



KING'S POINT POTTERY ROOTED IN NEWFOUNDLAND

by Gloria Hickey

The “spout” of the teapot-shaped King’s Point Pottery sign points to the shop and studio.

To Yates and David,

Congratulations on the first soda kiln in Newfoundland.

Thank you for sharing it and this beautiful place with me.

—Gordon Hutchens

This is not your average thank-you note. It is written in bold marker on the juniper planks of a kiln-shed door located on the edge of a saltwater bay in King’s Point, Newfoundland, Canada’s eastern-most province. Gordon Hutchens, an internationally known ceramics artist, had traveled from Canada’s Pacific coast all the way to the isolated but fanciful little pottery in the Atlantic to lead a workshop in firing the province’s first salt/soda kiln. Although an authority on

salt firing, Hutchens had to admit he’d never before seen the innovative technique that these potters, Linda Yates and David Hayashida, co-owners of King’s Point Pottery use. When the kiln reaches 2300°F (1260°C), they spray saltwater collected from the tidal pools of their bay into the glowing oven. Aside from its availability, the saltwater is less corrosive than the typically used rock salt on the soft bricks of their propane kiln, which was created from a recycled and modified forty-year-old British-made electric kiln. “Having the only salt/soda kiln and being the first in the province is about perseverance and teamwork,” explains Yates. “This kiln was dreamed about twenty years ago and through hard work and a boatload of very helpful people in this community-minded province, it was achieved.” The unique resources of their island environment provide inspiration and



PHOTOS: NED PRATT, DAVID TILLEY

Linda Yates carries a wareboard of salt/soda pots to the King's Point Pottery shop. The kiln shed and waterfront are in the background.

raw materials for both the production stoneware and the one-of-a-kind salt/soda ware of King's Point Pottery.

The Pottery has been in full-time operation since 1992, and is housed in a renovated gas station that was originally run by Yates' father, Calvin Yates, since 1961. Still very active in his eighties, Cal is a vital part of the King's Point Pottery business. His handiwork can be seen in the beautiful and unique shelves for their award-winning display units, while at the same time he provides an endless supply of sawdust and wood ash for the clay studio. Cal is the cherished jack-of-all-trades and father whose presence is a constant reminder of the sign above the kitchen doorway that reads *Families Are Forever*.

King's Point Pottery has been primarily known for its successful line of high-fired functional stoneware. (The Cone 9 clay is custom-

made for King's Point Pottery by Tuckers Pottery Supply once a year.) They were recently selected to provide the VIP gifts to all the premiers of Canada at a recent provincial conference and Yates has already received the provincial Craft Council's highest honor for her work in the craft field. Hayashida observes that they are in that small minority of potters who somehow manage to make a living solely from their pottery. "We don't teach and we don't have another source of income," he explains. "I often wonder why it is that functional work is undervalued while non-functional reflects its true value. And I hope I'm not alone in believing that one of the most difficult challenges in clay is to create something that is both functional and timeless. Still, we are so fortunate and very proud that our production manages to pay the bills."

Over the years, more than a hundred designs have been stenciled on the line of blue and white mugs, but the best known are the images of whales. Majestic humpback whales migrate annually to the deep waters of the Green Bay right outside the studio windows. Hayashida, who individually hand cuts the stencils, while Yates throws the forms, is also passionately involved with their oceanic neighbors. He is volunteer chair of a multi-million dollar museum project interpreting whales. Sometimes, in the early morning quiet, when the propane tanks are turned off after the intensive 16-hour salt/soda firing, Hayashida and Yates can hear the soft blowing of dolphins playing in the bay.

Across the street from the kiln is the picture-postcard storefront studio. The shop has a shard-tiled path and leggy garden of Newfoundland wild flowers surrounded by a *quigglely weave*, a traditional Irish stick fence. Hops climb up to the second story deck

while the various local woods and natural fibers are integrated into evolving basket handles.

A few years ago, King's Point Pottery introduced the salt/soda work—pots, baskets and trivets—at craft fairs as “Firescapes.” While potential customers admired it, the potters felt resistance to the higher prices, which they were obliged to charge for the salt/soda line. Most shoppers did not understand why it was more expensive than their previous work. “Education, education” became their mantra as they undertook to inform their consumers about the new work and the significant time, costs and skill required to produce such special salt/soda work. Instead of dwelling on soaring fuel costs, corroding firebrick and shelves, breakage or kiln mishaps, they pointed out their special techniques and local ingredients. Hayashida and Yates were not prepared to abandon how their production clay body serendipitously blushed warm and toasty in their new kiln. In fact,

they upped the ante and booked a solo exhibition of the salt/soda work in the province's capital city.

Two and a half years later “Saucy Boats & Knotty Baskets,” opened at the Craft Council Gallery in St. John's. More than 100 pieces were gathered onto discrete islands of Cal's pedestals, while large banner-photographs documented the dramatic firing process and stunning studio location.

