John Glick

Studio Management *(Part Two)*

STUDIO LAYOUT

The personality of the potter, ease of movement and the resulting traffic pattern are key factors in thinking about studio configuration.

When I first started, I had a 30 by 33 foot building with a very low ceiling. The walls were six feet high, and at the peak there was nine feet. I had very little choice about where to put the kilns. They had to go in the center of the building, towards one end, underneath the highest section of the roof so that there would be a safe space between the hot kiln and the roof structure.

Our traffic pattern in the early few years of the studio was based on the location of that kiln and storage of ware around it, and all movements were based on the kiln's being right in the midst of studio activity. Well, the building additions that we did later were designed to improve the space relationships in the studio: to increase the safety factor by eliminating that hot, smelly object from the middle of the room, and improve the flow of pots and materials throughout the studio, as well as eliminating some of the boondoggles of storage and raw material access.

What we have now is a main work area with 1,000 square feet for all the throwing, glazing, ware cart storage, clay storage, small woodworking shop, a small office space, plus the 350 square foot addition for the kiln building and pug mill room, located in a separate area through a door. It is adequate for one potter and one apprentice under most normal conditions. We have dual-use areas in the main working space. The throwing area is used for raw ware during that part of the cycle, and during the glazing cycle the same benches are used for holding glaze buckets which are stored away during the clay working cycle.

I think if I were to build from scratch and design a building for this specific purpose, I would start with raw material receiving and storage, make sure that I have access to a solid road so that I could back trucks to unload without having them sink into the mud, and have the storage area adjacent to the clay mixing area for minimum moving of heavy sacks of raw materials. And I would also try to store the mixed clay in that vicinity, then move it directly to the wheel area so that movement of wet clay to the wheel would be minimized. Then, considering access to the kiln area, I would locate the potter's wheels and other support facilities around these major primary functions and try to eliminate duplication of effort.

The primary consideration, I think, is to isolate the kiln for reasons of noise (especially if you have blower burners) and for dangerous fumes that are emitted during firing. I prefer to have the kiln in a heated second room, so it can be easily loaded in wintertime without any discomfort, or without fear of slightly damp raw ware developing freezing cracks. I think the overall aspect of analyzing and organizing a studio is to see what your personal movements are by drawing a model floor plan on paper, and trying to make it easy to go where you need to be most often, locating the sink for example right next to the wheel and not 40 feet away. It's mostly learning to develop a sense of the grace of movement within those spaces you define for yourself, and to eliminate or change the things that get in your way. The goal should be to become completely unconscious of moving and working in your studio. Just learn to remove obstacles that aren't necessary so that you have peace of mind when you're working.

WORK CYCLE

The kiln size is one of the main points in evolving a work cycle. It's a fixed size and you can use it to determine the evolution of your work. In a sense, you design your time to yield enough ware for a bisque firing (assuming you're doing a two-fire system). I count the loaded ware carts for a bisque load. In my case it's five ware carts just stuffed full of pots — double and triple high, large things filled with smaller pots, and so on.

The question may come up, "Why do you need a specific approach to figuring out a work cycle?" Well, I feel it gives you a sense of freedom within some logical boundaries. It lets you predict with some accuracy a firing schedule. The times of the month that you'll be able to fire helps you anticipate scheduling problems, an exhibition or a sale that may be coming up, for example. It makes life a little more predictable if you know how long it will take to produce a kiln load.

My approach is to list all the things that I want to make during a given time period. For me, it turns out to be approximately two and a half to three weeks of throwing and hand construction for a bisque firing. Here's a list of objects that might be considered in one cycle: Bowls-40; plates-60 (thrown type); plates-18 (slab type); jars with lids-36; pitchers-24; kitchen shakers-30; planters-18; teapots-12; casseroles-18; wine-bottles-24; hypothetical Jones dinner set-12 place settings, with four parts in each place-setting; miscellaneous slab pots-50 to 60. This would be looked on as a general goal for that work cycle, but all the quantities will vary when the actual work is begun. There's no need to be exact. It's just a rough estimate. In the end this will usually yield between 400 and 500 pieces of work, depending on the comfort and speed of the cycle.

Photo — Bob Vigiletti

Kiln furniture can be moved en masse using a sturdy steel and plywood cart.

