pots for someone else for so long, but you should have the necessary skills to start looking.

Eric Smith, like Matt Jones, graduated from Earlham College. Eric is from suburban Philadelphia, spent two years with me with his wife Jill, also an Earlham graduate, who is a gardener and environmental educator. They have just bought some property in Cummington, in Western Massachusetts, not far from Mark Shapiro, where they plan to set up a pottery, and they are expecting their first baby.

I find myself jotting down the same four words over and over... That Pottery Was Alive. From the first day that Jill and I pulled into the last house on the Johnny Burke Road, I remember the excitement and anxiety of knowing that it was now my turn to be part of what truly felt to be a living, breathing organism. Everywhere were signs of life. From the meadowlark perched on the power lines along the drive, to the magnificent stand of pecan trees that stretched their arms over the road on the final approach as if embracing your home. From the rows of purple lavender that lined the front walk, to the Carolina wrens hopping about the wood piles, and the Hewitt's lab Molly announcing to the world, "They're here!" In the midst of such a fertile atmosphere were the pots themselves. They were strong, active and so clearly at home. From the large planters so lovingly planted up around the property to the tumblers we would drink ice water from in the hottest months, the pots always seemed to speak the truth. They told tales of time and were clearly connected to place. At 424 Johnny Burke Road, Mark's spirit lives within everything. The roots he's planted are strong, his touch, apparent. For the two years I spent there these things invigorated me, made me feel connected; made me feel home.

It's a somewhat deeper dig to recall memories that may have made this time a difficult one. At the time I was there, there were two apprentices, myself and Daniel Johnston. Daniel had already spent two years with Mark and was well seasoned in the workings of the pottery and the pots themselves. It could at times be very intimidating and too easy to know what rung of the ladder you stood on. There was a well established level of trust between Daniel and Mark that at least in the beginning felt impossible to attain. While at times this was a hard bite to swallow, it became clear that we all had a lever of dependency on each other. The nature of the apprenticeship was an incredibly intimate one. There were jobs to be done, pots to be made, and very few distractions. Our relationship with one another both individually and collectively blossomed slowly, quietly, and very sweetly. We found our rhythm in one another and it was good, it worked. At the end of the day you might reflect on personal accomplishments or frustrations, but there was always a sense that you contributed to the whole moving forward. My time with Mark will be with me forever, the foundations that were laid are an integral part of who I am and what I do. I am so proud to be a part of his family.

Joe Cole was raised in Ellensburg, Washington State, east of the Cascades. He graduated from Cornell College, Iowa, and worked for me for two years. He then helped Daniel Johnston build his workshop and kiln, and is currently working at various potteries in

Seagrove before establishing his own pottery somewhere. He is living with his girlfriend, Christy Hamilton, another Cornell College graduate.

Pros:

There is no better way to find out what goes into the day-to-day workings of a pottery than dedicating several years to living and working with an established potter. Making pots on a daily basis under the guidance of someone who produces pottery for a living, and has been doing so for many years is perhaps the best training an aspiring potter can receive. If you can find a potter who makes pots you like and who is willing to take you on as an apprentice, I highly doubt you would regret the time spent under his or her guidance. I certainly would not be the potter I am today if it were not for the two years I spent living and working with Mark.

Cons:

An apprentice's job is hard to define. There are large gray areas as to what does and does not fit under the responsibilities of being an apprentice. Because of this gray area, an apprentice can often find himself or herself doing jobs that he or she had not foreseen when signing on as an apprentice. An apprentice must be flexible and make compromises to make it through an apprenticeship.

While working under an established potter on a day to day basis, one cannot help being disproportionately influenced by him or her. After a few years of this intense experience it can be quite disconcerting setting out on ones own. You can not help comparing every pot you make and every decoration you apply to the pots of your former employer. Everything that you do is suddenly broken into two categories: pots and pottery-related actions and ideas that your boss would have approved of and those that your boss would not have approved of. I do not know the solution to this problem, but I suspect the answer comes with time.

Chris Early was born in Peoria, Illinois and attended Bradley University there, studying ceramics. He worked for me for two years and is currently living in Cincinnati, where his fiancée, Adream Blair, teaches in the Design Department at the University of Cincinnati. Chris is currently working at a cabinet shop, and waiting for the next step. He and Adream will be married in May.

He writes,

Most people would say that the main benefit of working under Mark Hewitt, or any other potter, would be categorized as being able to make lots of pots. For me it was also two other things.

