

Jenni Ward

Santa Cruz, California



Just the Facts

Clay

stoneware

Primary forming method
handbuilding

Primary firing temperature
cone 6 oxidation

Favorite surface treatment
cutting holes

Favorite tools
X-Acto knife

Studio

The studio I have worked out of for the past 12 years is a converted two-car garage attached to our home. We live near the Monterey Bay in California, surrounded by redwoods and very close to the ocean, both of which are a great source of inspiration for my work. When we bought our house, the studio was truly a garage with no insulation or windows and one dangling light, so renovating it was the first project we tackled after moving in. My husband is a carpenter and built everything from the tables to the pedestals, which makes it feel like a real studio space and not just a garage. I was supposed to share this space with him and all of his tools, but I slowly took over the whole area and we ended up having to build him his own shop. Most of the equipment in the studio I bought used from other artists. I had a wheel and a very small kiln to start but slowly we found another wheel, a slab roller, upgraded the electrical to buy a new larger kiln and added more shelving and work space. My students just gifted me an extruder this year, which was a fantastic surprise and I also just found an old sandblaster at a friend's studio that I'm hoping to make room for. The studio has evolved slowly over the years to make it a great space to work in and teach out of. It's still an evolving project. I share my studio with my students who come for weekly classes and I also open it up to the public twice a year for sales.

While it's convenient that I can run out and check the kiln in my pajamas if I need too, it can also be hard to have my studio at home. The feeling that I'm constantly at work can



be taxing and the isolation of days alone can be hard too. For all of these reasons we started looking at moving the studio to a larger space that was near a community of artists and could accommodate larger kilns and equipment. During the writing of this article, we found it and are now in the process of moving from our beloved studio in the woods to a very large warehouse on the other side of the county. This new warehouse is in a complex filled with creative people, from painters and sculptors, to blacksmiths and guitar makers, so it's a great community to be a part of. It is also nearly triple the size of my current home studio, but this time I really do need to share it with my husband and his tools. After finishing the drywall, giving it a fresh coat of paint, and building a few interior walls to divide up the clay areas from the non-clay areas, we are now in the process of setting up the new space. I plan to officially open for a fall open-studios sale in October.

It is hard to let go of my cozy old studio but the process of going through everything as I move is cleansing and the freedom to sell our home and try something new is now an option. I'm really excited to start building new work in this space and seeing how a new environment influences what I make. It seems like a big change to

move from a home studio in the woods to an industrial warehouse in the city, but we are only blocks from the ocean and minutes to the forest, so I know that the source of my inspiration is still right there and that the makers I'm now surrounded by will be a supportive, creative community to thrive in.

Paying Dues (and Bills)

I grew up in New Jersey, just outside of Manhattan and was lucky to have a great clay program in my high school, which was when I really fell in love with clay. Being this close to New York City, I was able to go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) or the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) on school field trips, so all of this amazing art was a short drive away and a source of early inspiration. I moved to California after receiving my BFA in ceramics from Hartford Art School in Connecticut, in 1998. I have been a full-time working artist and instructor of classes out of my home studio for over 10 years. Before that, I worked in other artists' studio spaces and taught community ceramics classes for a variety of programs and schools. It feels like I spend about 80 hours a week in the studio between teaching classes,



building my own work, and cleaning or loading kilns but in reality it's probably more like 40–50 hours on an average week plus more hours put into the marketing, accounting, website, and office-type work.

Body

Sometimes it's hard on my body to spend so much time in the studio working, so I try to get out for a walk or a hike every day with my dog. I also like to rock climb at the local gym and I try to eat healthy to stay energized and keep up with a laborious work schedule. I also try not to badger myself for resting when I truly am tired.

Mind

To keep me company in the studio, I listen to podcasts while I'm working. Sometimes I listen to interviews with other artists on *Tales of a Red Clay Rambler* or *The Potter's Cast* but other times I listen to people's stories on *Radiolab* or NPR interviews. I love learning about new places and interesting things going on in the world.

I travel and plan lots of adventures to refuel myself from all this work time. This year I spent a few weeks traveling through Spain and Morocco. Last year I climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Both were epic trips, but I also love to go backpacking in the redwoods and escape for the weekend just an hour or so from my home. I find that because I spend so much time alone in the studio, it's important to create a balance by getting out into the world, meeting new people, and experiencing other cultures. I think this is also why I've started taking my art out into the world and photographing it in nature; it's a way for the two parts of my life to intersect.

Marketing

My work is primarily sold through two annual studio sales and the new online shop I have set up on my website. I also show and sell work in gallery exhibitions. My studio is the strongest space to sell my work because I have found that people really want to meet the artist, connect with the pieces, and see the space where they were made. It helps them tell a story about the work that they



purchase, which makes the connection to the pieces deeper. The challenge comes with trying to recreate that studio-visit experience for the viewer on my website, so that they know as much about me or my artwork as they would learn by physically being in my studio. I thought that once I had my online shop up and running I could check that off my list, but I've learned that it's a constant evolution of tweaking, refining, and improving. The effort I put into that is worth it when I can reach out to all the people who would not otherwise be able to buy or see my work.

I am inspired by forms and structures in nature and my experiences being outdoors, so over the past few years, I've started to take my finished work out into the world and document it in the wild. This process doesn't necessarily bring me new sales, but it does pique the interest of viewers, giving them a closer look at what inspires me and how my two loves of working with clay to make abstract art and being outside can collide to create very dynamic images. I also love interacting with passersby when I'm installing these pieces. They always think I found the work

washed up on the beach or nestled in the forest floor, so it's a great conversation starter and people want to know where they can see more of my work.

Most Valuable Lesson

If I was to give advice to students or others just starting out in ceramics, it would have to be to keep making art, no matter what and be disciplined. I know that's easy to say and actually really hard to do. When I tell people I'm a full-time artist, they always think it must be so fun and easy to spend all day in the studio. The reality is that it's not; just like any other job you do full time, it's work. It's also so easy to stop, there are a million reasons to be distracted, from laundry to laziness, but I truly believe that if you put your time in and share your work with the world, your art will improve and the shows and sales will happen.

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