

A watercolor illustration of a house with a gabled roof and a chimney, surrounded by lush green trees and foliage. The style is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a mix of green, blue, and yellow tones. The house is the central focus, with its reflection visible in the foreground. The overall mood is peaceful and nostalgic.

# THE SIDE HUSTLE

A MEMOIR

DAVID WALTERS



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DAVID WALTERS

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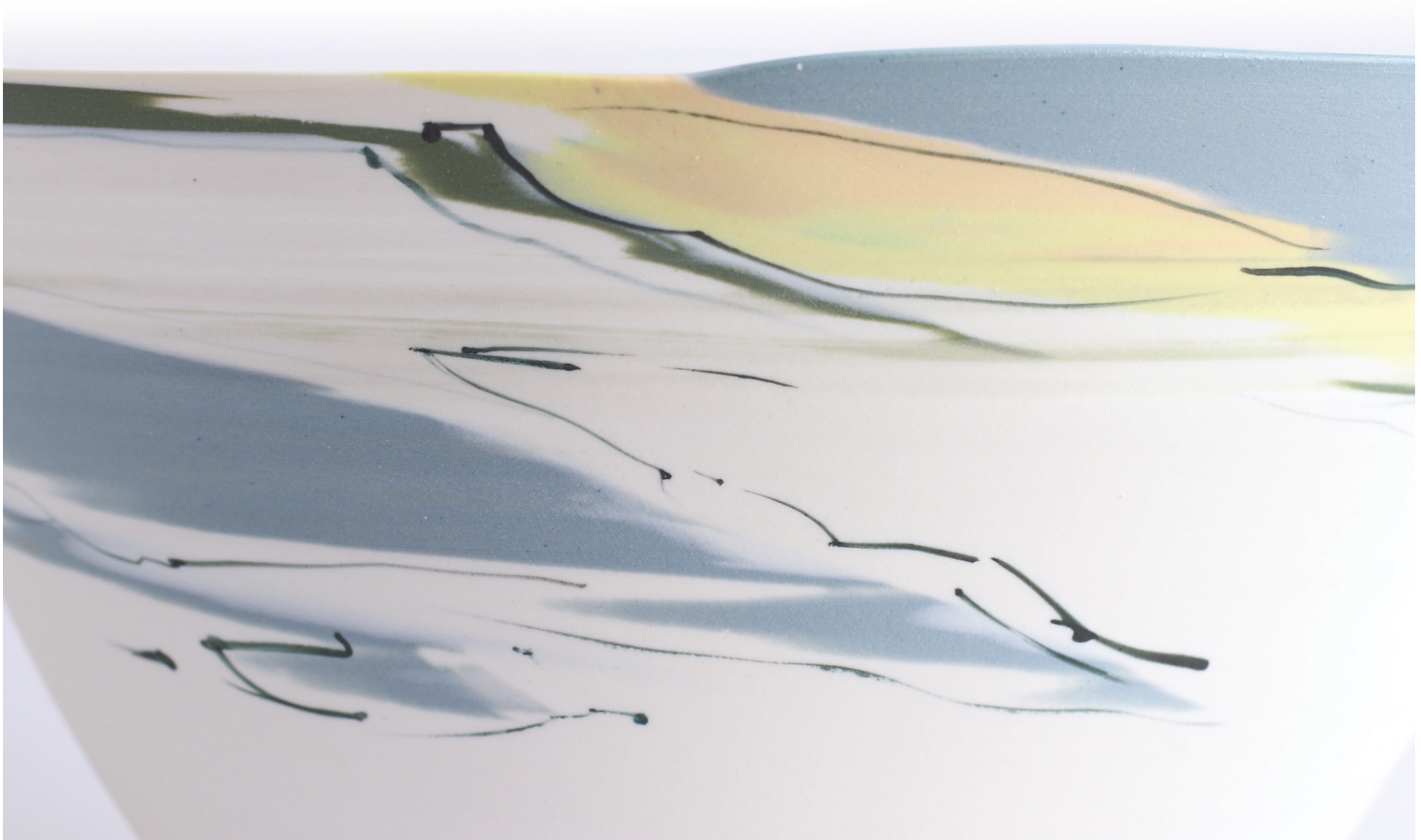
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*Things men have made with wakened hands, and put soft life into  
are awake through years with transferred touch, and go on glowing  
for long years.*

*And for this reason, some old things are lovely  
warm still with the life of forgotten men who made them.*

D.H. Lawrence



## FOREWORD

I have no reason to write a long thesis on my life. In many ways it's been perfectly ordinary and uneventful. In other respects, it's been anything but tedious! You may know that I'm a potter. I got into pottery (almost) by chance and, through a combination of hard work, creative intuition, good fortune and a natural feeling for clay, it became my vocation. But few people have heard about my side hustle: what I was doing on the margins of making pots to make a decent living. That was building and renovating houses – necessitating occasional moving of homes, here and there!

Making a living as a potter in South Africa is extremely difficult, although I have to say it has been the greatest fun. It's been brilliant not to have to actually work, and particularly not to have to work for somebody else. I could never have put up with a boss breathing down my neck! But unfortunately making pots doesn't put much money on the table. And from fairly early on in my married life, and especially once my wife Michelle and I had had our two children – Sarah and Jamie – I realised that I needed to think about my family's well-being after I had finished off. And, after a heart attack at nineteen, finishing off always seemed a very real and present danger!

I guess my anxiety about the future grew when I began to realise that our son's disability meant that he would never be able to work, and that he may well outlive us. To our great sadness, it didn't happen that way; he passed on a few years ago. But there is still our darling daughter to think about. And precious Michelle will last a lot longer than me! So here begins my story of a succession of remarkable homes and studio spaces, from Caversham Mill in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands to The Particular Pottery in Norfolk and others since. It's been quite an adventure, I can tell you!