The exhibition gave the production potters an opportunity to focus on trying designs they had only talked about before. “The demands of a gallery show push you beyond the boundaries of your comfort level and you are moved to discover new possibilities,” says Yates. In all, the exhibited body of work contained five new directions for sauceboats and five new series of baskets.

The *slut*, a specific traditional form of Newfoundland flat-bottom metal kettle, inspired one particularly popular series of pouring vessels. Thrown and altered forms characterized both sauceboats and baskets. Strongly textured slab work was used in bases and on generous spouts. Thrown inverted and cupped, some vessels revealed rich glaze crystals in spiral rings (from the clam cooling process), while impressed textures from netting, seaweed or scallop shells in the slab bases trapped pools of luscious glaze.



Slut (tin kettle) forms, to 4¾ in. (12 cm) in height, thrown white stoneware with flashing slip and green liner glaze, fired to Cone 10 in a salt/soda kiln, 2006. These pouring vessels were inspired by a traditional Newfoundland flat-bottom metal kettle called a *slut*.

of Tuckamore wood, which comes from trees twisted like pretzels by the harsh local climate. Inside the store and studio is a harvest of scallop shells and crab claws, stones, driftwood and sea grass. These are everyday inspiration for the potters, providing evolving forms and decorative motifs that can be impressed or portrayed in the salt/soda work. Yates may drag a crab claw across a slip-covered form to create texture, or Hayashida may paint a crab motif in ochre. Local minerals are ground and used in experimental glazes,

FROM ARROWHEADS TO PEARLS

While generations of heritage and people tie Linda Yates to the community of King's Point, it is the very land itself that attracts Hayashida. The red ochre, for example, that Hayashida likes to paint with is harvested from the local soil and produces a rich sienna slip. It is also the same ochre that the Beothuks used 500 years ago to decorate themselves and their objects, earning them the label "red skins" from European settlers. The aboriginal peoples also used the local "golden" iron pyrite to make fire. In the hands of King's Point Pottery, the pyrite is ground in glazes to produce a glowing amber palette. Jet-black chert was once used to make arrowheads and now provides quartz-white pearls in a deeply textured glaze on "Firescapes" pots. Encouraged, Hayashida pushed the mineral experiments further and learned that green "Peters" Virginite stone could be relied on for a deep orange and "Newman" Hornblende gave them their own local version of temmoku.

In the year prior to their solo show, the King's Point area was hit with floods. Luckily, the pottery was not damaged and even enjoyed some unexpected benefits. When Linda and Hayashida went out to collect material for the handles of the baskets and bowls they planned to make, they discovered a bounty of exposed roots. Graceful and dramatic roots were used to spiral and gesture over their vessels.



"South West Arm Basket," 16 in. (40 cm) in height, thrown white stoneware with colored slips, crab-claw texture, fired to Cone 10 in a salt/soda kiln, spruce flood root handle with rattan knots, 2006.

Handles and feet were also important to the sauceboats and baskets. They suggested the different characters and backgrounds of the two potters and partners in life. One of Hayashida's earlier careers had been as an international retail designer based in the urban center of Toronto. His design is evident in innovative sauceboats that seem poised for the fashion catwalk and pots balanced on recycled trimming tool legs that Hayashida explains are "specifically chosen to compliment the recycled nature of the clay medium itself." In contrast Yates, whose family has been in rural King's Point for many generations, started out as a fiber artist. Thus many of the pieces suggest her affection for buttons, fiber-impressed textures, wrapped handles and the basket form itself. With Yates' embellishing, the classic cobalt of salt firing comes to resemble sensuous indigo and comforting denim.

Despite the emergence of separate styles, Yates and Hayashida still identify the majority of their work as being the product of collaboration. "Collaborating really fast tracks the evolution of our new ideas and pieces," says Hayashida. And Yates adds, "Problem solving goes much faster." Yates thinks best at the wheel and Hayashida prefers to work in a giant sketchbook. They readily solicit each other's opinion and depend on their synergy to get their pots to the next aesthetic level. Their shared love of the rugged natural environment in which they live helps fuel their collaboration, as does the salt/soda kiln, which they fire together. Hayashida and Yates conclude, "The salt/soda kiln is both wonderfully unpredictable and it produces such honest surfaces and inviting raw textures. It has opened up a new range of aesthetic and technical possibilities for us, as well as a meaningful way to reflect the amphibious island culture that is Newfoundland and Labrador."

**Basket, from the Sea and Stars series, 5¼ in. (13 cm) in height (including handle), thrown white stoneware, coil lugs, with Newman Hornblend glaze with local clay and micro crystals, fired to Cone 10 in salt/soda kiln, flood root handle with brass wire wrap, 2006.
The feet on this basket are constructed of carved slabs with wadding, which were glazed and fired into place.**

