

CLIFF GLOVER

A Potter's Journey

By Peggy Templer



Cliff Glover standing in front of his rebuilt gas kiln.
Laurie York photo.



Hobin Teapot,
porcelain with
blue celadon glaze,
4" x 4".

ing; doing fairs where I sweltered on hot pavement while families trudged by with six-packs in hand; working in an 8' x 12' room, partially exposed to the elements, where, after the pots dried, I would glaze them green and then schlep them down to MAC to fire. Just insane.”

Cliff grew up in San Francisco, the son of college-educated parents who respected the arts, but didn't encourage them as a rational career choice. “It wasn't until I was a senior in high school that I even took an art class,” says Cliff. “My mom would

“No rational person would go about it in this way,” says Cliff Glover, remembering all the crazy things he did on his way to becoming a professional potter: “Things like firing on the coldest day of the year so I had to dump hot water on the propane tank to keep it from freezing;

say, ‘You can't make a living doing art.’”

Then two things radically changed the course of his life: the early death of his father when Cliff was 15, and running head-on into the maelstrom known as the '60s. His father had been an experimentalist, into Zen and hypnosis, as well as an accomplished archer who taught Cliff the importance of eye-hand coordination. “Just concentrate on the bull's-eye and the arrow will follow,” his father would say.

Left mostly to his own devices after his father's death, Cliff freely indulged in San Francisco's psychedelic scene of which he says, “Most weekends were a hedonistic blur at the Fillmore Auditorium.”

After high school and a couple of useless years at City College avoiding the draft, Cliff left for India, traveling overland across Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. After bouncing around Northern India and Nepal for a year, he settled down



Newly Fired Tea Cups in the Late Afternoon Sun, mixed stoneware clays, iron slip, and Shino glaze, approximately 3" x 3 1/4".



Left to right: Chawan, wood-fired stoneware, 4 1/2" x 3". Saki Set, stoneware with Shino glaze, Tokkuri: 7" x 3", cups: 2" x 2", pond vase: 11" x 2". Rope Impressed Teapot, buff stoneware with high feldspathic, rust colored glaze, 7 1/2" x 7 1/2".

and spent two years living in an ashram. "Nothing like cleaning toilets to get you centered," Cliff jokes. "Once I left India, I felt I could do anything." Back in San Francisco he began restoring and refinishing furniture, learning to work with his hands, until he woke up one morning with welts all over his body. He had developed an allergy to sawdust.

In 1980, Cliff moved to Lake Tahoe and at the community college there came into contact with clay. His main interest, however, was in writing. "I had a romantic idea of myself as a writer," he says, and while later attending the University of Nevada, Reno, he pursued journalism and got a job writing for *Nevada Magazine*. Some of his assignments involved writing profiles of local artists and he recalls being fascinated that "someone could actually make art for a living!" He soon purchased his first potter's wheel and kiln and began taking classes at the

Brewery Art Center in Carson City.

"Pottery took over my life," he says. "After work, I would spend hours on the wheel and more hours at the library during my lunch break, reading every book I could find on the subject." He read *The Unknown Craftsman* by Soetsu Yanagi and became intrigued with Japanese aesthetics and Buddhist philosophy. "I began



Discussing tea bowls with Dr. Shozo Sato. Stoneware and porcelain clay bodies, wood fired, salt fired, and gas fired. The average tea bowl measures 13 cm x 8 cm, or the golden mean.

to see pottery as a 'Do' – a way in which I might do something useful and mindful at the same time."

Unforeseen circumstances eventually brought Cliff to the Mendocino Coast in 1991, where he enrolled in the Mendocino Art Center's two-year Advanced Ceramics Program. "I wouldn't be where I am now or doing what I'm doing now if not for the Art Center. The sense of community on the coast felt like a homecoming." He began doing fairs and shows and gradually was able to support himself as a potter.

Cliff creates teapots,



Left to right: Rice Bowl with Porcelain Inlay, black stoneware, porcelain, and Sea Slug glaze, 5 1/2" x 3 3/4". Side Pouring Teapot, stoneware clay with Sea Slug glaze, 6 1/2" x 4". Chawan at the Asian Art Museum, white stoneware with matte black and white ash glazes, 4 1/4" x 2 3/4".

bowls, mugs, pitchers, salt and pepper shakers, and other functional items that are, he says, not unique. His final goal is “to create a piece that is warm and wonderful to hold, and, most important, does its job. I get a lot of joy from making small changes, like trimming a comfortable ‘foot’ on a teacup where your finger can rest.”

In the 1990s, Cliff studied the Japanese Tea Ceremony, *Chanoyu*, with Dr. Shozo Sato. “The lessons were invaluable for gaining a deeper appreciation of ceramics.” Studying the Tea Ceremony taught him to be sensitive to use, function, occasion, simplicity, and, most significantly, ordinariness. “How beautiful ordinariness is!” he exclaims. “The essence of *Chanoyu* is to just share a bowl of tea!”

In keeping with the teachings of the tea ceremony, Cliff tries to be mindful while in production on the potter’s wheel. “Throwing the same form over and over has honed my skills and taught me to throw without fuss. It has inspired directness and simplicity. But if I’m not careful, if I look too far

ahead toward the end result, production will get boring.”

Cliff has this advice for potters: “Even if you have bills piling up, you should always have something in the kiln you care about. There has to be something, no matter how small, you look forward to seeing.” He also emphasizes the joyfulness of the process: “Although it doesn’t always happen, when I come out of the studio with more energy than when I went in, I know I’m on the right track.”

Cliff Glover’s work can be seen at Highlight Gallery, Mendocino; North Coast Artists in Fort Bragg; Ren Brown Collection in Bodega Bay; at the home and studio in Albion he shares with his partner, ceramist Marion Miller, and on his website cliff-gloverpottery.com.

Cliff will be teaching three ceramics workshops at the Mendocino Art Center: Demystifying the Japanese Tea Bowl, May 18–21; The Tao of Teapot Making, June 19–24; and The Many Shades of Shino, August 23–26.



Yunomi, stoneware with a red iron slip under a Shino glaze, 2 5/8" x 3 1/4".