David Walters  
2020

# TIMELINE

**1950**

DAVID IS BORN  
IN DURBAN

**1969**

WORKED WITH  
TIM MORRIS  
HEART ATTACK

**1974**

GRADUATED  
FINE ARTS DEGREE  
STUDIO 2, HILTON  
HOUSE 1

**1978**

SARAH IS BORN

**1982**

HOUSE 2 AND  
STUDIO 3,  
HOUSE ON HILL,  
CAVERSHAM

**1984**

MIDLANDS  
MEANDER

**1968**

MATRICULATED  
HILTON COLLEGE  
CLASS OF '68

**1970**

STUDIO 1  
AT BIRNAMWOOD,  
CEDARA  
  
ATTENDED NATAL  
UNIVERSITY,  
PIETERMARITZBURG

**1976**

MARRIAGE TO  
MICHELLE  
  
SOWETO  
UPRISING

**1981**

JAMIE IS BORN

**1983**

HOUSE 3,  
CAVERSHAM





**1988**  
HOUSE 4,  
THE STABLES,  
KENNINGHALL  
  
STUDIO 4,  
THE PARTICULAR  
POTTERY



**1998**  
RETURNED TO  
SOUTH AFRICA  
  
HOUSE 7,  
ROUBAIX HOUSE,  
FRANSCHHOEK  
  
STUDIO 5,  
THE CERAMICS  
GALLERY,  
FRANSCHHOEK

**2022**  
DAVID IS  
DIAGNOSED  
WITH  
PANCREATIC  
CANCER AND  
PASSES  
(1950-2022)

**2018**  
JAMIE PASSES  
(1981-2018)

**1992**  
FAMILY HOLIDAY  
TO SOUTH AFRICA

**1994/1995**  
HOUSE 6,  
BEHIND CHAPEL,  
KENNINGHALL

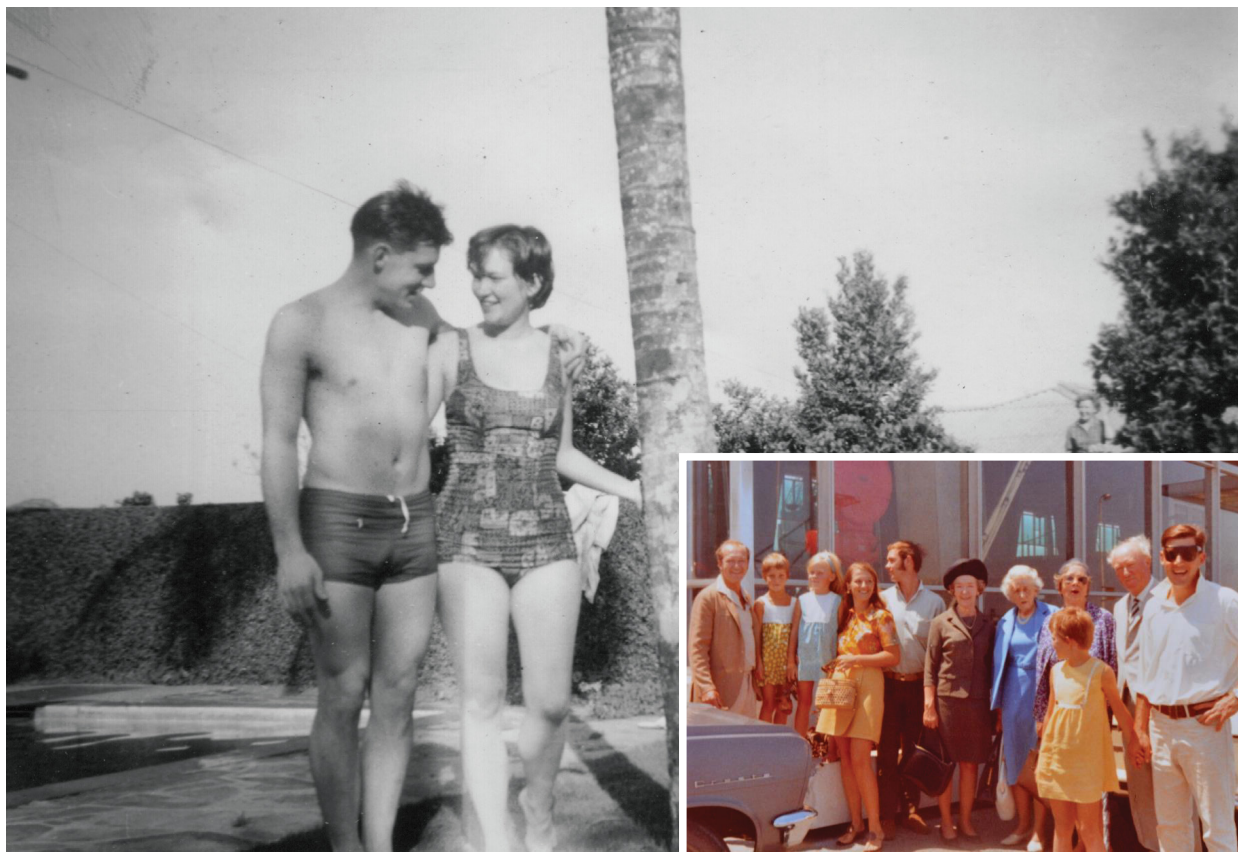
**2019**  
MOVED TO  
NEWLANDS  
STUDIO 6

**2015**  
DAVID HAS  
A STROKE

**1990**  
HOUSE 5,  
BLACK BARN,  
KENNINGHALL

**1987**  
FLOODS  
MOVED TO UK





# CHAPTER 1

## EARLY DAYS (1969–1971)

I woke up to a sensation I had never experienced before. It was in my chest, just above my lungs—an excruciating, searing pain I hope never to feel again. It radiated through the top of my body and down my arms, and every breath I took was agony. I remember seeing spots on the ceiling, and noticing the detail in the cotton curtains and the crinkles in the sheets. But I could make sense of little else. I wondered what the hell was going on. One is just not ready for something like this on holiday. It seemed such an insult, a rude intrusion from somewhere else: just the day before, I had been skindiving for crayfish right in front of our Umzumbe beach cottage, and had felt absolutely fine. How could this be happening to me?

Hearing everybody else in the house waking up, I slowly got out of bed, every breath still a struggle. I felt simultaneously cold and sweaty, and waves of nausea convulsed through me, leaving me weak and drained. Time does strange things when you feel such extreme, life-interrupting pain. It seemed to go on for hours. Eventually, to my relief, it began to recede a bit. I realised that there was no longer perspiration running down my arms and body. I wasn't going to die. Nevertheless, I was still pale and wan, and feeling weirdly outside of myself, in another place.

As soon as my dear parents realised how ill I was, they rushed me to the local doctor. The perplexed man said he had no idea what was going on. He'd never seen anything like it. I was a young man—19 years old in 1969—and slim, fit and tanned as I had recently finished a stint in the army. Discouraged, we then consulted another doctor in the nearby town of Port Shepstone, and he recommended I go to the hospital. It was there that the doctors finally diagnosed a heart attack: a myocardial infarction they called it. I couldn't believe it. It was especially hard to accept the instruction to stay horizontal—for ages! (Well, I was allowed to go to the bathroom but that was about it!)

After a week or so we went home to Pietermaritzburg, and because Mum used to be a top nursing sister at Addington Hospital in Durban, she called the most senior specialist doctors to see me. They assured me the worst was over. The best outcome of all was that I was finally out of the blasted army, declared unfit for duty! At the time all young men of 18 were conscripted for a year or two, expected to pitch up straight from school and do our patriotic thing ... If you were going to university directly after matriculating, you could get away with going to the Kimberley Army Base for three months. But then you had to report once a year for army camp duty,

on and on and on ... a nightmare. Having been at boarding school throughout my schooling, first at Cowan House Preparatory School in Hilton and then Hilton College, I didn't feel the hardship nearly as much as some poor fellows did. One has to learn how to disappear; become a cog in the military machine. Needless to say, being a trooper had never been my intention, particularly not under the racist apartheid government.

