

king's point pottery | linda yates & david hayashida

When does your work become your life? Is it when you love what you do? Is it when what you do is created from a space within you yet it is inspired by the space without? Is it when you share your work with someone who shares your life?

This is the story behind King's Point Pottery. It is a story of a passion for pottery by two people who have faith in each other, faith in their art, and faith in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a story of partners in life and work who believed that they could create a world class pottery business in a small community cradled into the head of Green Bay, Newfoundland. It is the story of Linda Yates and David Hayashida, artists and entrepreneurs.

Linda is from King's Point, NL. David is from the Kitchener- Waterloo area of Ontario. Both Linda and David have extensive education, training and work experience in arts related fields. David has a background in geography, commercial interior design and ceramics. Linda studied visual arts, and later majored in ceramics and fibre arts.

Through college David took advantage of co-op programs to broaden his practical experience and after graduation worked with Ontario design firms. In his spare time he pursued his interest in pottery making. Linda found herself working in arts and crafts business development jobs with the government of Newfoundland and Labrador advising and facilitating crafts people in setting up businesses. Eventually she wanted to produce her own work, to start her own craft business. To prepare for this, she apprenticed with a renowned studio in Scotland. Then, as fate would have it, their paths merged. Linda and David both enrolled in the same advanced glaze course in British Columbia. Soon after, David came to Newfoundland to tour the spectacular Gros Morne National Park - and he stayed.

David and Linda decided to make art and become business people together. Although neither of them had formal business training, they both had learned about business from their career experiences. Linda's position with the provincial government educated her in the business of crafts. Through this on the job experience, Linda developed an extensive business skill set. As well, Linda came from a family where being self-employed and owning a business was common among her relatives. It was something she saw as natural.

In planning where to establish the business, King's Point was a natural fit for them. With the help of Linda's father, they refurbished his old gas station so that they could set up business in a place where they could enjoy the lifestyle of rural Newfoundland. They both enjoy the outdoors and King's Point, Green Bay has much to offer.

There were many naysayers 20 years ago who thought that it would be impossible to make a success of a pottery business in rural Newfoundland. In that era, just after the declaration of the cod moratorium, many people saw no future in the outports. The young people were leaving in droves. But Linda and David prepared their business plan and believed in their idea. David says that looking back at that original business plan it is amazing how much they did not know about what is entailed in running a business. But the plan was a necessity. They had to start somewhere; they had to lay out what they knew and map out where they were going. They started with a studio and store in King's Point. But they were unknown; they had to market their product to the wider world and they had to find a way to get consumers to come to them.

And so they went to market, literally. They went on the road to all of the craft fairs. In addition, they put signage on the highways and roadways directing and enticing travellers to their little studio. Linda's previous experience in government also helped. She had connections throughout the province. This gave them a network of people with whom they could promote their products and also on whose advice and expertise they could draw. They are grateful to the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador and to the craft division of the provincial Department of Innovation Trade and Rural Development for the encouragement and support given.

Eventually they reduced the number of craft fairs they attended and concentrated on the wholesale market together with, of course, their retail store and studio in King's Point. This was the emphasis of their business for the first several years. It allowed them to get their products into many stores in various locations without them having to do the selling. Yet this model created much paper work, shipping and distribution costs and saw smaller returns on each item.

In recent years, King's Point Pottery has shifted its focus from wholesale to retail. They are selling their own products and those of other crafts people. They net a higher return on their items and also turn a profit on selling the work of others. David said that in the beginning he found selling challenging. But it is the delight in talking to people from all over the world about the products of King's Point and those of the other crafts people he admires, that turns selling into a pleasure.

Operating a business in King's Point may seem idyllic but it is not always easy. A big challenge comes in accessing supplies. Fortunately, the craft-making community is collegial and practical. Often crafts people rent a truck and share in the cost of bringing in supplies. David does not know if this level of co-operation exists among potters in other provinces. Linda and David's work could not be produced just anywhere. It is very much of the place, of King's Point. Their iconic blue and white whale line is inspired by the whales that can be seen playing off shore during the idyllic summer days. The place does not simply inspire design but King's Point is literally often in the materials used. They grind local minerals to use in experimental glazes on the pottery. Various roots, plants and wooded material are also incorporated into their pieces. Even the sea is in their pottery as the inside of their salt/soda oven is sprayed down with salt water collected from nearby tidal pools when oven temperature reaches 1260 degrees C.

David and Linda are artists who create beautiful functional series of ceramics as well as one of kind pieces. This beauty, this art, costs money and David and Linda have had to educate customers about the value of their work. To make a living their prices have to cover their costs. Sometimes a batch of pottery is not successful and nothing is produced. New techniques have to be tried and sometimes things go wrong. Even the bricks in their oven have to be replaced at times. The price per unit has to take into account all of their costs, not just the time and material in that one piece.

In educating their customers, they talk about their special techniques, the skills and unique local ingredients that combined to produce a thing of functional beauty. They educate the imaginations of their customers. They do not dwell on costs such as breakage, fuel costs, or other factors that drive up the cost of their pottery per unit. It is important to have the customer want to buy the piece for its inherent value not feeling that they are covering inflationary costs

and lost product.

David and Linda have been successful in their strategy. They do not have other jobs or sources of income outside of their business. There are few potters who can say that. For the future David and Linda will continue to concentrate on the retail side of the business. They currently showcase the works of about 70 artists in their store and soon will represent over 100. This, however, means an increase in the administration side of business – more paper work.

This retail expansion means that they will need extra staff in the summer. In recent years they have had an apprentice and they usually hire a summer student but they anticipate needing more assistance in the shop. The challenge will be to hire someone who shares their passion for crafts. Ideally this person would have worked in a craft store before and be a crafts person themselves. This person should love crafts. They want to invest in this person, train them and retain them. This is the challenge, especially in a rural setting. Luckily, they say, more young people are returning to that region.

Even though David and Linda have reduced the number of places they wholesale their products, their pottery is available in various locations around the province. It is carried in the Historic Sites Association Heritage shops. This enables them to use a central distributor to access several shops at a variety of geographic locations of historic and cultural importance. Of course, their work is also available at the Craft Council stores. Between them, Linda and David have received many awards and much recognition. The world class work and unique salt/soda oven were featured in the world's largest ceramics magazine, Ceramics Monthly.

For a young crafts person hoping for a career in crafts David advises education, both formal and practical. It is important to take advantage of co-op programs and apprenticeship opportunities. Once working in the field, a student will become knowledgeable of the range of related career opportunities available.

For those who are interested in owning their own business, Linda and David caution that people must be prepared to work hard, not just at making crafts but at the business end. Linda says, "Your craft skills will feed your soul, but it's your business skills that will put food on the table."

King's Point Pottery's third decade will be a new chapter in its operations. With Linda and David's blend of faith, vision and talent, supported by practical business sense, King's Point Pottery will continue to be a story of success.