



## Clay and Glaze – Our Artistic Practice

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Carol and Richard Selfridge

We make all of our own clay and glazes and although it is an incredibly labour intensive activity, it is one of the things that makes our collaborative work unique. We make about six different clay bodies from native materials from all over North America. Our terra cotta body is from Athabasca, prepared from the raw clay which we get by the dump truck load, mixed wet and screened and dried up to plastic consistency after adding flux, a dash of barium carbonate and grog and sometimes nylon fiber. It would be cheaper to buy these clays pre-made from a supplier but they are often not available and lack the consistency and thus control we demand.

We make about three different high fire stoneware bodies from materials from southern Saskatchewan (Ravenscrag), northern Idaho (Helmer) and Montana. In some of these we put feldspathic stones or stars which come from the Fraser canyon near Lytton B.C. One of these is a dark, bisque style, body which is sometimes decorated with our translucent porcelain. Our porcelain is made from pure kaolins from Georgia and England, feldspar from South Dakota and fine silica from Illinois. We fire it to about 2400F. on the verge of slumping to get translucency and luminosity. This body is blunged as a slip and dried up to plastic on cloth on the ground and aged for developing

plasticity. Developing all these clays has been a labor of love, research and testing. Sometimes we feel like medieval alchemists.

Our glazes are also the result of decades of testing. More recently we have been using a lot of native materials. These include the feldspathic rocks from Lytton, cedar ash from Barriere, B.C., other wood ashes from Clancy, Montana, and Priddis, and Hairy Hill, Alberta. We use gneiss from Hope and the Northwest Territories and our terra cotta clay from a glacial backwash in Athabasca. We have also used two varieties of volcanic ash from the eruption of Mt. St. Helens. All these materials are refined and ball milled to form glaze which gives special colors and effects from the included mix of minerals. This is a kind of special soup which has trace elements which are a mystery even to us. We see this as a way of using the gifts of the earth, some like the volcanic ash, dramatically given, to enhance our artistic creations.

Our majolica glaze colors which form a palette of nearly sixty, are composed of stains and oxides which we have tested after mixing and screening with our base majolica glaze. They are painted on the white unfired majolica glaze (like a water color on blotter paper) and then fired in the final glaze firing.

Finally, some of the work is glazed and fired a third or fourth time with over glaze enamels and real gold. All our work – the small stamps, stencils and trailing designs are created by us. What you find at our studio is a unique mixture of our knowledge and experience accumulated nearly thirty years in both the technical and decorative side of ceramics.