I had grown up living next door to Peter Brown, Chairman of the South African Liberal Party, and although I knew his children better than I knew him, I was nonetheless influenced by his liberal philosophy and the way he saw the world.<sup>1</sup> Peter Brown was an exceptional man. His courage was immense, and he had such an influence on me. He was very friendly, and always good to me: understanding and tolerant and always ready to explain what he meant when he discussed his political views. He had been head prefect at Michaelhouse and a most unusual schoolboy, I hear. Financially well off, he devoted much of his time to making good on the liberal promise in a country where privileged white folk were truly not ready or able to take on and understand what he was trying to tell us. And in some ways are still not, I am afraid to say! Undeterred by threats of imprisonment by the apartheid government, he battled on, travelling around South Africa to educate others about the deep injustices of apartheid and hopefully recruit them to the liberal cause. Needless to say, he was put in prison several times by the Nationalist Government for his views.

Apartheid laws had made South Africa a deeply divided, unequal country. As a white, English-speaking person living in Natal, I grew up in very privileged circumstances. Yet having parents with a liberal outlook and with the good fortune

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<sup>1</sup> His son Chris Brown and I were great mates, from the age of two or three, and his twin sister Vanessa was also a good friend. They had a son next, called Anton, who was disabled but a great sportsman and a fine fellow. In fact he set me up well, in a sense, for my son James who was also disabled—but we shall come to that in due course.

to have known Peter Brown, I came in time to recognise the deep injustice of the racist legislation the Nationalists inflicted on black people. I must admit, though, that as a young man I was oblivious of the real atrocities that were happening under our noses. We were a spoilt white minority, either wilfully or complacently ignorant. We know now what was done to our black countrymen, and we shall bear the guilt, and suffer the consequences, forever.

Though I was never cut out to be a military man, I loved reading books on the Second World War, lent to me by a friend of my dad's, Ken Mitchell, who had lost a leg during the War when his Spitfire was shot down by German airmen over the desert in North Africa. Reading was one of the nicest things about being bedridden at home. The other was that my great aunts (maiden aunts both) were ensconced there, as a homely respite from their rather lonely lives in London and Umzumbe. Shirley and Marjorie Moor had never married – and I guess that ought to have meant that they had never had sex. This was probably true of one of them, but most definitely not of the other! They were wonderful and interesting women, pretty old by then, and they took it upon themselves to chat to me and entertain me for hours.

Their father, Frederick Moor, and two of his brothers, had set off in 1872 to stake claims in Kimberley. After a few years, he met and married Charlotte Moodie, and sold his claim to return to Natal and buy a farm near Estcourt. He then followed his father into the Natal Government. By 1906, he had become the last prime minister of Natal, and joined the conferences that led to Union in 1910, when all four colonial prime ministers were knighted, and he became Sir Frederick Moor.

Of Charlotte and Frederick's seven children, The Aunts (as we called them) were the two youngest daughters. Naturally they had stories and gossip and strong views on things. I loved it all! Marjorie founded and ran a small hotel in London, and Shirley lived and worked on the remainder of a farm Charlotte had bought at Umzumbe, which she left to The Aunts when she died because Shirley had helped her to farm it. They kindly gave us a piece of land in the natural bush between the railway line and the beach, where Dad built our cottage. We were the fourth generation of the family to have a place there—and we still do, after a fashion.

Looking back, Mum and Dad were interesting people. Dad (Taffy was his nickname, but he was christened Frederick Robert Owen) was the son of Owen Walters, who had travelled abroad as a cabin boy on sailing ships: 'before the mast' they called it. After three or four years he returned to England to learn mining survey (the Walterses had been coal miners for generations). After qualifying, he left for Natal, where he helped to relay railways and rebuild bridges blown up by

the Boers in the South African War. Though he was a land surveyor, he made a lot of money by inventing a process for extracting tannin from wattle bark for tanning leather, and helped to found the very successful leather tanning enterprise called Natal Tanning Extract. Owen Walters married Lena, the daughter of Sir Frederick Moor, and my dad, Taffy, was their second son. He grew up in Pietermaritzburg but later went to school in England, at Blundell's in Tiverton. This was because his mum got very ill with pernicious anemia and was sent to England, near to where the boys were at school, in the hopes that she might be cured. Unfortunately, they hadn't yet discovered a cure for the disease in England, and she died. The boys returned home when their schooling was over and worked for their father's various businesses.

Dad met Mum when she was nursing at Addington Hospital in Durban. Mum was also born in Natal, the daughter of Norwegian parents who had settled in Zululand. The family lived in Durban until I was born—and by all accounts I was a mistake! They already had two children, Jenny and my older brother Owen (also nicknamed Taffy) and the doctor told them to go ahead and not to worry. Ha ha, lucky me! Ma was very nearly forty when I arrived so I was spoilt rotten and had an older sister and brother to look after me. I have to say that I didn't really get on too well at the various schools I went to because, growing up with older siblings, I was far more interested in adult conversation.

Perhaps this explains why I so enjoyed the company of my maiden aunts Marjorie and Shirley when I was stuck at home in bed. Sadly, this sitting around listening to Marjorie and Shirley's lovely stories had to come to an end. Mum was sick and tired of me being at home. I have to say that the reverse was true too! She and Dad decided to send me up to the highveld to stay with my sister, Jenny Hobbs, who fortunately seemed willing to take me on for a bit. I drove up in my Mini Minor, which had a little 850cc motor (one of the original Minis, not as large and comfortable as the current ones are). Ma came with me—just in case, I suppose. The journey went well. We got there in one piece and in good spirits and then Ma flew home.

Jenny is quite a lot older than me (twelve years to be precise) and had been married to Ron Hobbs for many years by then. They lived out in the sticks in Muldersdrift, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, and had four children, all girls: Madeleine, Jane-Anne, Karen and Sophie. All bright as anything! Ron was the boss at an established business called Hall Longmore, which made steel pipes, and he ran other successful pipe-making businesses too. The family lived well, and had friends around quite often to play tennis and swim in their pool. It was good to be there, and I was grateful for their generosity.

