





POTTERY AND POTTERING *in Cornwall*

Susie Moss goes to Falmouth to try a 'Potter and Explore' weekend run by Taz Smith of The Small Shed Pottery

Stay Centred, Breath, Take your time.' Life coaching? Yoga lessons? No pottery classes, and a mantra often repeated by Taz Smith as she guided us through the art of throwing a pot. So much about pottery is good advice for life, Taz points out, something she found when she first moved to Falmouth and began classes with her mentor Adrian Brough. 'He had no idea how poignant and life changing his pottery classes were for me; I realised I was "off-centre" and needed to change my life.' She leapt into the unknown, moving to Falmouth in 2013, and two years later quit her high pressured job to take pottery more seriously. Her hobby has become her passion and her new business. She converted the shed at the end of the garden into a tiny pottery studio and The Small Shed Pottery was born.

FRIDAY 8PM HARBOUR LIGHTS

Harbour lights twinkle in the dark waters and the air smells excitingly different to where I've come from. I can't wait to see this view in the morning and to explore the watery landscape that stretches out in inky mystery. For now I'm happy to flop into my comfy bed. I've settled in at



ABOVE Susie Moss spent a weekend exploring one part of southern Cornwall while learning some pottery skills

The Small Shed Pottery, also a B&B and home to Taz, her partner Craig and two much-loved Vizla dogs Ruby and Dooly. Over some good wine – Taz previously worked in the wine industry – we discuss plans for the weekend when our days will be split between pottery lessons and exploring the coast.

SATURDAY 9AM LEISURELY MORNING

The blackout blinds in the room are amazingly effective and only a very persistent seagull wakes me from my delicious lie-in. It's a joy to raise the blinds to the view; terraces of Falmouth homes line up to watch boats drift around the estuary. At breakfast we plan our walk options, of which there are many. Having no car is not a problem here as Taz offers her guests transport as part of the weekend stay.

10.30AM COASTAL WALKING

A short stroll from the house brings us to the jetty, from where the Flushing Ferry crosses every hour. We join locals loading up shopping into the small tug with benches for passengers. Beginning our walk at Flushing, we pass some grand 18th-century houses. The name Flushing comes from Flushing in Holland, as Dutch engineers

and sea captains drawn to Falmouth built their homes here. An appropriate pottery theme emerges as we walk down 'Clay Lane' and onto 'Kiln Beach', then across fields to the small sailing port of Mylor. We lunch at the easygoing and dog-friendly Mylor Café, before our return walk through the bright sunshine. ➡➡➡

ASK *the* PRO



Taz learnt on a kick wheel, and like many potters, prefers it over electric,

for both tradition and aesthetics. The kick wheel was designed by renowned potter Bernard Leach, who established a pottery in St Ives in the 1920s and has a school of pottery continuing his experimentation and learning. Taz is passionate about being close to the sea, and has spent a lot of time on the waves. It was after completing two legs of the Clipper Round the World sailing challenge that she decided she needed to keep the sea close and so moved to Falmouth.



2.30PM POTTERY DEMO

The shed at the top of the garden is pretty, with fairy lights and shelves full of pottery. Taz is developing her own 'Shoreline' range that will be on sale and in use at the B&B. We begin with a demonstration from Taz on the kick wheel; showing us how to centre a piece of clay and how to form a cylinder shape, all the while kicking rhythmically on the pedal that powers the wheel. I find it utterly mesmerising. When it's my turn I discover it takes considerable exertion to get the wheel cranked up to speed. I feel like a crazed tailor on my machine, but instead of cloth flying I have a lump of slippery clay to contend with. It's great fun and I enjoy the challenge. Once centred (both the clay and me, I think) I can slow the wheel down and concentrate on

ABOVE, FROM LEFT Taking in the views on a walk to Mylor; a shape emerges; Taz instructs Susie; The Small Shed Pottery; some of Susie's work with oxides but before firing; the estuary view from The Small Pottery Shed BELOW Food at The Ope in Falmouth is pretty as a picture as well as delicious

keeping a steady pace while first making a hole in the lump, then lifting the edges. Miraculously a shape, a pot of sorts, emerges. It's a bit like trying to do that thing when you pat your head with one hand and do circular motions on your tummy with the other, so I'm pretty chuffed I get a pot-like result at all. Taz is a calm and encouraging tutor and keeps pottery classes to a maximum of two so she can pay close attention.

