



# Active Tranquility

1

## Diane Creber admires Bill Boyd's crystalline glazed bottles produced in the tranquility of Galiano Island.

Bill Boyd's odyssey from pursuing a career in international marketing at the New York University Graduate School of Business to life as a successful potter in rural British Columbia was a journey directed by his heart. 'Though I was near to getting my degree, I somehow knew I wasn't cut out for the business world', Boyd says. 'I seemed to be searching for a more meaningful life.' The quest took him to Sweden, where a friend was attending art school in the town of Leksand. Inspired, he left business school behind and enrolled at the art school.

Students were encouraged to experiment with all art mediums and over the next two years Boyd discovered clay. 'Working with clay felt like a meditation', he recalls. The chemistry of glazes and the extreme heat firing process that fused elements of the earth into unique glazes with endless possibilities proved fascinating.

After graduation, Boyd and a partner teamed up to renovate and set up a pottery workshop in an old derelict hotel they purchased in a small seaside community near Varberg. 'Amazingly, we were successful right from the start', Boyd says. They built their own kilns – wood, gas, and electric – and taught classes. Influenced by the Bernard Leach-Shoji Hamada philosophy, they produced gas-fired stoneware. Visiting potters would drop in, there was always something happening. Gradually the influences of Scandinavia melded with an Asian aesthetic to form the foundation of Boyd's future work.

**NORTH AMERICA** In 1980 Boyd sold his share of the partnership and returned to North America, first settling in Florida but later, in search of a more tranquil lifestyle, he looked north. Having seen images of British Columbia in the movie *Roxanne*, filmed in Nelson, BC he was inspired to visit the area in the summer of 1988. Traveling farther west he investigated other small communities and several of the Gulf Islands, but it was on Galiano Island that he found what he was looking for. 'The quiet was overwhelming', Boyd says smiling. 'It touched something in my soul and I felt at home

1 Zinc silicate crystalline glazed bowl, 2007, Ø51cm 2 Zinc silicate crystalline glazed vase with 22 carat gold trim, 2007, H21cm 3 Using a handheld grinder to polish the jagged edge of the glaze on the foot 4 Zinc silicate crystalline glazed teapot with 22 carat gold trim, 2006, H18cm



2



3



4

5 Spraying a measured amount of glaze on the pot 6 Drying the sprayed pot to accept another layer of glaze 7 Applying a layer of 50% kaolin + 50% aluminium hydroxide to keep the pot from bonding to the catcher 8 The glaze pot placed on the catcher and ready for firing 9 Heating the

glaze catcher to release the pot 10 Tapping the heated catcher to release the pot 11 Using a Dremel tool for fine grinding and polishing 12 Bill Boyd in his studio 13 Zinc silicate crystalline glazed bowl pedestal vase with 22 carat gold trim, 2006, H59cm

Photography Helen Elizabeth Schnare and Bill Boyd  
 Email billboyd@hughes.net  
 Web www.billboyceramics.com

immediately. I knew I couldn't live in an urban area any longer, and I knew that this was where I wanted to be.'

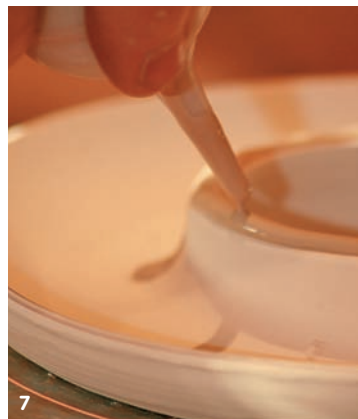
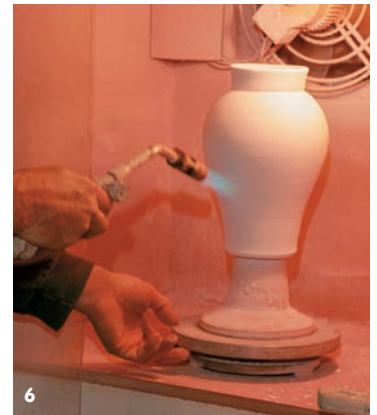
Initially Boyd supported himself with his carpentry skills, working on some of the island's innovative houses. 'I lived in a trailer in the woods, with deer and other wildlife all around. Mostly, the only sounds were birdsongs and the occasional foghorn. I was truly happy.' Planning ahead to his future pottery studio and garden Boyd bought two acres of heavily wooded land on a hillside with a potential view of the ocean. He cleared the site and milled the trees for the posts and beams needed for the building. Following his own design Boyd built a post-and-beam structure house with bright open spaces and wood detailing throughout. Clad with cedar singles, the cottage nestles in the wooded landscape. Wooden walkways and decks connect the house to the studio, a kiln shed, and a materials storage area. A large cedar deck across the front of the house overlooks the gardens, which frame a view of Trincomali Channel and islands beyond.