Jenny, an accomplished writer, had been a student with local English potter, Tim Morris. She introduced me to him, and in a turn of good fortune he offered me a job! Well, a sort of a job, really. He paid me R20 a week to come along and help him in his studio: wedging clay, cleaning up and generally messing around. I had no idea how pots were made, or why somebody would want to make them, but he taught me how to throw. Needless to say, I was hooked. Tim was a brilliant potter and such a good fellow to work with!<sup>2</sup>

Tim and I had fun, and we worked hard. We fired his huge oil-burning kiln and usually went out in the evenings as Tim was recently divorced from his first wife. So suddenly, after being laid low in bed at home for ages, things were hectic, in the best possible way. By this time, I had pretty much decided to make my living by any means other than taking a job, and the potting life felt good and right for me, even though it was irritatingly difficult to achieve a decent thrown pot. I reassured myself that this meant that real learning was on the go. Life was coming back to me in spades!

I feel so fortunate to have discovered at such an early age what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Difficult as it can be, working with clay is one of the most satisfying things that one can do! It's hard to convey the pleasure and concentration of the making process; it has held my undivided attention for all of my adult life. And let me tell you, you do need some physical stamina to keep it up!

This is something that I do not speak about often. Peter Brown once said that as a white South African he would not take a job when others were being denied the same opportunity under apartheid. This remark about job reservation for whites only resonated deeply with me. So, when I got home after learning the basics of potting with Tim, my mind was made up: I would remain self-employed as long as I lived in South Africa. I had been planning to study architecture, but reflecting on Peter Brown's words, I decided to enrol at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, to study fine arts, with ceramics as a major subject. This meant that I wouldn't have to work for somebody else or help turn the wheels of the apartheid economy. And it would be the most appropriate career for someone with a heart like mine.

In South Africa (unlike England and many other countries) potters are not very highly regarded. Maybe we are seen as having failed at some other life skill—I don't know! It is certainly hard to make a living out of making pots and, moreover, difficult to borrow money to set up a pottery business—as I found out to my dismay when I tried to borrow money from my dad. My land surveyor brother had previously borrowed loads of money from him so I was understandably quite miffed when he turned me down. I was forced to make do with some lousy wheels and my own hand-built kilns. But then I learned such a lot in the process.

Learning how to make good pottery on a wheel takes ages, and needs a lot of concentration. It's not easy for anyone, particularly if you are not truly interested. Fortunately, I was passionate and determined to improve. I am very glad now that I persevered. My determination had nothing to do with a sense of pottery as my natural calling, or of any innate brilliance as a potter. I was simply determined to make this independent lifestyle work for me. However, I definitely needed the time at university to get better on the wheel<sup>3</sup>, to develop my own distinctive style, and to understand what I was getting myself into career-wise. It was during this time that I decided to make pots 'for use', and not arty stuff for galleries. But I have to confess that the early pots I made when I returned to Natal were awful—not worth speaking about and probably bad copies of whatever Tim Morris was making at the time. I was also using nasty clay that I had dug out myself in Nottingham Road in the Natal Midlands. However, from my very first firing—in an awful, small, smelly, badly built oil-burning, reduction-firing kiln<sup>4</sup> in my brother's shed out at Birnhamwood near Hilton—came a tenmoku glazed gravy jug which I still use today, more than 50 years later!

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2 I learned all about the Anglo-Oriental tradition from Tim. South African studio pottery of the later twentieth century has consistently been described as Anglo-Oriental, because it was seen to adhere to the standard forms of utilitarian ware in plain or subdued colours and decorations. But really the term, used judiciously, describes the aesthetics and ethics of some, but not all, South African studio pottery.

3 Making pots on the potter's wheel is not really 'the thing' at the moment, mainly—I suspect—because it is so hard to do. I'm not sure. But it is what I do best, and so I have continued to work in this way.

4 To fire a kiln using oil or wood is known as reduction firing, and it was the interest of the glazes that inspired such a kiln. An electrical kiln is much easier to use but the glazes are less interesting.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE UNIVERSITY OF NATAL FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT (1971–1974)

I started my four-year Fine Arts Degree at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, later than most. I had had a year out with my brief stint in the army, and recuperating from my illness. But that time out had served me well.

The campus was bigger and grander than it had been when my older sister and brother were students there many years before. But it was still good old 'Maritzburg Varsity' and I was to have a lot of fun there. My sister had graduated there in 1956, and my brother Owen was also there for a time, before his Land Survey degree eventually took him to the Durban campus of the University of Natal.

We first-year students arrived all dressed up to the nines (I was wearing a jacket and tie, for goodness' sake!) preparing to meet one another for the first time. Quite a daunting prospect! But it all went off enjoyably. There were quite a lot of us, including a great many wonderful people like Jenny Scott, Carol Heywood, Sue Barnes, Melanie Hillabrand and Lorna Ferguson. I also met a fellow called Boetie (Andries) Botha, a down-to-earth chap who took no nonsense from the college types who wanted to turn us into 'proper' students!<sup>5</sup> As we said hello, we both knew that we were going to be firm friends. And that is how it turned out.

It was quite a place, the Maritzburg Fine Arts Department, and it took some getting used to after Hilton College. The study of fine art was not what I had expected—frankly one produces a lot of complete rubbish. But one learns slowly, over time, by doing everything on offer: from ceramics to painting, sculpture to graphics, and photography to drawing (mostly nudes). To me it was all quite wonderful. First year Fine Art involved a lot of work in the studios, but it was all pretty simple stuff. We got to know the lecturers and each other very well in the hours spent together. We had excellent lecturers at that time: Professor H.A. Duckworth, Dick Leigh, Hilda Ditchburn, Mike Taylor and Jinny Heath are names I remember, and we got to know them well—after all, you were with them all day long and sometimes into the night.

Professor H.A. Duckworth was quite a character and a talented avant-garde painter too. He used to eat a lot of garlic for lunch, so it was a little difficult to get near him in the afternoons. But he took a keen interest in us and we realised

after a while that this was quite a feat. First year students are not interesting at all. Most of them should leave as soon as possible, and the rest are best ignored! Quite a few people dropped out at the end of that year.

Mrs Hilda Ditchburn, who was a senior lecturer at that time, and head of department, had a bit of a struggle with me, I'm afraid. I'd had a head start over many of the other students, and I couldn't see why I had to learn all of the basics again. However, I eventually went along with it all, and realised afterwards what good sense it made. I wish I could tell her that now, but she died suddenly while I was studying. Looking back on that course, I realise how excellent and well structured it was. We made earthenware, learned to throw on the wheels (again), and were able to use some superior glaze materials from England. Although we didn't get to actually touch the kilns, we could choose the temperature we wanted to use. There was a great chap called Eric who made all the clay for us, kept the place clean and was such a nice fellow.

The pots that I made at university were not much better than my early attempts. However, in my final year I had to choose a subject and make a series, and I chose to make a fairly elaborate dinner service. It was thrown and then the bowls squared off. The glaze had tiny bits of titanium in it that I had picked up off the beach at Umzumbe. (Titanium makes little black dots in the glaze when fired in an electric kiln, but the dots produce a yellowish band around themselves under reduction.) It came out looking quite attractive, I have to say.