Now, on Day One of a work cycle, assuming a fresh start with an empty studio, I extract a portion of several of those listed areas in which to start throwing. For example, small two pound plates-18; dinnerware plates for the Jones set-16; allow some extras for kiln failures. Then for a change of pace, 6 teapot bodies and the related parts, and finally, 12 medium planters. This is generally what would be done in one day. Then cover lightly overnight with plastic to partially dry some of the things so that the next day they're not too wet.

I use the highest energy time (for me that's early morning to midday) for throwing, so consequently do the Jones dinner set salad plates-16. Now for a change of pace: miscellaneous bowls thrown off-the-hump-20. Then I trim all the plates from the previous day, add elaborate feet to the planter bodies now drying, and assemble the six teapots. And so on for a six-day week.

A day-to-day breakdown of my time might be this: I usually arise at 6:00 a.m. and come immediately to work for an hour and a half. At 7:30 I go in and awake the family, give my two children breakfast, my wife coffee in bed, and then usually eat breakfast myself. I practice the guitar for half an hour and then finally go back to work around 8:30, and work through until 12:30, when I take a mid-day break. I may practice guitar again after lunch and then return to work at 1:30. I work through without a break until 6 p.m., when we have family dinner. If I get a break in the afternoon, it may be for some miscellaneous activity: taking care of some special visitor, or even practicing the guitar again if I've missed one of my earlier sessions of practice. After dinner, if necessary, I will return to work for one or two hours, though I'm not a night person so I don't work into the night. In this way two or three weeks progress.

One consideration on the work cycle: at times it is absolutely essential to shorten the cycle because of some deadline or other. I then throw the largest and most complex things in the first few days of the cycle, because they demand slow drying. These pots are allowed to dry slowly under plastic during the rest of the cycle. Then I go ahead with smaller and more easily dried things as work progresses. It is also possible to eliminate the slow-drying items and time-consuming things if they're not crucial: for example, tea pots which for me take a great deal of time to construct and must be slow-dried to allow parts to accommodate each other. Concentrate on medium-to-large open forms, such as planters and large bowls which, of course, can be filled with smaller items in the kiln. These can be thrown rapidly and dried with some speed, and they fill the kiln rapidly.

All my dinnerware pieces have been worked out over three or four years. I have a large chart that details clay weights and wet dimensions for throwing, so that I know exactly how much clay to select for each size of bowl or plate or mug. This saves a lot of guesswork and refiguring each time I sit down to work. I just glance at it next to the wheel or next to the wedging board and proceed accordingly. I have all other general purpose ware programmed, so if I want to make a four quart casserole, regardless of shape, I select so many pounds of clay, and so on. Even though the shapes may vary a lot from month to month, I still know that a basic weight of clay as indicated on the chart will give me a desired volume.

It is important to stress how little time in actual hours is spent on the throwing portion of the work cycle. When I list all those pots I don't mean to imply that it takes three and a half weeks of solid work to produce them. My days are broken up with unpredictable things: I'm called away from the studio for a little while, unexpected visitors come, family problems arise, I catch a cold — you name it. But somehow or other it all comes together in that length of time. I rarely can throw more than three or four hours in any ten hour day. Trimming, decorating and assembly of things are not what I consider in throwing time.

At the end of the clay-working period, when the last of the wares are dried, we wheel everything into the kiln room and prepare to load a bisque firing in the 100 cubic foot kiln. Every possible corner and crevice is jammed. Every big pot has two or three smaller ones in it nested medium and then small. I use grog between the pots that are stacked together, and a little bit on the shelf to allow for small movement during bisquit shrinkage.

Photo — Bob Vigilietti

Glazing related objects together. Afterwards tables are cleared of glaze materials and used to hold raw ware during early stages of cycle.

We start a very slow overnight warm-up period in the kiln so that even by morning, about eight hours later, we haven't gone beyond 212° F., or the boiling point of water, so we're not in danger of blowing up heavy pieces. During the actual firing day, I may be finishing more raw ware or mixing and preparing glazes that need replenishing, and converting a portion of the studio over to the glaze mode in anticipation of bisque coming out.

