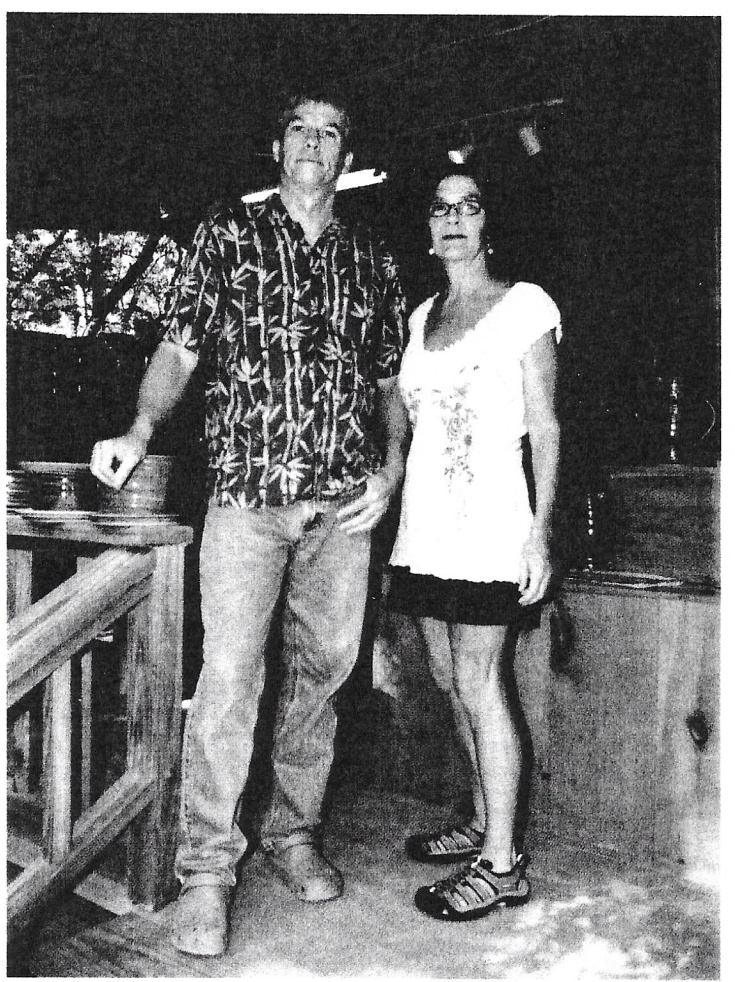


arts &  
culture

# for the joy of learning, creating and doing

*For 3 decades Emmett Collier has been turning clay into beautiful pieces of stoneware, and learning a thing or two along the way.*

BY GREG WAXBERG  
PHOTOS BY DAPHNE NABORS



**E**MMETT COLLIER can walk to work in less than a minute. A small stretch of grass separates his pottery studio, home-made kilns, display tables and retail store from the house where he lives with his wife, Jani, also an artist.

The 56-year-old Mississippi native found his passion at the University of Mississippi while majoring in English and Philosophy. He took pottery as an elective and was amazed by the creative possibilities.

"The 'doing' is the fun of pottery. At the end of the day, it's very gratifying to look back and see the things you made. You're always making breakthroughs and jumping to the next thing," he says.

He does not work on the wheel every day, but averages two weeks every month. No matter what he's doing, he has goals. "I'm competing with myself. I try to throw on the wheel better than I did the month before; I try to glaze better than I did before, and I try to fire the kiln better than I did before. I have better visions of where I'm going next. This whole pottery thing has been more exploration and checking out techniques and different styles and types of pottery than anything else. We have really gone through the spectrum here," he says, mentioning porcelain among the styles of pottery he's done.

Currently, most of his output is stoneware – hence his company name, "Brandon Stoneware" – because of its practicality. Many of his pieces are on display in the store adjacent to the studio, a store that solved the problem of traveling to craft fairs around the country. He and his wife enjoyed the fairs, but time for making pottery was lost.

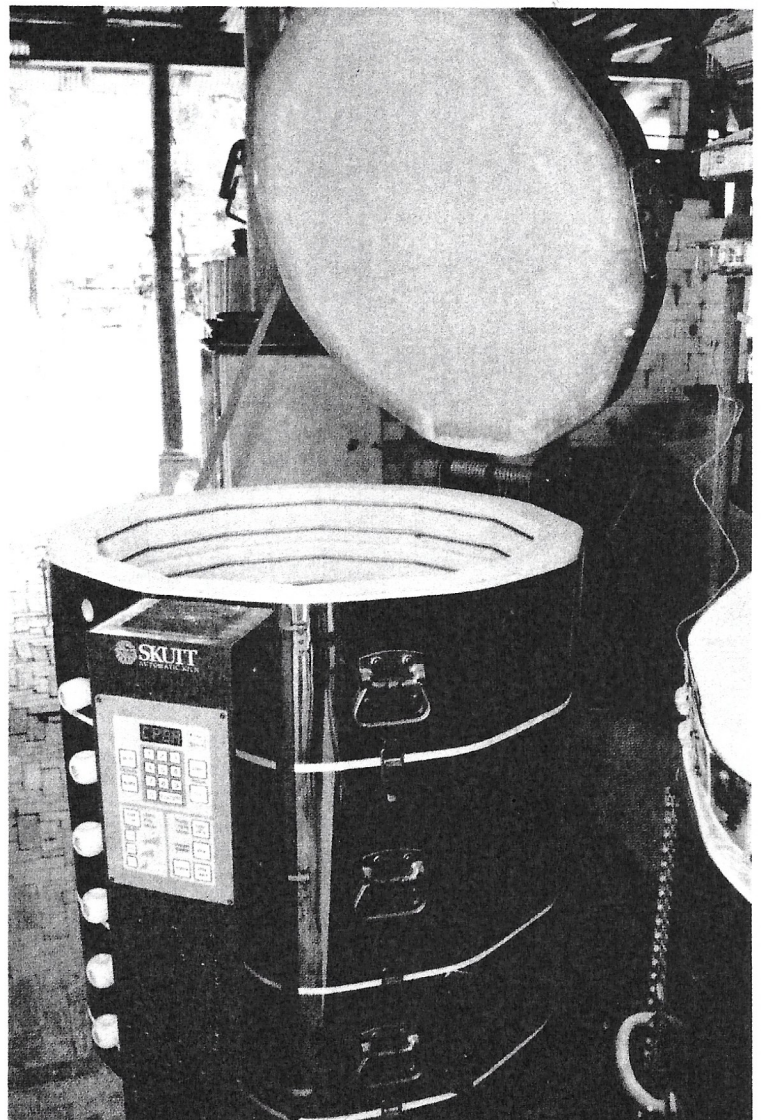
He also makes time for the wheel by not spending time digging clay, because he now gets clay from a Missouri mine. Every four or five years, a shipment arrives, and a machine produces three-inch diameter tubes from which he cuts segments.