I was worried about spending four years getting my Fine Arts degree but, looking back now, it was necessary and good for the soul. I needed all of it, because it gave me a sense of process, a way of looking at what I was doing, and also a much more refined way of looking at myself and others. Besides, it offered an enormous sense of achievement and of considered adventure in aesthetics. I must admit I feel quite sorry for folk who have not had this time to gather themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> I think Fine Arts students were regarded as hippies, and having chosen an easier, less academic course than a straight BA, even though it was a four-year course, we did attend various lectures outside of the Fine Arts Department (English, philosophy and pre-history, for instance).



In 1973, in my third year, I spent my July holiday building a small cottage with a large studio on a six-acre plot that my father had bought years before, right up at the top of Pietermaritzburg's Town Hill, on the edge of Hilton. There was a tiny cottage at the bottom of the steepish piece of land, where first my brother and then I had lived previously. The piece Dad demarcated for me was nearer the road, and had several big white stinkwood trees. I cleared it up, leaving most of the trees, and built half way up on the edge of the scrubby bits. The cottage and studio had the most beautiful view, through some very tall trees, out over the back of Maritzburg, down the Winterskloof valley. And then he gave it to me! Bless him and lucky me!

I finished building just after the July holiday, but so engrossed was I in this enjoyable activity that I didn't concentrate on my studies terribly well that year. However, miraculously, I passed everything (except Art History, that is. My Art History lecturer Raymond van Niekerk was very demanding!<sup>6</sup>) In my final year in 1974, I got through all my subjects but I was pretty bored with learning and university life by then. I had come to find out about ceramics and I was ready to

get on with it all. My studio was prepared for me in Hilton and I had been potting away all the time I was at varsity.

What's more, I had a new girlfriend: the beautiful Michelle Anderson. Her mother Gillian Anderson and I moved in the same circles as we were both potters and we had become good friends. When her daughter decided to study ceramics at Maritzburg varsity, I offered her a short apprenticeship in my studio over the Christmas holidays, just before my first year. And the rest is history, as they say!

In time, she agreed to spend her life with me. She just had to finish up her Fine Arts degree, and we would be able to get married. How could things have been better? I had been involved with other girls before this but, frankly, being in the Fine Arts Department all day long for four years had put a bit of pressure on those relationships. Michelle was a unique find, and she is still here with me—an integral part of my life and of the business we have created together. I couldn't have done it alone.

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6 He became a professor after I left, and then went on to the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, where he ruled for some years—in many ways in direct confrontation with the government of the day. Good for him!

*Many potters have a studio on the same property as their home. However, it makes commercial sense to also include a showroom or gallery set up. This means that your customer has access to your work at reasonable prices, as they are buying directly from you. Vital also is the feedback about your work you receive from them: a win-win situation. This of course would not appeal to everyone, as visitors can be time consuming and disruptive, but it became a recipe for success for our businesses and later, was the foundational concept of the Midlands Meander, at a time when there were few Galleries selling ceramics.*



## CHAPTER 3

### GETTING MARRIED (1976)

Once you have decided to do this thing, there seems to be no reason to dilly-dally. We decided to go right ahead—I couldn't wait! We agreed on the date of 6 September 1976, just before Michelle's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday on the 28<sup>th</sup> of that month. She would still need to write her final exams at university at the end of that year but we didn't see this as an impediment. It is now seen as not really the thing to do—getting hitched at such an early age, that is. But we've been lucky: we have been together ever since and, if anything, I love Michelle even more now than I did then! Parts of our lives together have not been easy but we have learned to rely on each other and have truly enjoyed all of it. Always working together in the business has perhaps given us some advantage. I can tell you that after years at a boys' boarding school, with all that boyish farting and bullying and arrogance, not to mention the smelly socks, to marry a gentle sweetheart like Michelle was heaven! You have no idea.

Michelle's parents, Gill and Peter, were supportive about the marriage—partly because they wanted to go and live in Britain, where Gill wanted to pursue her pottery career. Her dad Peter was also very artistic and an excellent woodcarver when I met him, but earlier in life he had practised as a veterinary surgeon. He was apparently highly regarded as a vet and early in his career was stationed in the Serengeti in Tanganyika, working for the British Government. It was during this time that Michelle was born. She told me that while her father was working there, he was attacked by a lion! He and his policeman fought it off, but he had the scar of the bite marks on his leg forever afterwards.<sup>7</sup>

Just as I was getting immersed in my pottery and enjoying life outside of university, Prof Schoonraad, the new Professor of Fine Arts, asked—or rather, demanded—that I return to the department and lecture while Professor Ditchburn went on sabbatical. I finally agreed, largely because Juliet Armstrong was there and we were great friends. It helped that the Department had attracted some interesting students like Katherine Glenday and Sue Geddys Page, who were worth going back for. Naturally I met a whole lot of new students too, though now I can't remember their names. Although the teaching demands were a nuisance, I learnt a lot through the experience—primarily not to teach or to work for anybody, ever again! I took the money that I had earned and bought Michelle a ring!

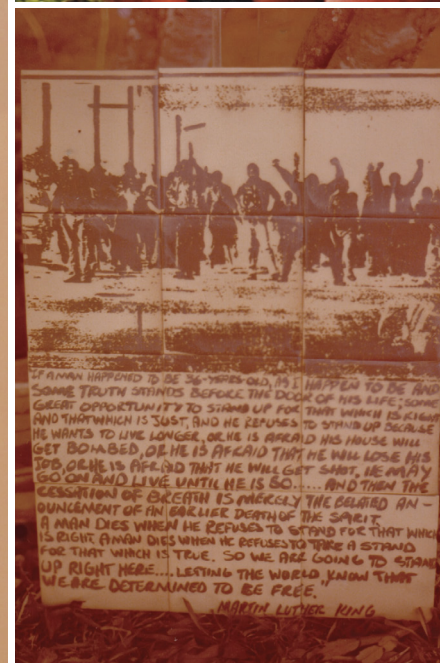
We were happy living in Hilton, and went on to have two children there: Sarah in 1978, then Jamie a few years later, in 1981. With these growing responsibilities my career as a potter was becoming more serious. I had to make and sell my pots

to succeed! Don't forget that I was still unable to borrow any money at this stage. We simply had to 'get' clay, and I used second-hand bricks to build my kilns—all of which was time-consuming and tricky, but good for the learning process. I was still battling along with the rather large, firebrick-built kiln that I had designed myself, and using fuel that I bought from a local man. This was mainly old oil from a dry-cleaning business that he sold to me for R5 for a big drum, can you believe it? (I had to fetch the drums, it has to be said.)