After a day of cooling, we unload, work out what will go in the first high fire (of course it will be less than what was in the bisque), and store the remaining bisque on several ware carts, covering them with plastic to keep the dust off them. Then we proceed to wax the feet, the lips and the lids. In this job Ruby helps. Then I immediately proceed to glaze the entire load over a three-and-a-half day period, without a break for any other kind of potting — just glazing, getting into the rhythm of the

Photo — Bob Vigilietti

Kiln shelves are conveniently stored 24" off the floor to eliminate bending over.

forms and becoming excited all over again by the potentials of decorative techniques started on some pieces, and making glaze combinations enhance what I have done. We need about four ware carts very closely packed with glazed ware, plus three or four large and medium pots to fill out a glaze firing.

I have 26 glazes arranged in two rows, kind of an aisle, where for easy movement, I just glide around and dip and pour. I have large catch-basins that I use if the glaze bucket itself isn't sufficient to catch overflow. (These are horse-feeding troughs made of strong rubber, available at horse and riding equipment stores.) The glazes are eight basic formulae, most of which I have developed, carried out in a variety of colors. I have two ash formulae carried out in seven variations; four to six matte glazes based on two formulae; and about 12 or 14 celadon glazes carried out from three formulae into that many color variations.

At the end of the glaze cycle, we move all the ware back into the kiln room on the ware carts. It takes us about six hours to place all glazed ware into the kiln. During the glaze session we have marked pots that have heat-sensitive glazes with paper slips: blue, tan and red for cool, medium and hot zones. These are sticking out of pots, so we know where to place them. By the time you've glazed 300 - 350 pieces it's difficult to tell at a glance which glaze is which — especially when many pots have 3 - 4 glazes on them.

As soon as the kiln is loaded, we brick the door up and start the high fire. It's usually late in the afternoon by then. I give it a fairly slow start and then boost the temperature, until by late evening I'm at 1000° F. It's turned up once more before I go to bed. Then I get up several times during the night and boost it again, till by mid-morning it's ready for body reduction at 1850° F.

Our overall cycle is 30 hours, depending on the density of the load. The kiln will be running most of that second day on into the late evening. I never stray too far from quite heavy reduction after 1850°. This seems to be required for my kiln to achieve a good penetrating reduction. I like the effect I get, especially on glazes. We have one and a half days of cooling for this kiln — roughly 30 to 36 hours. On Cooling Day I may be cleaning up the studio or storing glaze buckets and washing the place up, doing repairs, running errands, even relaxing a bit, believe it or not!

The next day is Unloading Day, the day to cheer or cry or a little of both. We sort the ware out, make notes on any glaze tests, and comment on any new results in glaze combinations that may be useful in the future. We begin to move ware up to the showroom in wicker baskets, setting aside potential exhibit pieces that may have shown up in the general run (this may be as many as 40 or as few as one or two). The next day, after unloading, we finish dispersing pots and cleaning up the kiln room, organize things back into a semblance of order, and begin thinking out the next work cycle. By now we're well into the fourth week. Many ideas and fresh thoughts have occurred, and we are ready to start the entire process over again.

APPRENTICESHIPS

One of the major facts of economic survival for a potter today is the need for some kind of studio help. The apprentice and the employee are two distinctly different types, each with a potential contribution to the studio. Any such person in a studio has a tremendous impact on the potter's approach in terms of time and peace of mind. In nine years I've had seven people working with me or for me: two female and five male. All have fulfilled some quite different need at different stages of my own development in clay.

Jan Sadowski came as a high school student, very advanced in potting, with a lot of personal ambition. He worked with me after school and on weekends. My intent with Jan was to teach him studio throwing so that I could have a certain amount of production from his output, along the lines of the Leach pottery in England.

In two or three months he was able to reproduce my more simple shapes with excellent results, and I began to pay him for piecework. In addition to this he was a general studio helper in the kiln loading, clay mixing, etc., that we did together. When he worked he was paid $1.50 an hour. This relationship progressed through his junior college for several years until his time was taken up elsewhere. By then he just worked weekends and vacations, and was extremely prolific, earning up to $40 on a weekend of throwing. He threw up to 15-pound shapes very well and started many forms that I would later uncover and coil and throw to extend the shapes.

