

Bruce And Estelle Martin

HAWKE'S BAY'S OWN INTERNATIONAL POTTERS

Quietly nestled amongst an area of moor, and native trees in Bridge Pa is the home and working place of two of Hawke's Bay's potters. Bruce and Estelle Martin, have for over twenty five years, been working and experimenting with clay. Kamata Pottery down "Valentine Road", is their home base where they craft pots of unique creativity. The Martins are using a firing system similar to Hawke's Bay.

Anagama, meaning "hole kiln", is an ancient style of kiln which has changed little over the 1000 years it has been a part of Japanese culture. Originally the Anagama kiln was dug into a clay bank in the hillside and fired very slowly because the clay rotted. However the Anagama kiln was not solely attributed to the Japanese. Anagama fired pots have been unearthed in archaeological diggings as far away as France.

Deliberately the art is slowly dying out in Japan, through the shortage of raw materials and tough anti-pollution laws.

Bruce and Estelle first learned the technique over four years ago when they went to Japan in search of some more stimulating styles of pottery. There in Japan the couple visited master potter Mr Shinya Fuji at Himeji near Kobe. On their way to N.Z. the Martins built their special kiln which took about five thousand bricks and two and a half years to construct. Upon which they fired a collection of pots. Mr Shinya Fuji was so excited by their efforts that he suggested for return to Bridge Pa with the Martins to help them in the technique of Anagama and to make another firing. Over many months, Bruce, Estelle and Mr Shinya Fuji made pots in several pottery pieces used in traditional trade such as the Japanese tea ceremony. Of the best pots selected, Mr Fuji returned to Japan afterwards. In and the Martin's engaged an exhibitor of their ART.

Bruce and Estelle Martin received very positive responses from Japanese people with a good acceptance of their traditional Japanese ceremonial works. Orders were taken and they have now found a place in the Japanese pottery market. Mr Fuji advised the Martins that the Japanese people were now ready to view some of their own expressions in the art of pottery.



On the home front, the western conservationists do have to accept Anagama's form of glazing. There is a great difference between New Zealand's standard domestic ware. Anagama fired pottery has a much more interesting feel, giving the pot more expression. Colours from orange to blue are applied upon the pot's surface by the licking of flames and the build-up of soot and ash. The structure of the pot in the large kiln regulates to an extent the colour and pattern on the pot. Heat, moisture, flames, soot and ash all play a large part in the glazing of the pottery.

Preparation of the Anagama kiln is a long process with kilns hauled to over thousands pots to be stacked into the kiln. Over twenty tonnes of wood have to be split, to keep the kiln at the approximate 1000° Celsius temperature for nine and a half days. This is needed to glaze Bruce and Estelle's art. With the help of enthusiastic friends and interested parties firing the kiln around the clock for the required days, the expert hands make this an easier task. After the firing has reached its specified time, the kiln is left to cool for almost a fortnight, before the pots can be exposed to the light of day.

Bruce and Estelle informed PHOTOBIM that in Japan they fire for up to fifteen days. A couple of these days are needed to dry out the kiln in the climate in Japan of more humid, but they are still looking at more than ten days firing. The Martins have decided to go for the ultimate, and fire their Anagama kiln over the winter period. They have never been able to do this in their previous three firings, through lack of wood. Bruce has calculated that they would need over twenty five tonnes of fuel to keep the kiln at the appropriate temperature for more than ten days.

When using the fire no-day, colours of the pot can never be standardised, guidelines can be followed to gain a certain wash but the outcome is a completely natural occurrence. Anagama adds an excitement to each piece as it builds its own character and individuality. Wood ash helps to stain many of the terraces fired on the pots. Flames dancing over and around the pots add the colour of deep brown to vibrant orange. With the build-up of soot on AGAINST THE FURNACE to temper, decorates the pot's surface of Estelle and Bruce's work. Anagama releases a comfortable feeling of naturalness in its coloring, giving unmatchable combinations from any artificial form of glazing.

As New Zealand has an abundance of raw materials and our pollution laws are not too strenuous, the Martins will be able to continue this exciting form of art, further bringing a piece of Japanese culture to Hawke's Bay. Their place is certainly worth a visit. You are welcome to view the Martins studio on any day to enquire or purchase their works.

By Craig A. Johnson

Photographs by Mike Long