I can't quite remember what I was making at the time, except that my pots were mostly brownish, like many of the pots from that era, and I was probably still digging up the clay in Nottingham Road. I remember making loads of plates, bowls, mugs and some jugs, but there are few pots that stand out. There must have been some successful ones. I do recall making tall urns. These were not decorated but rather covered in a lovely matt white glaze that I have used all my life. It varies depending on what body you put it on, but is always pleasantly off-white and matt without being rough. It will show pouring marks, depending on the thickness it is, and this can also look good. I have a feeling that I also made casseroles during this time, and that would have been a sensible idea from a commercial point of view. I was also making large platters at this stage, and they have been a successful part of my production ever since. I was not aware that they have a reputation for being difficult to make, as I found them fairly easy. It was the decoration that made them popular. I enjoyed the opportunity to paint 'oxides' onto them, and mostly with a landscape theme—an idea that proved successful and so became constant.

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<sup>7</sup> In 2015 Michelle and I, her sisters Biddy and Jane (with her husband Dave), and their mum Gillian revisited the Serengeti (sadly only after Peter had died). It was fascinating to see where the family had lived and to spend time camping in the north of the beautiful Serengeti reserve surrounded by great herds of animals. It is magnificent and vast but felt a little scary, especially when we came across lions hunting and killing a baby zebra for breakfast.



16th June 1976: Soweto Uprising. Hector Pieterse was shot and killed when black students were protesting the enforcement of the teaching all subjects in Afrikaans at schools.

Top: Artist Daryl Nero

With Michelle's help, I was able to sell enough to make a living out of my work, so things were fairly stable. Also, Daryl Nero<sup>8</sup>, a very likeable fellow I had befriended when he started lecturing at the University of Natal on his return from England, had in the meantime moved from Natal to Botswana. He had been painting places in remote parts of the country and he had been invited to have an exhibition at the Botswana National Art Gallery to coincide with Queen Elizabeth's royal visit. This was a huge and prestigious thing, and he invited me to be a part of it. Lucky me! I made some pots, and sent them up, and I have to say that they sold very well—to such an extent that I supplied the Gallery for some years afterwards.<sup>9</sup>

During these productive and happy years in Hilton—before and after the children came—we had some wonderful overseas trips. We wished to spend time with Peter and Gill and also to explore museums and galleries and take in the magnificent architecture of cities like Paris, London and Barcelona. We were also keen to see the great paintings we had learnt about at university, by artists like Rembrandt and Picasso. It was a privilege to experience these famous artworks at first hand.

When the children were still very young, we decided to travel around the UK and Ireland in a camper van, and sent money over to Peter to buy us one before we got there. We were able to travel around England and to Scotland, Wales, and Ireland on a shoestring budget, which was all great fun. Then we decided to go down to Greece. The van was big enough to accommodate Peter and Gill too, so they came with us this time, although they had to sleep in a tent! I have to say that it was pretty adventurous. Off we drove through beautiful France, down to the Mediterranean Sea and along past Monaco and through rural Italy—all the way down to Brindisi (a long and dreary road, this one, on the western side of Italy)

where we took a boat to Corfu. That was a nightmare because we hit some bad weather and I was sure that the boat would sink! However, we made it and had a wonderful stay, eating and drinking alongside the sea, close to where the writer Gerald Durrell (one of my favourite authors) had lived all those years before.<sup>10</sup>

On the way back we visited the ruins at Pompeii, which are incredible. Well, except for the loos. I went along in the early morning and they were too awful for words. Put simply, somebody had decided to poo through the wires of a metal chair, because the loo seat was too disgusting to place your bum on! I had the greatest difficulty doing my business and decided there and then not ever to buy a camper van without its own loo! We also stopped over in Rome, which was great fun. From our base in a lovely campsite just outside the city, we explored famous places like the Vatican Museum. It is such a special place. I had visited years before, with my sister, Jenny. I remember that she had just bashed a man with her handbag (because he had stuck his fingers where he shouldn't have) when we saw a huge tapestry with the spitting image of our brother Owen on it! It was so funny. There he was, dear fellow, dressed up as a lion and looking earnestly down at us in the enormous Vatican Museum.

When our holiday was over, we flew back to South Africa and left the camper van with Peter, to sell again. His friend Bob Chandler really wanted it (because unknown to us it was a very special model.) and so he bought it and decided to do it up a bit. When the mechanics took it apart, they found, tightly wrapped up in the doors and in the various bits of covered apparatus, a stash of hard drugs! Imagine if we had been stopped in Corfu with that lot. I would probably still be in prison there! I can't bear the thought of it. The stuff had been there for a while, so the police in England believed that we knew nothing about it. Phew!

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8 Daryl Nero: 1946-2019. He grew up in South Africa but moved to Zimbabwe in 1981 where his loose and fluid water colours of wild animals were highly sought after. He used to stay with us often, in our various homes and would sit outdoors and sketch. As "payment" for lodgings, a good bottle of wine and a roll of beef, he would gift us with a watercolour. (The Waterwheel – Caversham, The Black Barn – Kenninghall and Roubaix House – Franschoek) I still own his painting, 'Sleeping Sisters'; it hangs over our bed.

9 We were obviously not invited to the opening of our show, because I imagine that the Queen thought that she was looking at 'indigenous' work!

10 I devoured Gerald Durrell's books when I was young. Mind you, I also loved his brother Lawrence Durrell's books. *The Alexandria Quartet* has left a lasting impression on me.



*Caversham Mill by Daryl Nero*

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDING CAVERSHAM MILL (1982)

Back in Hilton, we began to realise that the studio was simply not big enough to allow me to earn a decent living. We had been living there for around seven years together, getting my pots established, and learning a great deal. It was good in many ways, but there was nowhere to sell my pots myself and I had little faith in selling through the local galleries. One leading Maritzburg gallerist strangely suggested to me that I make my work with a ‘sell-by date’—make the items breakable, in other words, so that people could come back and buy another! Needless to say, I declined the suggestion. We knew by then that we had to make our own plans.

In the meanwhile, Dad (who was always trout-fishing around Natal) had told me of an old wood-and-iron, grinding mill-house he had come across on the Lions River at Caversham. He thought that it would make a decent studio, and he also loved its otherworldly and beautiful setting. When I finally got to visit it, I too was struck dumb. I had goose bumps up and down my neck as I walked through this old building! It was set between trees, down on the bank of the Lions River, overlooking a large natural pond with a waterfall at its upper end, just below a narrow, arched bridge built of stone. There was dense indigenous bush across the river, and birds flitted about in the reeds where there were little side streams and runnels. In the deep pool below the falls, I would later discover that there were big fish and otters that often came to play and swim around between the rocks. It was all too beautiful for words; deep green, fresh water, and everchanging according to the seasons, with rocks visible or hidden depending on the seasonal water level. And the mill waterwheel was still there, derelict and broken, but just out of sight from the road, which had probably protected it from vandalism. The rest of the building was in tatters—partly a natural ageing process as it was built around 1840 entirely of yellowwood, but also because local people were taking off bits of the thick old corrugated iron to fix their own homes, quite understandably.