In addition to these studio activities, he helped sell at art fairs and took part in all related craft activities. He also visited other studios to increase his total comprehension of the craft picture. One of the negative aspects of that relationship was that by having throwing as a dominant goal, his own personal growth was inhibited by the necessity to do my things, with almost no spare time for his own interests. He had an unusually long stay, and I think what held us together was mutual respect and a need being fulfilled at both ends.

After his stay here, I took almost a year's break without an apprentice and I learned some rather interesting things. One was that I could make the same amount of pottery by myself. The choice of the ware size seemed to be upgraded; there weren't so many small objects. But my output that year was identical, so that the time I was spending with him on his work disappeared and I made more pots. During that year away from an apprenticeship, Ruby filled in wherever possible with the more tedious jobs, and this was a help, of course.

In 1972 a most unusual type of apprentice arrangement evolved. This was with Rostie Eisemont, a graphics designer from New York. He proposed to give up his job there and bring his family to Michigan and learn pottery for approximately a year. And it came to pass that we applied for, and won, a Tiffany grant. The grant specified that the $4,000 be divided: $1,000 to me and $3,000 to the apprentice. We determined that we would use this as a wage for him, to be paid monthly for living expenses.

This was a different approach. In many ways he was an independent potter learning here in my studio. He fired ware here, and although he was not tempted to establish a marketing procedure until towards the end, he was functioning in many ways as a potter would in his own studio. We mixed clay together, loaded kiln and did general jobs that needed to be done. But he was in a unique position: rather than spending his time in labor for my needs, he spent most of it making his own pots. Of course, his work was constantly analyzed in joint critique sessions, and we did not keep all that he made.

I would like to emphasize some aspects of how I react with the apprentice in the studio. I never have believed in turning over all the traditional so-called dirty jobs to an apprentice. I prefer to be involved with clay mixing and kiln loading. I want to know what's going on, and in almost every case it's a mutual job. With Rostie there was a tremendous influence on my thinking due to a second productive personality in the shop. It's frankly quite difficult to balance and modify my approach to accommodate two people in a kind of competition for kiln and studio space. Having accepted, however, the basic premise of another person in the studio, there is the responsibility to give him the experience best capable of advancing his career.

Beth Campbell has been working for me over three years. She's not a potter. Her only involvement is constructing slab-built pieces. I did all her preliminary training, primarily teaching her to assemble various slab forms. She works in her own home and

Photo — Bob Vigiletti

Ware carts are stored where glazing takes place; then filled one at a time with ware and moved to the kiln, with empty one being returned.

I've set up a small facility in her basement with work-benches. We prepare clay here in the studio, slice it into required thicknesses, wrap it in plastic and label each bundle as to which kind of form it will be used for. I drive these to her home, deliver the raw material and pick up some finished pieces that were done the previous week or ten days.

She follows a kind of work guide I have prepared for each pot. It describes which steps should be performed first, how dry to allow the clay to become, and so on. Then using metal templates as size and shape guides, she cuts out the various parts required in groups: all the sides, bottoms, etc. Using the assembly techniques, plus some wooden framework and wooden profiles I've made, she bends and assembles the various parts together, coming up with the basic forms. She then wraps them up and sets them aside until I come to pick them up and bring more clay. Working this way on a piecework basis, she earns perhaps between $4-$5 an hour. We go through this process about two times a month.

Using the resources of a second person extends the time in which I can successfully interact with a particular form. Even so, these become very limited editions. In most cases a maximum of maybe 100 to 150 over the course of two or three years, less if the form ceases to stimulate me.

I think the real importance of this relationship is its physical absence from my shop. These activities are out of sight in another location. As designer I feel the responsibility to put a great deal of time into the preliminary designs, before I would ever dream of finalizing them for my helper. After Beth is done with the basic forms I spend considerable additional time on them, adding thrown parts, decorating, etc. This is to insure the successful completion of the feeling I started out with.

In a final view of apprentices as assistants, I think they can be a powerful help and influence. But I cannot deny the large impact they have both in terms of my time which they consume and in the emotional impact involved. Their problems become your problems, and this is a drain. *But if you're willing to accept the benefits you should be willing to accept the disadvantages too.*

I look on all this as a worthwhile aspect of my role as craftsman: occasionally to be the catalyst in some person's beginning, and to let them see in depth what's going on, acting as a focal point for later growth on their own. I look on apprenticeships as a responsibility a craftsman has towards the larger craft world. These opportunities are generally not available in any school situation. I think all craftsmen in every field should seriously consider whether they could do this occasionally, perhaps not as a steady diet, but as the opportunity comes to do the job well. To experience the truth of the studio artist's situation, rather than going on hearsay and vague generalities that filter out of dry lectures at school, is a living kind of learning.