"I make a huge mess right here," he says as he walks to the wheel. All of the clay is formed in the room and taken outside to dry.

Two of Collier's many clients are BankPlus and Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery. "His work is timeless and not too trendy for corporate settings," says Jocelyn Barnette, an interior designer for Robert Parker Adams Architects, whom BankPlus hires to design their buildings. "His pottery is extremely versatile and affordable, and Emmett is so easy to work with."

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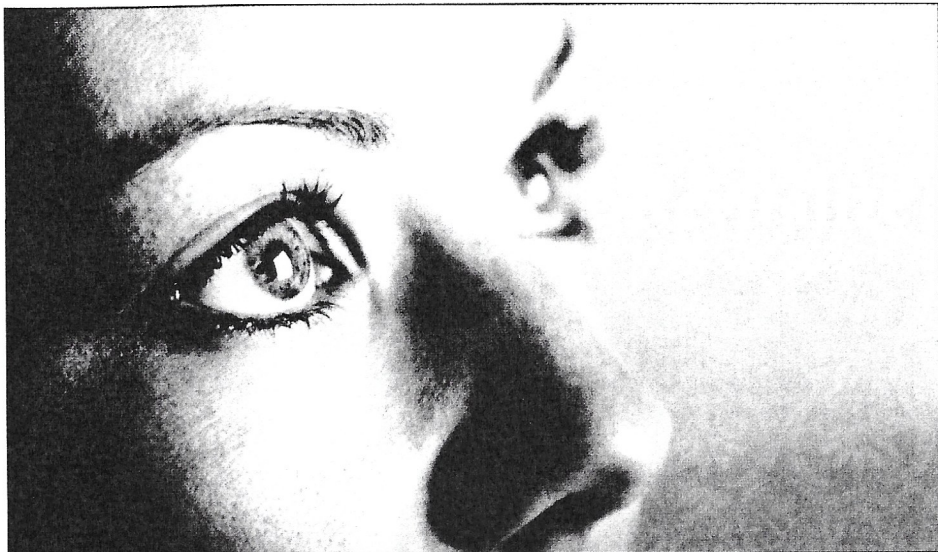


He makes sinks, plates, bowls and platters for Ferguson, a collaboration that started when a member of the company drove by his shop and was impressed by the different sizes of vases and distinctive colors. "He has so many different options, his prices are really great and he's just a wonderful man," says Dodi Cooper, a showroom consultant, also emphasizing his ability to match the colors that customers want.

At one time, Collier's employees included Jason Guynes, whose high school art class had toured the shop. Guynes spent six summers as an assistant and is now the Chair of the Department of Visual Arts at the University of South Alabama.

"Emmett is a tremendous crafts-person. Plenty of potters simply make pots, and it's very mechanical. Emmett goes beyond that. When I got out of grad school and decided I wanted to teach, having the versatility not only to teach painting but also be extremely competent in ceramics was a real plus," he says.

Collier has been working for three decades and considers himself lucky. "I just like making pottery, and I knew I was going to do it, no matter where it led."

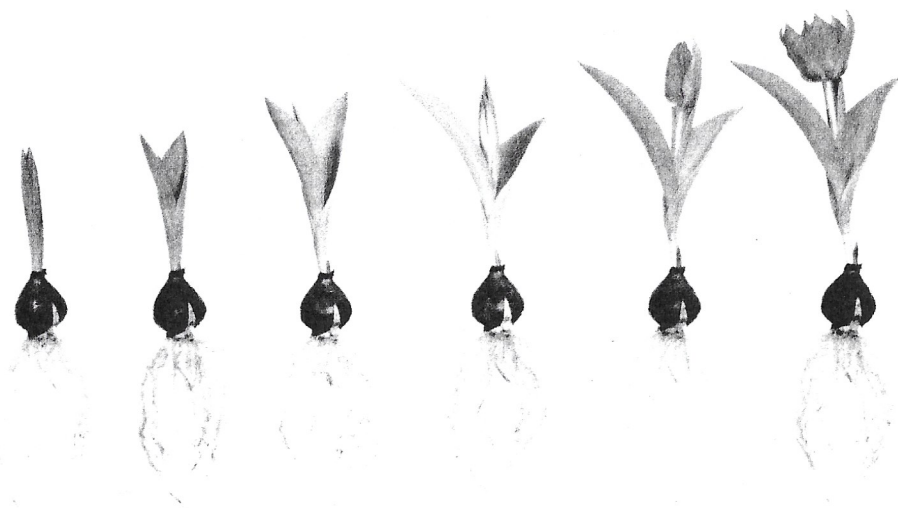


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