Anyway, I was smitten, and decided there and then that this was to be my studio. But how? I was amazed to discover when speaking to my sister Jenny about it that she had been at Maritzburg Varsity with the person who owned the mill. She now lived in Zimbabwe. I managed to get in touch with her eventually and, to cut a long story short, she agreed to rent it to me for a mere R15 a month. Bingo! (There was a lot of work to be done, you see!) That started quite a complicated process, which entailed me driving out to Caversham every day for a year or more while I fixed up the dilapidated building and built a new studio

and showroom next to it and generally got my new studio going. My wonderful dad took on the rebuilding of the waterwheel and got it working again. It could have ground wheat again if we had wanted it to, but of course we didn’t because of all the rats the grain would attract. Besides I needed to focus on my pottery! The main point about this special place is that it was big enough for me to sell my work myself, from the premises directly to the public, at wholesale prices. And they would remember where they had bought it, and would hopefully come back again!

We were fully committed to Caversham Mill, but with two young children and the long journey between home and work, Michelle took a lot of strain at this time.

It’s quite a full-time job, this pottery business, and if you are not committed to it, you have lost your way forever! You want to love it and have a need to make it all work. It made a big difference being able to sell directly to the public from the studio. We made more money (although not a fortune) and we also made friends!<sup>11</sup> By this time, my work was a lot more sophisticated and better made. It was consistent in quality, well-fired in a newer kiln that I had built at the Mill with fellow potter Jonathan Keep’s help, and my glazes were getting more interesting. I was still making plates and platters, bowls, mugs, tea pots, and so on, but they were more practical: lighter, and better glazed. I could sit down in my studio at Caversham and make loads of one thing at a time, like casseroles with lids for example. And I was perfectly able to make them in different sizes, from small to medium and large. The studio would look full by the time I had finished, and then I would have to be back the next day for all the turning and putting on of handles!

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<sup>11</sup> A fellow potter, Jonathan Keep, had been coming out to work in the studio for ages, and had got married by then. He and his wife Charmaine lived for a period in a part of the Mill buildings, and it was fun having them around. Soon after, they moved to the UK. Jonathan has established himself as the world expert on digital printing of ceramics.







## HOUSE 2 AND STUDIO 3, HOUSE ON HILL, CAVERSHAM

*We finally decided to sell up our beautiful home in Hilton and build a house on a plot of sixty acres just up the road from the Mill. I got in touch with Gordon Small, an architect in Maritzburg, who I knew and held in high regard. Though he was much in demand he made the time to design a home for us—more of a sketch it was, really—but we loved it and built it right away. It had a fantastic view from the top of a high-level stretch of land, on the edge of a grassy, rocky hillside, looking down onto local farms and way up into the afro-montane forests that cap the rolling hills in this beautiful part of the world. And it was built around a grassed courtyard with bedrooms on one side of the courtyard, a front section with our bedroom and the lounge, and then a big kitchen on the other side, with two garages behind that. I must admit that I had fun building it. It was easy to construct, as it had aluminium windows and sliding doors and a corrugated iron roof. It would last for ages. The railway line to Joburg was at the back end of our land, with the main road to Nottingham Road running alongside that in all its glory. We loved the trains going past at night—long strings of twinkling lights winding around the dark hills. What we hadn't really thought*

*about, though, was the winter months, when the grass was parched blonde-brown and the wind blew and the threat of wild fires increased like mad! It was a bit of a nightmare. We were very exposed there right up on top of a grassy hill, and the thought of fire was ever present.*

*The rainy summers were fine, though, and we got to enjoy living out in the sticks! I could walk to my studio down the hill through the long grass and Michelle and I could be together again, without having to drive back and forth. I also did some farming: I grew tomatoes on a half-acre of flat land behind the house and I copied my older brother and put in a sophisticated drip irrigation system like his set-up at Birnamwood—a small pipe with little outlets that gave the plant drips of nutrient-enriched water but didn't sprinkle it everywhere. This meant fewer weeds and much less water wastage! The tomato crop was all covered in shade cloth as well. Then, when Natal had a severe drought, I had water! So, I really made money out of my tomatoes—well, myself and Tony Kerr, an old friend and neighbour who owned a tractor, which was useful!*



After a couple of years, I finally persuaded the owner of the Mill to sell it to me. This was momentous, and came about after a great many troubling phone calls and a deal of rudeness, chaos and much soul-searching. But now what to do? I decided to sell the house and small farm on the hill (I truly wasn't much of a farmer, and we were still scared of the prospect of fire up there) and to build a home at the Mill, close to the water. We didn't have enough money to own both properties. But was there going to be space down there near the river for a house? It was a bushy, green, very small piece of land. And it was still a part of the original farm. It was well-nigh impossible to subdivide a tiny bit of land off a farm in the Natal Midlands!

Thank goodness I knew Oscar Tarboton. He was a long-term land surveyor and a first-class man. He was also a friend and previous employer of my brother Owen, who knew these things inside out. My brother wouldn't have anything to do with my plans, saying that we would never get it done, and I would blame him! But old Oscar didn't believe that for a second, and along he came, smartly attired with his hat and shiny boots, and an assistant to carry his theodolite! In no time at all I owned the waterfall, the old mill, and around an acre or two of the bushy land downstream where the river swept around a bend. It was truly no good for farming purposes but for me it was heaven on earth.



## CHAPTER 5

### BUILDING OUR NEW HOME (1983)

Building again! I decided this time to ask an old architect friend who lived in Durban, Robert Brusse, to design the house. We had got to know each other through Artefact, a shop I owned in Maritzburg, and I liked him enormously. He was just a bit older than us and fussy about his plans, but we decided to use him because we had an oddly shaped space to build on and he was up to the challenge. Basically, it was a steep-sided cliff from which stones were once excavated, I guess for road-building, or maybe for the bridge. It was rather an eyesore: steep, rocky and overgrown with lots of weeds.

He got stuck in, and what a plan he made for us. Built on the outside from stone, it was going to be a truly beautiful home on nine levels, just about impossible to build! We spent the first month just moving rocks, building fires on the big ones to crack them so that they were easier to break and move out of the way. Luckily enough I was able to buy some stonework from an old building down the road that had collapsed, to use for the stone façade.

Tommy, an Indian builder I knew from Howick, was project manager, and even he was fairly puzzled by it all. It was tricky to get the levels right. But we persevered. Slowly, rock by rock, brick by brick, the enormous, rambling thing came to life. Emerging from the old quarry, it looked down on the grassy, unkempt bit of land below the Mill, where the water furrow for the wheel ran away, and out across the winding river and the trees to the hills and forests beyond. A magnificent looking building and a joy to live in: a truly wonderful home.