SALES CONCEPTS — THE CRAFTSMAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PUBLIC

The craftsman has to take the lead in directing his selling and distribution. *Don't slavishly follow the dictates of the marketplace.* One has to be sensitive to outside influences, but not strictly follow commercial pressures. Otherwise personality and inventiveness take a back seat. To get this creative freedom of movement, I feel one must use the direct-sale as a basic approach.

Our direct-sales approach started in our first rented studio. We sent out announcement cards after we were properly set up, saying we were back from the Army and in business. Our showroom was in a separate room in the studio, and sales started off slowly after those cards were mailed. But they doubled monthly for six months before assuming a modest rate of climb.

People came and looked and bought and told their friends. It's an amazing process, and an excellent way to reach people. Having the showroom in the studio was a good education for me. The feedback — both negative and positive — was very instructive. At the same time I began to sell in several galleries in Detroit on a one-third commission consignment, and also became involved in local art fairs, building more business through contacts that eventually followed me back to the studio.

The common factor in most of these involvements was that I got full dollar return on the sale, and this means greater flexibility. I had a chance to observe on a first-hand basis how my newer ideas were received. I developed the attitude that whatever I was going to do would be the freshest and most challenging and best I could offer.

I have learned it is not necessary to do pot-boilers or rent-paying pots, pieces with low sales resistance factors. Perhaps in the very beginning this might be feasible, but after that it becomes an excuse for not getting deeply involved. In the end people will respond to your best efforts far more consistently than to your quickie notions. Life is far too short to waste time on knock-out items.

One refinement of the direct-sale approach is the Sale with a capital S. We've had two: one just before leaving the rented studio as a prelude to plunging into the conversion of our newly acquired property in 1965; the second in 1969 to help finance the addition of the kiln room and large kiln. We feel, however, that it does little good to overdo these events, unless it's your only major sales event of the year. I feel people get a bit weary of a yearly Sale, and thus it loses its impact as an interesting phenomenon.

Our present showroom is located in a converted one-and-a-half story garage building near our farm house, about 80 feet from the studio. The bottom floor is divided almost in half. The showroom area is 10 by 19 feet, paneled in rough cedar, with a dark burnt red brick floor. It's large enough to hold 70 to 80 pots, and has a small seconds shelf in one corner. The room is separated from the other half of the bottom floor area, which is my wife's studio and a showroom backup supply storage facility.

There is a wall running lengthwise with a door and sales window. All sales are carried on through that window. We're open Tuesday through Friday 12:30 to 5:30 P.M., Saturday 10 to 5. That's about 27 hours a week. Of course there is considerable pressure on Ruby to attend to showroom needs while making valiant attempts at holding together family, children and household, not to mention getting some of her own work done. These drains can be considerable and cannot be ignored in designing a personal sales approach.

I must mention that in addition to taking daily care of the showroom, Ruby does all billing to customers who didn't pay on delivery or in the showroom. She types and prepares all orders to suppliers and she pays all bills, both business and family. On my end, I prepare a yearly master set of books for my accountant so that he's able to analyze our complete cash situation as far as income and outgo, and prepare our tax records. I also prepare a monthly income tally-sheet from all sources of income we have. And I do all business and professional correspondence.

Another major source of selling is the art fair. There are many in the midwest, with a nucleus of good ones. Among those we've participated in, and think very highly of, are the Oldtown Art Fair in Chicago, the Milwaukee Lake Front Air Fair, and the Somerset Art Fair in Troy, Michigan. I feel it's best to visit a number of them if you're considering entry into the circuit, and try to discover where critical selection of participants has given the look of quality to the event. Usually, open-juried 300 to 500 artist activities are a loss. There is too much clamor and confusion, and no visitor has a way of seeing the overall picture before commiting himself to a purchase.

