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A Potter
writes about
his work

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I have been potting for about thirty-five years.

I think of my ceramics as primarily sculptural, even though many shapes develop around a basic pot form. From the raw material of clay I find I am instinctively creating forms and qualities found in the world about us. Not replicas of any specific object but forms embodied — as I hope — with the character and power of some half-remembered image which I have discovered earlier.

All shapes are made by hand — never on the wheel now. They have two rôles — first sculptural and then as a surface for images. Sometimes these are illusionistic, suggesting depth; for instance a distant horizon has a particular interest for me.

The technique I use for decoration is "agate" — that is the lamination of different toned clays. This produces rich and striking design possibilities reminiscent of those found in Nature.

The tactile side of my work is very important to me and glaze has on the whole no place in this. I would like to think of my work as possessing the qualities of wood, stone or rock. To this end sand is mixed with the clay body to give grit and



Composite pot 9 1/2" Laminated slab structure

edge to the touch and the firing is taken to stoneware temperature to give a rock-like hardness. 147

As regards colour—I have been happy to keep within a narrow band of warm ochres and browns with the occasional heightening of blue and white. Brighter colours, I feel, would distract from tonal relationships and texture.

I'm an outdoor person and am constantly taking in stimuli from my environment. I live by the sea, which, with its accompanying sky and coastline, its boats, marine defences and structures, is an endless source of interest and delight, not excluding the strange and exciting forms to be found in man-made debris thrown up on the beach. Inland we have an abundance of woods and hedgerows and until recently, around my home, some mighty specimens of beech tree. Whenever possible I visit the North where the rocks, mountains and wilderness have always had a special appeal to me. These images, collected in my mind and subconscious over the years and continually replenished, give me the resource I need.

In recent years I have begun to take an interest in the working process itself. I am aware now when I begin a new phase or sequence of work that I am pitching into the unknown. There is a precariousness which is both daunting and challenging. From experience I have learned to trust my instinct.

Alongside the risk of this situation is, I realise, a searching for order. Not a regular, predictable order but that complex variation which is found everywhere in the natural world; for example—the way debris is scattered on a beach after the tide has receded. I am intrigued by the apparently coherent relationship which seems to exist between objects in this ostensibly chaotic situation. Amidst this random array there appears to be an underlying rightness in the way stone lies next to stone and space, pattern and objects relate. It is constantly my objective to achieve just such a natural whole from a complex and varied situation—a sort of order out of chaos.

And this is where drawing comes in. I now know that studying form and structure is an essential base from which my ideas develop so whenever I'm able I draw and paint. Drawing



small shallow dish 12"

148 for me triggers perception and spatial awareness. It is a fundamental element in the whole process of making and rounds off for me a wonderful world of visual experience.

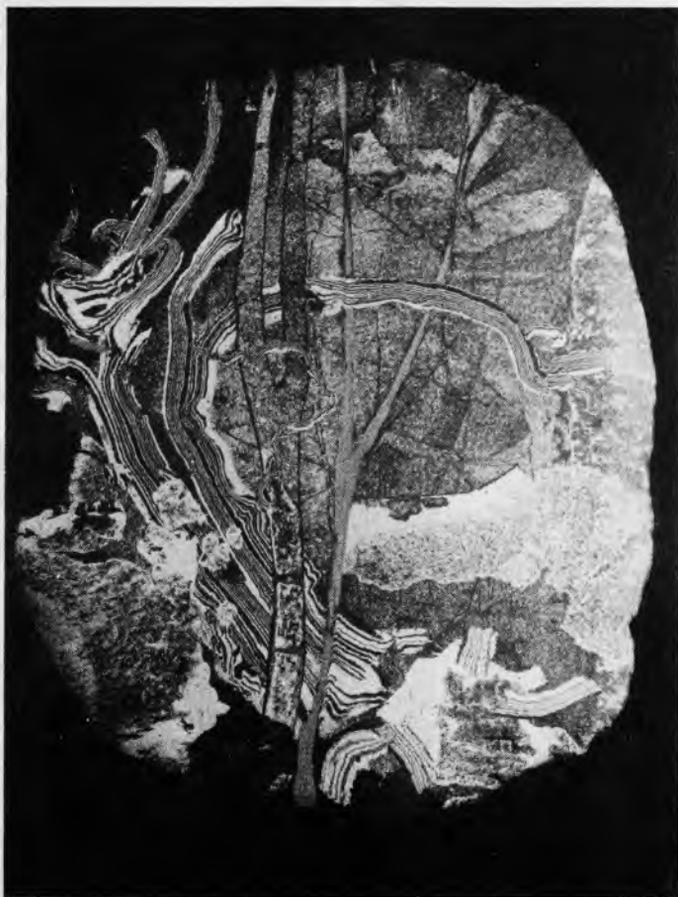
What attracts me to pottery is its breadth — for not only does it concern pot making but it also encompasses sculpture, drawing, paint and decoration. I suppose I am obsessive about it. A favourable response from people out there is good to have — but if there were none I would still pot and paint.

Member of the Craftsmen Potters Association of Great Britain and the Society of Designer Craftsmen.

Michael's work can be seen at CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS The Craftsman-Potter's Shop and Gallery, William Blake House, 7 Marshall Street, London W1V 1FD (This is near the Regent Street Liberty's shop).

Michael's can also be viewed by appointment. Please ring 0304 822624.

This is the second of a series in which local creative artists write about their work.



Small wall plaque
inlaid design 13"