7PM GREAT PUB GRUB

Changing from our clay-splattered jeans we head to The Royal Standard. It's a lovely pub, with a relaxed vibe. My Spanish stew with local fish and mussels is very tasty and we share tales of travel and adventures at sea. The cliché of all that sea air, and perhaps the wine and warm fires, beckon me to a deep sleep.

SUNDAY 8.45AM ON THE WATER

Not much beats messing about on boats, and Taz and Craig pick us up in their boat *Little Minx* to pootle around the Fal. On calm waters we see St Anthony's Lighthouse and Pendennis Castle protecting the river-mouth to the open sea and

we turn up river, with Craig pointing out favourite barbecue beaches and swim spots. We wave at cheerful swimmers enjoying a bracing dip nearby. The gig rowers are out for practice and heave past at impressive speed. Heading north we find traditional sailed oystercatchers. Wild oysters can only be harvested this way; on sail, and these guys are working hard at it on this crisp morning. We pass Trelissick, a National Trust house with gorgeous gardens rolling to the sea, then, rounding a bend, we are met with an unlikely vision – a huge ship. This behemoth of the industrial sea world comes as quite a shock after quaint houses and fishing boats. The Fal Estuary is the third deepest in the world and ships come here to rest or renovate.

11AM PANDORA'S INN

We turn with the tide and head up another creek to Restronguet, to a magical place dating from the 13th century, for coffee, a must-see stop when in this corner of the world. I'd first seen The Pandora Inn when I was on a 'competent crew' sailing course many years ago, and today, despite having parts rebuilt after a fire in 2011, the





place still lives up to my memories. It's picturesque and cosy and best accessed from the water, the prettiest view of it is certainly from there. We enjoy coffee and warm up around the open fires while our hosts sort the boat and then return us to Falmouth by car.

12 NOON EXPLORING FALMOUTH

We wander the streets of Falmouth to look at shops and find somewhere to eat. Falmouth has an abundance of funky cafés, unusual gift shops, and retro clothing, encouraged I'm sure by the university and art college here. We opt for The Ope and are not disappointed. It's a perfectly formed tiny café, full of colour and gorgeous pottery, with dishes that arrive like vibrant abstracts on deep blue plates and taste as delicious as they look.

2PM BACK TO THE POTTERY

Returning to the shed it's time to learn how to 'turn' our pots at the 'leather hard' stage. This is the point in which, if you're clever, you can turn a clumsy thrown piece into an elegant shape by trimming off excess clay. To do this, the clay needs to be dry enough to hold its

shape and this usually involves leaving the pot to dry over a few days. Taz has a cunning trick to speed this process so students can learn this stage; we blow-dry our pots with a builder's heat torch! Once the pot is stiff enough Taz shows us how to use the trimming tools while the pot is turning on the wheel (more vigorous pedalling involved!) Taz also explains the glazing process and the use of oxides and slips. She shows us examples of the glazes she has and we choose how we'd like our creations to be. This final process is not something we can do but something Taz offers to do for her students, as first the pieces need to be bisque fired, then cooled, before glazing and firing again. To complete the whole process involves a week-long pottery class, which is on offer, but not possible in a weekend. Instead we can return home knowing our completed 'masterpieces' will be sent by post.

As the light fades from the garden we know it's time to wash the clay from our hands and say farewell to Falmouth. We've had a full and varied weekend and leave with a new understanding of pottery and an appetite to do more.

NEED to KNOW

HOW TO GET THERE
Getting to Falmouth is easy by train and Taz offers a pick-up from Truro station. Falmouth is located on the mouth of the river Fal in southern Cornwall, so there are many different creeks to explore as well as coastline.

WHAT TO BRING
Bring comfortable old clothes that you don't mind getting messy (though aprons are provided) and non-slip shoes for the wheel, plus clothes for all weather for when you go out walking or boating.

MORE INFORMATION
Full details of the possible activity options, an outline itinerary and costs for a weekend with at The Small Shed Pottery are on smallshedpottery.co.uk or email thesmallshedpottery@gmail.com for details.