I'd like to contrast all of this with the wholesale-selling approach. One aspect of wholesaling is the catalogue. I must say I would enjoy having a catalogue of my work. But it has a way of freezing what you stand for in people's minds; in fact, it has a way of freezing what you do because you continue to get orders for work that was perhaps done two or five years before. None of us likes to spend more money, so the inclination is to use the same catalogue for quite a period of time. The result can be a stifling of the creative urges, which are subjected to the pressure of following orders pouring in. I think being weighted down by the catalogue has a downgrading effect on a creative person.

To get an idea of pricing when I first started producing enough to sell, I simply went to galleries whose taste in crafts I respected and tried to put myself in some perspective with their state of achievement, using these first notions as a rough price-guide for my own work. Soon I was able to analyze my own situation: kiln space, ease of techniques, my own state of achievement, etc. I went so far as to prepare a time-motion study, relating that to clay weight, material costs, and so on. I always came up with some very strange figures! Essentially I learned that many objects which are rapid in production time will pay for such things as teapots and more complex things. It turns out that if a variety of work is done there's no problem with having things even out in the end.

In analyzing my prices over the last six-year period, I've found these facts: in 1967-8 during the period with Jan (my throwing apprentice), our average per-piece sale for the year was about $7. Many small objects were being done, and showed his influence on general output. In the 1969-70 period, after he left, $11 was the average per-piece price, and in 1972-73 it rose to about $20. Now it shows that I'm making fewer small pieces as the time passes and more in the $15-30 range, or even higher. On most ware it's 25-30% higher now than it was, partially to offset the inflationary rises in raw material and propane costs, and the result as well of a sense of increased awareness concerning the inherent worth of my own work. As this whole process took over nine years to evolve, I strongly suspect it's not something you can easily manipulate, or even analyze, in the first years of your studio work. *Over the years things become more fluid and you still find that the pot itself is the major reason for buying, not price.*

I think it's a great advantage to have a well-designed series of business materials, whether it's a handsome business card only, or a whole package of related articles such as stationary, envelopes, business cards, informational brochures, etc. The concept of excellent design should influence them all equally, as it does your pots. In our studio we presently use an informational brochure composed of a folding cover that holds up to 10 loose photo-prints of pots of recent vintage. Inside is a brief philosophical comment and a statement that says "this is not a catalogue but a representation of what's being done." We have these in the showroom, supplementary to gift-giving, and as general information for newcomers. The photos are replenished once a year, keeping the image fresh and up-to-date. Such graphics are not inexpensive, costing us up to 40 cents for each set. At art fairs we don't casually scatter them about, you may be sure! In short, when your work is not there to do a good communications job for you, well-designed business literature should be there instead.

EARNINGS AND PHILOSOPHY

Income potentials of a studio pottery are quite flexible. I know of several potters with small potteries that have a yearly income of over $50,000. In each case, however, the net income may be quite variable due to the number of apprentices, location, overhead, etc. In our location, with direct-sales approach, we find it possible to earn a net income roughly equal to the earnings of a senior faculty member in a university. This figure varies from year to year, but has been relatively stable over the last five years. We have all the usual financial responsibilities of other families, including Blue Cross, auto, home and business insurance, heavy local taxes, etc. We do manage to save a reasonable amount each year for our future needs, and to help defray college expenses in the future for our children, Margaret and Ian.

What frightens me most of all about this whole subject of studio management is the complete lack of any accurate information

Photo — Bob Viglietti

Display units: supports are 1⅛" stainless steel square tube, finished in a scratch surface; shelves are 24"x5' colored waterproof plywood, with 2" hardwood edges; threaded devices screw out of steel members and clamp wood tightly in place.

on the part of those who should know about it before taking the plunge; that is, on the part of the student, apprentice, or would-be-professional. The possibility of earning a reasonable living definitely does exist, without the usual accompanying overlay of commercialism so often thrown into discussions about working artists. It's really up to the individual to sort himself out in a way that deals with the hard facts of earning a living. And with the even harder realities of living with your ego and surviving as some kind of functional artist.

I am grateful each day to be working as a craftsman. Being in my studio and doing pottery has become an almost unconscious act, a natural function of the body and mind. Stopping during these moments to reflect on what I'm doing, I find the same feeling of excitement and sense of challenge in my work now that was present ten years ago. I hope I may stay equal to this challenge.

(Thanks, John)