

Bodner's Pottery Sets On Top Of An Unmade Pot

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BUCKEYSTOWN, MD. —

Located at the crossroads of an old Indian trail that dates to 1725 and the main pathway to the grand manor and plantation of Charles Carroll, one of the signers of the declaration of Independence, is a stone building that has stood since colonial days. At this important intersection, the historic structure has served as what was once the second largest general store in Frederick County, a gas station, warehouse, and now, home to Bodmer's Pottery.

Nancy Bodmer seems very much at home in her comfortable old building that she has converted into her studio and storefront. It showcases the unusual, but functional, and much sought after pottery which she creates. "I love throwing on the wheel," said Nancy. "It's instantaneous; right away you can see that you made something."

Nancy Bodmer took an interest in pottery fifteen years ago. "I didn't know where to start," she recalled. "I took one class and became so frustrated that I quit." She then rented studio space where she used a kick wheel, powered by her feet. There was a lot of physical labor, but I was determined to be a purist, and use no electricity."

A purist philosophy soon gave way to more reliable methods. Nancy traded in her kick wheel for one with an electric motor, and chose an electrically powered kiln. "Electric allows for much more control," she explained. And the kiln is clean, reliable, and more accurate than a wood-heated model.

Nancy was well on her way in her back yard garage location. In 1976, she outgrew her pottery studio. She said, "I had given up my job and worked at pottery full time."

She acquired the building at the crossroads, which is adjacent to her home, and set up shop in one half of the building, and sold her wares and woodstoves from the other side of the shop.

"I started right away making pots. I make pots all year 'round," she said. A self-taught potter, Nancy took up the way of many artisans in the beginning years, by following the craft show circuit.

"It's not worth packing up any more. You need a lot of inventory and something dramatic to catch people's eyes," she explained.

And, she has managed to catch the eyes of the many people who see her wares at her Buckeystown, Maryland store.

"My favorite casserole is a Nancy Bodmer casserole that my husband bought ten years ago," commented Helene Anderson of Potomac, Maryland. "She made it special for my birthday. Everyone that comes into my house loves it," added Helene.

The little shop has a country store character about it and nicely showcases the many plates, cups, bowls, tureens, casseroles, goblets, honey pots, colanders, vases, canisters, teapots, ornaments and jewelry that she makes.

"I'm a very functional potter," she said. "I love making pots. It makes my day when I hear someone say that as they use my cereal bowls each morning, they think of me."

All of Nancy Bodmer's pottery is made for use in the oven, microwave oven and dishwasher.

Nancy's business has grown steadily over the last fifteen years. "About 50 percent of it is special orders. People come to me, now," she said. Among the offerings are special occasion earthenware, and decorative pottery plates which are personalized for weddings, anniversaries, births, or other special events. Family tree plates are popular also.

"I use four different clays, which is sort of suicidal," said the potter. The problems lie in different firing temperatures, and "you don't want to contaminate one clay with the other."

Despite the extra considerations, Nancy said the outcome makes the challenge of using a variety of clays worthwhile. "I enjoy variety and I like the different effects."

Nancy explained that there are as many as 40 different clays from which a potter can choose each differing in color, purity, firing temperature, and content. Among the clays that Nancy uses are pure white porcelain clay, two types of stoneware clay, and a red earthenware clay.

Each type of clay is best suited for select items, and yields a particular color. The porcelain clay

fires to a beautiful creamy white color, well-suited for special dishes, jewelry, and colanders. The earthenware gradually progresses to a deep reddish brown color, from its original peachy tone before the final firing. The clays vary in firing temperatures from 1,900 to 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit.

The special occasion plates that Nancy creates often bear dates of birth or marriage on the front. But, the reverse of the plates is special, as well. "I almost always put something personal about the weather or flowers that are in bloom on the day that I make a plate," said Nancy. For example, plates may be inscribed with the notation of a holiday - "First Day of Spring," or "sometimes people give me Bible sayings to use." On the back of one plate in the inven-



Nancy Bodmer displays a commemorative plate which bears her drawing of the Buckeystown Post Office, which stands behind her.



Bodmer's pottery is located at the crossroads in Buckeystown, Maryland. Nancy's studio was once the second largest general store in Frederick County. Here she stands in the doorway of the shop.

tory of special orders Nancy inscribed the following. "Hand-made by Nancy Bodmer in Maryland on a lovely spring day in June, 1991."

The colors of Nancy Bodmer's pottery are deep and rich. She once experimented with creating her own pigments, but now relies on paints which yield colors which remain true through a firing, from the first plate to the 50th plate.