First, and foremost, Mark taught me to see. To see the often overlooked hollow spot in a knob, or that the bottom section of a pot could be more filled out. As Mark would often say, *"I think you would enjoy the pot more if...(you did such and such a thing)."* The

second thing was the relationship I was able to develop with Mark and Joe Cole, my fellow apprentice. I feel that it is always nice to have someone to call for help, and believe me, there were days when I needed Joe to help me get through work.

The downside of an apprenticeship, for me, was nobody's fault but my own. After leaving college I was able to put off "real life" for a few more years. After I was done with Mark there was nowhere left to go but into life. I cannot set up as Mark did, I am not him, so I have to find my own way, and it will probably take a while.

James Olney is from Granbury, Texas, south of Dallas. He attended Southwestern University near Austin, and has worked for me for two years. After he leaves North Carolina this summer he plans to join the Peace Corps with his girlfriend Christy Cox, who will soon graduate from Bryn Mawr College, in Philadelphia.

He writes,

Apprenticeship offers specific opportunities and experiences not available through graduate school or independent study. Observing first hand what is required to run a studio has taught me numerous valuable lessons, including the specifics of clay and kiln preparation, firing, and how to budget time and materials across kiln cycles. Mark's strict routine and high standards have forced me to develop discipline in my work and my pot-making. Finally, exposure to visiting potters and pottery enthusiasts, as well as the books in Mark's library, has increased my understanding of the history of pottery, and encouraged my own thinking about what it means to be a potter and what it means to make good pots.

My apprenticeship has included three challenging aspects that others should consider before choosing to apprentice over other options. The greatest difficulty for me has been dealing with the tension sometimes created between three independent and dedicated potters, each with a unique personality, work ethic, and creativity all working in the same limited space. For me, this tension makes work more tedious and can interfere with concentration and creativity. Secondly, one person's working rhythm may not match the pace of another person's studio. Mark's intense pace suits some and often accomplishes jobs more quickly, but I prefer a slower, more conscious pace where my mistakes are less frequent. Lastly, apprenticeship offers a less than modest salary, which makes it impossible to save enough money to even begin to think about setting up a studio soon after working as an apprentice. I have struggled to pay for necessities and unhappily depend on my parents to make some insurance and loan payments. Also, the structure of my particular apprenticeship sometimes made me feel more like a poorly-paid laborer than a student potter.

These negative aspects, however, do not outweigh the positive ones. My time as an apprentice has allowed me to increase my skill and knowledge in pottery while also having a little of fun.

Zac Spates grew up in Painesville, Minnesota, and like Joe Christensen, went to St. John's University and studied with Sister Dennis. He also worked with Richard

Bresnehan and with another Minnesota potter, Bill Gossman. He has been with me for two years and plans to stay two more while his girlfriend, Abby Loeth, is in the Nursing School at UNC Chapel Hill. They live in Pittsboro and are the night managers of a local Bed and Breakfast, The Rosemary House.

There are more to apprenticeships than making pots, they help you figure out who you are as a potter, and who you want to become. My original intentions for an apprenticeship were to become a great thrower, and then to set up my own studio later. It wasn't until actually experiencing an apprenticeship, that I realized what it really meant to me.

As a college educated art student, my training in the arts was diverse. Additionally, I worked alongside several potters during those years and learned many aspects of running a studio. I sought after an apprenticeship partly to polish those skills, but primarily to be educated in the most primal facet of throwing functional wares.

Being given the chance to learn everything a teacher knows makes an apprenticeship far outweigh the hardships involved. Learning from the challenges and solutions in a non-threatening environment gives an apprentice time to develop the confidence and abilities of an experienced artist. The close relationships formed in this environment are far superior to other teacher/student relationships.

As a potter working under a successful maker, it's easy to be motivated to make the best copies of the master's work. Duplicating vessels become easier as apprentices are molded into the studio's style. The difficulty comes when looking to creatively explore something new.

As an apprentice, I find it hard to generate fresh ideas about new pots that will fit within the studio's confines. Creativity, which equates to the basic artistic emotions, seems lost. The difficult barrier for an apprentice is to overcome that impression of lost originality or boredom. Beyond those borders, inspired ideas serve as a basis of character in the newly formed potter.

Although emotionally and physically demanding, an apprenticeship is the foundation on which I will begin my artistic career. Using this time as a guide when starting my own workshop, I can realize all that I have learned in the years prior.

Additional Thoughts about Apprenticeship

GOOD ASPECTS OF APPRENTICESHIP

Continuity, Lineage, Pedigree. I like my pots, they stand for something good, and sowing seeds for future continuity seems appropriate. If you do something well, offer it to someone else. I'm proud of where I studied, what my pots represent, and think it important to keep the ideas going. My studio is, in this way, like an atelier, it has a vision.

