Internship Opportunity at Little Plum Pottery

There are two categories of people for whom this is a genuinely interesting opportunity— and probably some overlap between those two groups. I’m going to explain it as clearly as I can.

First let me say, we’ve never done anything with internships or apprenticeships before, so this is new territory for us. Ultimately the plan is to work in one or more long-term apprentices, aspiring ceramic artists who want to learn as much as possible from what we’ve learned over the years, but for now the plan is less ambitious.

It’s also important to understand, this is not a high-production pottery, with no aspirations of ever fitting that definition. This is a “mom & pop” operation. Barbara handles the glazing end of things, and I do everything else. That covers probably 98% of the whole story. For the last twenty years I’ve worked as a thrower at Red Wing Stoneware while at home in Little Plum we’ve worked to develop and refine our own ceramic work. Things are changing. As of last summer I’ve cut back to one day a week in Red Wing and my focus is Little Plum. Our ceramic goals can be defined pretty simply: make a beautiful form, and clothe it in a beautiful glaze. There are admittedly other ways to approach clay work, but this is ours.

We fire with wood, cone 10 reduction. The kiln is my own design, meant to fire evenly from a single firebox and be manageable for one person, both firing-wise and production-wise. Unlike the work of many wood-firing potters, our objective is excellence in glaze results. It’s been working out pretty well. I’m also in the process of developing a sustainable system for growing and harvesting kiln wood, and between the kiln design and the firewood process I think this is going to develop into a very accessible way for the individual potter to embrace wood-firing.

The internship position would be very loosely-defined and casual, inasmuch as that’s the way I work. There are times when I focus intently on pots, and the intern would have specific duties, like moving pots through the process, getting them dry, loading and firing bisque kilns (electric), prepping the wood kiln (cleaning ashes, shelves, kiln posts, that sort of thing) and (hopefully) learning to load the wood kiln, plus the never-ending task of clay reprocessing.

At times when I’m working on other projects it becomes less structured. An intern would always have access to clay and time for personal work; when I’m not active in the studio it would be totally available to the intern—but the choice of what to do would be the intern’s. There are always pottery-related things to do—like for example processing kiln wood—but, well, whatever you want to do…

What the intern gets out of this…

To start with, if you’re interested in seriously developing your throwing skills, you’ll get that from me. What I’ve come to understand about clay, how to treat it, how to get it to work with you and do what you want it to even astonishes me—and I’m very good at explaining these things. If you want you can check out the “Art Gannett Boot Camp” exercises on YouTube, that’ll give you kind of an idea.

Still in the educational vein, if you’re genuinely into learning to make pots, the amount of incidental stuff you’ll pick up from the experience is impossible to quantify. Anybody who’s worked in clay as long as I have (46 years now) has worked out his or her own way of doing things, and there’s an awful lot of consideration and reasoning I’ve gone through over the years you can benefit from.

And I’m not even addressing our glazing—that’s Barbara’s department. But if you want to learn to get results like ours, well, you’ll see how we do it.

So—outside the educational benefits…

In case you haven’t already guessed, this is an unpaid position. As I’ve already said, the ultimate plan is one or more long-term apprentices, and there’s no reason the internship couldn’t lead to that—but that’s purely a future consideration. For now, we can offer living arrangements which some (myself included) would consider close to idyllic.

And some would not.

We live in a stunningly serene little valley a few miles from Pepin, actually the valley where Little Plum Creek of Laura Ingalls Wilder repute originates. Several years ago, for reasons not pertinent here, we moved an old mobile home onto part of our property. I say old; we used to joke that it was nicer than our house—which had stood abandoned as part of a cow pasture for thirty years before we started reclaiming it and moved in. That was in 1980.

That house was destroyed in an LP explosion six years ago, and we lived in the mobile home from June through half of the following January while building a new house. If you can imagine what a difficult time that was, it’s interesting to note that, throughout the experience, I honestly felt genuinely blessed to have had the opportunity to live in the trailer. If you like peace and quiet, and serenity, it’s an extraordinary place to live.

There is no running water. Neither will you have television reception or internet (you can access the internet from our *new* house); you’ll have to go ½ mile up the hill to get cell phone reception. On the plus side, it’s fairly spacious—one large bedroom, one small, kitchen/dining room (stove and refrigerator) and a spacious living room. And a non-functional bathroom. When I say “no running water”—while we were living there I did hook up cold running water to the kitchen sink. By the time we moved out in mid-January, that system had frozen up and I wasn’t able to drain it to preserve it for future use, but it may be salvageable.

So I said there were two groups of people who would find this an interesting opportunity. Obviously one group is, anyone who would value the educational opportunity with respect to doing pots. The other group would be, anyone who has no pressing plans and no driving ambition to be earning a lot of money right this moment and would value having a free place to stay in a beautiful, peaceful environment, in exchange for doing a certain amount of work. If you’re not into learning to make pots, well, the way it really works, anything you do that I would otherwise have to spend my time on is helping me out. It doesn’t have to be pot-related. I have so much stuff here to use up my time, any help I can get is worthwhile to me.

Regarding income: honestly, anyone who is doing more work that I think is necessary in exchange for the free place to live I would be inclined to pay—but the amount I could afford to pay is limited, maybe a top end of a couple hundred dollars a month. Other than that, something I can’t promise but is a real possibility would be some part-time work at Red Wing Stoneware to generate a little cash flow. I include this simply because I think it’s relevant information.

Anyway, if you’re sufficiently out-of-step with 21st century America to find this interesting, email akgannett@gmail.com.