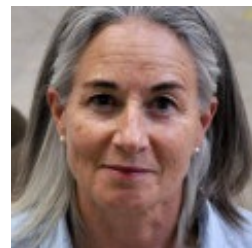


## Pottery for the generations

Kate McGraw / For the Journal

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David Repsher, left, and Matt Repsher, right, with their salt/wood-fired kiln in Pennsylvania. (Courtesy of Santa Fe Clay)

Santa Fe ceramic artist Matt Repsher's favorite line about his childhood is a frequent utterance: "I wasn't around him as a potter, but I was around a lot of his pots." It's so familiar, in fact, that when he made the statement in a telephone interview for his show opening today at Santa Fe Clay, the interviewer experienced a little bell in the back of the mind...ping...ping...ping: "Haven't I interviewed you before?"

It turned out Repsher, a member of the Santa Fe Clay stable of artists, had used the same statement in an interview 18 months ago advancing a two-man show with Brian Kluge. Matt Repsher's partner for the show opening today is his father, David Repsher, who has recently returned to potting after many years of frivolling his life away putting a roof over his family's heads and food on the table.



“Vase 5” is a 2013 wood and salt fired stoneware piece by David Repsher. (Courtesy of Santa Fe Clay)

“I got an MFA at Penn State,” David Repsher, 68, said. “I graduated and went to work for a design company; I have a BA in architecture. I was able to secure a commission for ceramic planters in hotel projects. Another former grad student and I got together, and we acquired equipment and built a kiln, and I satisfied the commission. After that, my only potting was demonstrations for the Scouts or whatever. I was a designer and builder and worked for a construction company 20-plus years. When Matt entered university and decided to be an artist, I got re-interested in the clay. I was able to acquire the pottery I’d built all those years ago and moved it home (to Centre County, Penn.) In the summer of 1997 Matt and his roommate and I built the kiln.”

Matt’s career trajectory as a potter is more linear. At 36, he has lived in Santa Fe (with his wife, the metalsmith artist Mary Miller) for about eight years. He has been a potter basically since he first got his hands into clay in high school, and like his father, earned arts degrees at Penn State and Indiana University. Matt Repsher is a teacher in the Santa Fe Clay studios.

He credits his dad with inspiration for his career. “I don’t have a real specific moment of being, like, ‘Oh, this is what I want to do,’” he said in a recent telephone interview. “I think it was, like, being good at it – and also my dad’s enthusiasm for potting. I think I carried some of that enthusiasm forward.”

In his pieces the viewer can see ancient structures and historical vessel references. Scratched surfaces with blocked muted colors decorate the red ceramicware. Cutouts make his pots resemble structures like the Roman Coliseum or a Moorish temple.

“My work has an underlying theme of structure and repetition built on a foundation utilizing wood and clay,” Matt Repsher has said in a written artist’s statement. “Raised in the woods and the son of an architect/potter, I learned to value the expressive qualities of wood and clay and recognize a heritage they have within human culture. The growth of my work has long since been strongly influenced by how I perceive and manipulate wood and clay.”



“Bottle 3” is a 2013 redware piece by Matt Repsher. (Courtesy of Santa Fe Clay)

David Repsher called his own pots “kind of raw and primitive.” That’s deliberate, he said. “I use clay that I dig out of an old strip mine, mixed with Jordan clay and high-fire clay,” David explained.

The two potters used a salt/wood-fired kiln on his property. “I didn’t have an opportunity to work with fire before. It’s pretty primitive, and I like what happens,” David said. “From my experience making pots for that first commission, I have made a conscious effort not to become a slave to the craft. Now that I’m retired, I do it for my own enjoyment, and I get a lot of inspiration from my son.”

According to the website Ceramic Arts Daily, “salt firing is a vapor-glazing process where salt (sodium chloride) is introduced into (the) kiln firebox at high temperature. The salt vaporizes, and sodium vapor combines with silica in clay surface, forming extremely hard sodium-silicate glaze.”

For the father and son team, the hard work of salt/wood firing just added to the pleasures of the joint project.

“We’ve kind of been putting this show together since June,” Matt Repsher said. “I talked to Avra (Leodas, director of Santa Fe Clay) about doing it, and we weren’t entirely sure when it would happen. I was planning a trip back to Pennsylvania in July because my wife was studying metals in North Carolina. So I drove out there with my tools and made pots for two weeks and then Dad and I were in the studio together making pots for two weeks. We had to fill a pretty big kiln. Then we fired the last week I was there. It was fun.

“It’s a fairly intense process,” Matt said of the firing. “It takes about a full day to fire and burns through about a cord and a half of firewood. It’s a good thing we were in Pennsylvania and not out here!”

“There was a little bit of a stress factor for me, because I needed work to come out of this firing. I think my dad was just having a good time. Since then he’s done another firing on his own.”

David Repsher acknowledged the fun part. “This past summer was the first time I had actually worked with Matt in pottery. It was a really, really good experience. I hope we can keep it going,” he said. “From the time I gather the firewood to the time we open the kiln I’m just having one long good time.”

### **If you go**

**WHAT:** Repsher + Repsher, father and son show

**WHEN:** Today through Dec. 14; reception 5-7 p.m. today, artists’ talk 5:30 p.m. today

**WHERE:** Santa Fe Clay, 545 Camino de la Familia

**CONTACT:** (505) 984-1122

**WHAT:** Small Treasures, curated exhibit of affordable ceramic art

**WHEN:** Today through Dec. 14; reception 5-7 p.m. today.

**WHERE:** Santa Fe Clay, 545 Camino de la Familia

**CONTACT:** (505) 984-1122

The elder Repsher also stressed his gratitude for his wife, Penny, whom he said helps gather firewood and feed the kiln, and also organizes a kiln-opening party each time. “She has been thoroughly encouraging. I think she may have been disappointed that I wasn’t making pots all along,” he said. “I’m really thankful for her participation.”

Santa Fe Clay is opening a second show today called “Small Treasures.” It is a curated exhibit of smaller, more affordable ceramic works, some decorative, some functional, that would make good holiday gifts.

“It was sort of a collaborative effort,” Leodas said of the show. “We wanted affordable holiday offerings for people that might be thinking about holiday shopping. They’re all artists that we have relationships with; it’s a tremendous range, all over the map. The works are smaller size and also possibly a smaller price range. The prices are reasonable and affordable for handmade ceramics.”

### **Kickstarter campaign close to success**

It looks like Santa Fe Clay’s fundraising campaign to move its kiln will be successful. After 23 years in Santa Fe’s Railyard District, and five years of negotiation, Santa Fe Clay has signed a lease with the City of Santa Fe that will secure its future as a part of the Railyard. A condition of the lease is that Santa Fe Clay moves and encloses the kiln that serves its studios. The non-profit business set aside \$50,000, half of the \$100,000 needed for the project, and looked for ways to raise the other half.

Several friends and patrons of the longtime arts organization suggested crowd-sourcing on the Internet, a method director Avra Leodas was not familiar with. “We had a barbecue last spring for the studio end of the year,” Leodas said. “I made an announcement. There were close to 200 people here and a couple of people said, ‘We want to help you raise money.’ There are some fantastic crowd-sourcing nonprofit fundraising sites. We did some research and decided on Kickstarter.”

The campaign to raise \$50,000 kicked off the first week in October. “I have some faith in our community,” Leodas said, “and my faith has been rewarded. We have raised more than \$45,000 with nine days to go. Our community has been incredibly generous. It’s very emotional for me, and seems like a very personal validation for what I have done the last 23 years.”