"I love color," said Nancy. The porcelain clay pieces are often decorated with pastel colors, whereas the earthenware is decorated with bold earth tones. Nancy decorates her creations with her own hand painted designs, with the exception of a sheep motif decal drawn by fellow artist Marilu Tousignaut.

Just a few steps from the shop, Nancy Bodmer shares a beautiful 1780 stone house with husband, Ed, and 13-year-old daughter, Serrin Clay.

"Serrin has made pots since she was four years old," explained Nancy. "But, she's like her father - she doesn't want to get her hands dirty."

Their home in the heart of the historic district of Buckeystown, was constructed from stone which was quarried from the Monocacy River. "It had lots of iron. It was a rare vein of stone," explained Nancy. The iron content accounts for the reddish color of the stones.

Nancy has taken a great interest in the history of Buckeystown,

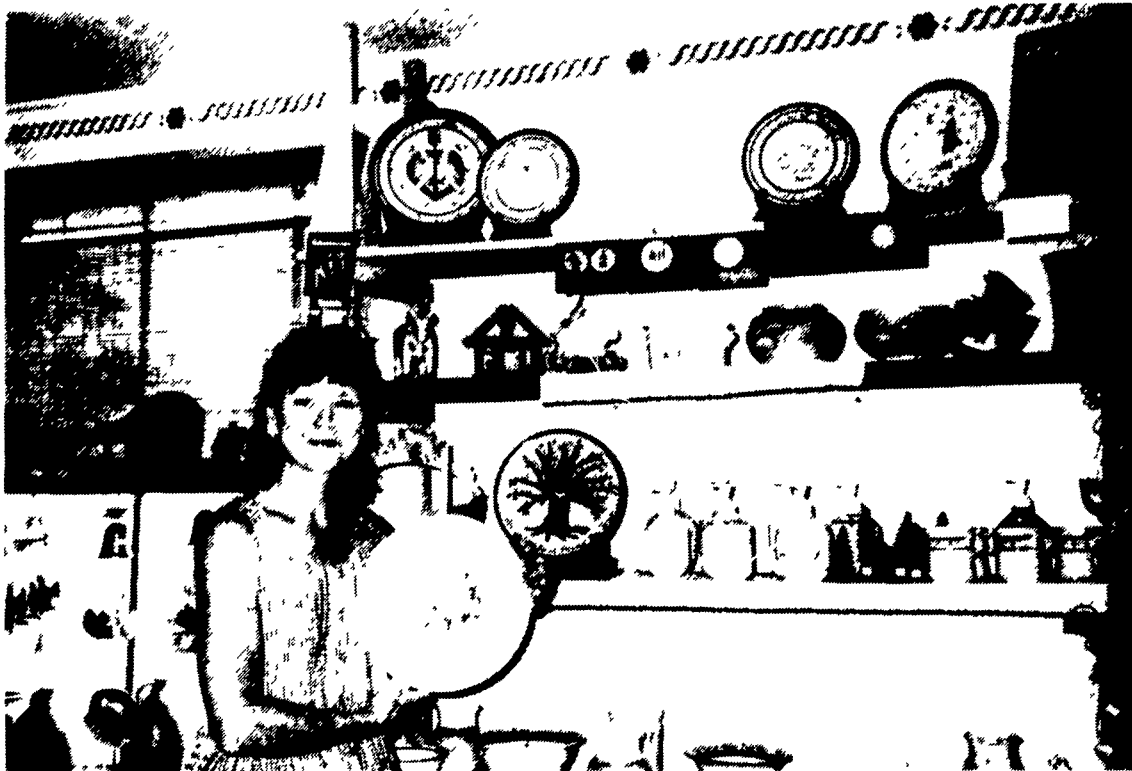
and has authored a book on the subject titled, *The Past Revisited; Buckeystown and Historical Sites*. She has also written two other books about area historical sites.

When the Bodmers planned to expand the studio, they dug footers for a new addition. "We hit Buckeystown clay which is yellow and fires to a brick red. I made little pinch pots," Nancy said that she has dug clay from nearby brickyards, but it proved to be uneconomical.

"You need machinery to strain it to get out the stones, sticks and shale."

As for her studio's foundation being located on the clay which she has come to love, she said, "I'm sitting on top of an unmade pot!" Nancy said she "will always make pots. I can see myself at 80 years making pots - that's my reason for getting up."

Special occasion plates and earthenware can be ordered from Bodmer's Pottery, Box 163, Buckeystown, Maryland 21717. (301) 662-0777.



The pottery of Nancy Bodmer takes many forms. It's unusual, functional, and in demand.

Homestead Notes