The studio is about twenty feet away from his back door. Inside are two Shimpo wheels and a pugmill and a spray booth, a method of glaze application that he likes. The work is fired in either of two electric kilns fitted with controllers or in the propane-fired kiln he built himself. The clay, bought commercially, is picked up by taking the ferry to Vancouver. Three different kinds of stoneware clays are used and two porcelains. One clay, with a toasty-brown colour, creates a reduction iron spotting with some of his glazes. Either porcelain or a white stoneware clay is used for his crystalline glazes as well as for other glazes such as celadon and chun.

**MARKETING** When Boyd set up his studio in 1996 he was making functional pieces such as coffee mugs and small bowls, and his market was among the local islanders. When he began to make larger, more challenging pieces, his prices increased substantially; he lost some of the island clientele and had to rethink his marketing approach. Now Boyd wholesales about seventy percent of his work through twelve galleries in western Canada. This, he explains, is one of the challenges of working in a rural environment. 'Since the island is not served by the standard parcel services, my markets are dictated by my willingness to either deliver or take the pieces by ferry to Victoria or the mainland and ship from there. As a consequence, I've selected galleries that give me larger orders or are closer to where I live.'

The remainder of Boyd's work is sold from his studio. Initially, he had one display shed at the end of the driveway but it was too small so he built a second alongside. Built of cedar with glass roofs and upper walls, each display room admits lots of natural light, providing a lovely setting for his work. For his drop-in clients, walking through the woods and finding these glass boxes filled with crystalline glazed pottery, is like discovering two jewel boxes. Most studio sales are during the tourist season, from June to September, but he keeps his display area open from 10am to 5pm year-round, whether he is there or not. When he is not there, the customers take care of themselves. Posted instructions explain how to pay with a credit card, cash, or cheque and how to work out the tax. They drop the payment into a slot in the table. 'I believe most people are honest, I think they appreciate that I have faith in them or perhaps they think I'm naïve. Either way, it works.'

**FORM** 'I am attracted to classical forms, such as vases, large bowls, platters and lidded vessels', Boyd explains. 'I consider myself a traditionalist, but I don't see much traditional work being done





12



13

any more; it's getting replaced by 'free-form'. I look at much of the pottery being done today, all those convoluted shapes that have been twisted, gouged, or distorted in order to make them different, and I wonder what's been sacrificed for the sake of uniqueness. I have this theory that some of the forms that have been done for thousands of years are in our genes, they are so universal across cultures. We see them, and without understanding why, we find them pleasing. I respect traditional shapes, and I have never deliberately done anything in my work to get attention. I want the form to speak for itself. I find it ironic that by making traditional forms I have become somewhat rare among today's potters.

'Right now I am working mostly with crystalline glazes in a large format. Unlike most crystalline glaze potters, who make small items, I do pieces up to two feet tall and two feet wide in crystalline glazes. I also have a passion for traditional Asian glazes, such as shino, temmoku, chun and celadon. I suppose my work is a bit of a paradox. I have always favoured simplicity and subtlety and I maintain a connection with traditional forms, yet now here I am doing crystals, which are anything but subtle and traditional. I could say this is what distinguishes my work: the combination of large classical forms with crystalline glazes. I like calling this style "Nouveau-Classique".'

In 2002 Boyd met his wife Shao-Fang, who is originally from Taiwan, and is also an artist and a gardener. They each work in their separate studios but tend the garden together. Shao-Fang and Boyd have travelled extensively but they both agree that living on Galiano Island offers them a place of beauty and serenity where they feel completely at ease. Bill Boyd's fascination with the pottery process continues and he revels in the surprises and mysteries of crystalline glazes. ☞