There is more flexibility within my aesthetic than many production potteries, we don't have rigidly controlled wholesale lines. The parameters are loose, we make a wide range of pots, large and small, simple and complicated, and use many decorative techniques. I show apprentices everything I know, and give them a chance to make it on their own and be successful.

Generosity - giving young people a chance.

Inviting young people into your life. They work for me, I work for them, at its best it is a win/win situation. I'm more than a boss, I am a mentor and friend.

Lifetime relationships with my former apprentices.

Good for the master financially, apprentices are indeed cheap labor (so too are interns, assistants, and graduate students). Because of the nature of my business and the healthy market for my work, I chose to expand my production. The division of labor allows me to concentrate on what I enjoy most, which is making pots, but they are also students, not just supporting laborers.

Also good for the apprentice financially and economically and aesthetically.

Carol and I want apprentices' lives to go well. We pay them decently, providing accommodation, and a monthly wage that increases after each of the three firings I have annually. My current apprentices, having worked here for two years earn the equivalent of about \$12-14,000 a year. Some apprentices save money while here, others do not. We don't provide health insurance. Carol administers the pottery and keeps everything legal and sound.

If an apprentice stays close by they often do well – the Japanese model also works in NC – Daniel Johnston being a case in point.

Physical help.

Camaraderie, fun being part of a team.

Teach everything I know – master as mentor, hero.

Help in other areas, Carol very good at teaching apprentices about financial matters, book keeping, small-business management, though not everyone seeks her advice.

Character mentorship, an interest in the whole person, conversation, exchange of ideas – encouraging apprentices to take other classes (for instance Zac and James are taking a building class at CCCC, they could also go to places like Penland if they chose).

Cloistered – a time to focus on the learning without the struggles of the real world

You get out of it what you put into it.

People's characters are set by the time they come to me. Jesuit saying, "Show me the seven year old, and I'll show you the man." You've either got it or you don't, there's not much I can do but provide a decent place to work, and whatever is there will come out.

If there is good demand for a potter's work, apprenticeship is a great option to help increase production.

Are assistants in an artist's studio the same as apprentices? Do painters and sculptors have apprentices, or are they assistants? What's the difference?

BAD ASPECTS OF APPRENTICESHIP

Bias – Class, Gender, Race, Age, Physicality. My apprentices self-select, and tend to be white middle-class, college educated males. I don't get many requests for apprenticeships, and only two ever from women – one bad timing, one unsuitable.

Production pottery, in addition to being an art and a craft, could also be considered a trade, like being a carpenter, electrician, plumber. (This could be a good thing).

Hard physical labor

Potential for exploitation and abuse

Little money, but also little debt.

Financial requirements are higher than in the past - student loans, health insurance, vehicles etc. The base income requirements are high

False expectations - no guarantee of success

Narrow education, I know little about glazes, molds, decals, porcelain, earthenware. Apprentices are often tired at the end of the day, and so here is little energy left for independent study and advancement, to learn things I don't teach them on their own time. I suggest books to read and encourage them to take classes elsewhere. They can be easily distracted.

Narrow aesthetic – hard to develop your own voice until later, although I'm trying to structure things more loosely now, so this can emerge more easily. Experimentation is encouraged in the evenings and weekends, but apprentices, as a rule, don't take advantage of the opportunity.

Cloning, when apprentices leave they have little sense of their independent voice. I'm teaching them the notes, they must then make music on their own, and it takes a long time (regardless of where you study) to find your own style and artistic identity.

Learning by mimicry – although many great artists did the same, Beckett wore the same sized shoes as Joyce, even though they were too small. Hunter Thompson used to copy F. Scott Fitzgerald's books, typing pages word for word so he could get inside

Fitzgerald's head. So, clearly not a bad system.

It is hard being an apprentice, even harder being a potter

Character conflicts/workshop tensions - better having two, so they have someone to complain to. Need to get along in a confined space.

Comparisons with Art School – Art Schools are expensive, many students go into debt, and their emphasis is experimental rather than economic, so many students flounder in the real world after they leave ceramic programs. If you could measure “outcome,” or “Success,” I wonder how Art Schools compare to apprenticeship programs in terms of numbers, percentages.

Takes more time to become a potter than people anticipate, or have available - as the saying goes, it takes 7 years to become a potter, and 20 to establish a pottery. That's about right.

QUALITIES I LOOK FOR IN AN APPRENTICE

Passion for pots

Dreamers, idealists

Focus/concentration

Intelligence, (book smart and skill smart)

Patience

Talent

Good character

Presentation

Willingness/enthusiasm for hard work

Flexibility

Stubbornness

Additional talents and experience

“Indefinable extra something”

Good chemistry for a healthy working relationship