You approached the ‘front door’ of the house from behind the new studio and showroom building on the Mill property. And there we put a big, strong double door with glass panels, bought from an old bank in Maritzburg, and built a little section of roof over it. Once through the door you went down some steps into a generous, open, brick-paved courtyard. The house was a sort of horse-shoe shape and big doors opened onto the courtyard. Straight ahead of the courtyard, as you entered, were two yellowwood-and-glass front doors made by my dad, and between them a tall glass ‘wall’ (just a sheet of glass) with shelving behind it, and a built-in yellowwood arch for displaying pots. These doors led into the reception room—a big hallway with a four-sided fireplace and a beautiful, multi-coloured encaustic tiled floor that I’d salvaged from an old police station in Maritzburg. From this room you could either turn left to the sunken sitting room, also with its own fireplace, or right up a few stairs to the children’s bedroom and playroom,

with a bathroom between them, and a two-sided fireplace. The open-plan study was in the middle, up some steps, and to the right there were also stairs leading down to the guest bedroom, and our bedroom and bathroom. Both of the front rooms had square old bay windows and views across the garden, the trees and the river, on and up into the forest and the mountains beyond.<sup>12</sup> To the left of the courtyard were two more double doors, glass-panelled with glass semicircles above them, leading into a huge kitchen/dining room with a three-sided fireplace right in the middle of it, and views down to the river and the waterwheel.

I scavenged most of the doors, windows, beams and floors from an old house in Maritzburg that was being pulled down. The floors were Oregon pine, as were the windows, the internal doors and the exposed matching roof timbers. Although I had to scrape and sand them all down, they came up beautifully. Halfway down the stairs under the study was a room which we also used as a spare bedroom and exercise room and then, down at the bottom below our bedroom, was a passage and off it the guest bedroom with its own grand door to the outside, and a bathroom and separate loo next to it. Above all of this, dividing the roof into two areas was a series of windows, a kind of clerestory, on top of the woodwork, which ran between the fireplaces and split the levels of the roof. These let in light all over the house, which was always sunny and bright. Out at the front we built a stone swimming pool, lined with bricks and smoothly plastered, away from the gaze of the visitors to the Mill. And we also had solar-heated water for all the showers and baths and for kitchen use. It was a gorgeous home: a sunny, beautiful, calm house with space to lose oneself in.

I am not sure how Robert felt about our home. We certainly used his ideas, and we loved the plan of the house, but we did have a few struggles. He wanted to finish off the plans properly—and I mean draw in and colour each brick—while

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12 Beautiful and symmetrical, it now has verandahs connecting all the doors. In the middle of the view is now Fée Halsted’s home and Ardmore business, but it wasn’t there then.







I was desperate to get on with it all. So, we dug the foundations before he had finished designing the house! He wanted to have a steeply pitched roof with high ceilings, and he made this all plain as the building progressed. However, not being a very tall chap, I decided that we had reached high enough; I could barely see the ceiling! Plus, the building of stonework around the whole thing was getting out of hand. I called a halt to the building work and popped the roof on, much to Robert's chagrin. But it was all resolved in the end and he went on to design and build several homes, offices and even a church for my friend Charles Lloys Ellis, so I guess that he won in the end.

It may seem I did nothing but build homes, but that is simply not true. That was my side hustle. Most of my time was spent happily making pots in my big studio overlooking the waterfall, trying not to wee because of the noise of the cascading water, and sometimes greeting visitors – hopefully buyers! By now, I was making a lot more individual (mostly decorated) pieces, which went off to various galleries, including the Gaze Gallery down the Natal South Coast where my great friends John and Doreen Gaze sold my pots for years and years, and the Phase Four Gallery in Durban, owned by another great friend, Vance Waldeck.

Around this time, I remember getting in some porcelain clay from Gillian Bickell, who made several different clays for me that we shipped down from Joburg by train. The porcelain clay was superb; I responded to it straight away. Not easy to throw, porcelain is certainly not a clay body for beginners to use, but for somebody who has good wheel sense and has spent time throwing, it is such a treat. Get the right porcelain and you shall be away! Of course, I would have to remake my glazes to suit the new clay, and I had to think about what I was going to make. But all of that started a train of ideas that has grabbed my attention for thirty years or

more. However, I was still making things primarily out of local clay at that stage, and porcelain was a new and exciting experiment on the side.

We had lots of people visiting us now, and living at the Mill made it so much easier. The work looked good in situ in my studios and sold well. By now I was making very successful pots: well-decorated and mature in appearance, with my own distinctive glazes on them. During this period, I was invited by the well-established Maritzburg architect, Gordon Small, to make a new ceramic wall-mounted piece for the new Opera House in Durban, which he had designed. This was probably my first major commission. I decided to make a long mural, constructed out of big, wide bisque tiles imported from Germany, and to add bits of porcelain over them to form a kind of 'landscape'. I installed the mural alongside a walkway, I seem to remember, and it is still there, as far as I know.<sup>13</sup>

To decorate, glaze and fire these tiles took a lot of input and energy but it made a great difference when I bought a new trolley kiln: a gas-fired job, made by Craig Leslie down in Cape Town, and delivered by him too. It was a whole new concept to get used to, but it fired well and in a shorter time than my unwieldy old oil-fired job. I loved it and, though it was quite a bit smaller than my old one, I got used to it quickly and used it until very recently, when I gave it to Western Cape potter Nico Liebenberg. I believe that it's now owned by fellow potter Martin Swart, who has a studio on his family farm near Bredasdorp. The inside bit of the kiln, where the glazed pots stood on the base, was on wheels, so one could whip them out quickly and place the new pots in carefully before pushing them in again. This is why it was called a trolley kiln. It was an entirely new invention for me and very useful because it saved me having to bend when packing the shelves!

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13 Michelle and I didn't attend the opening event because the address was by a Nationalist Party boss who was not exactly welcome in Natal!



## CHAPTER 6

### THE MIDLANDS MEANDER (1984)

We were very happy in our new home and life was good. Sarah was at primary school in Howick, and Jamie was going to 'The Browns' School down in Maritzburg, which catered for his increasingly challenging learning disability. I had space to work in, and we got a fair number of visitors coming in to buy my pots from our showrooms. The only down side was that it was quite far away from town, and in many ways being a conscientious potter uses up a lot of time! I was aware that we were missing out on interesting things happening in Pietermaritzburg, like Juliet's discussions and meetings at the university, and the meetings of the Potters Association, of which I had been a founding member. That sense of missing out on things persists to this day, I am afraid. But, overall, the move to Caversham was working well both for us as a family and for my career.

Meanwhile, a number of artist friends had settled in and around our part of the Midlands. Ian Glenny had been potting away out in the Dargle Valley for ages, and potter Lindsay Scott had recently moved to his parents' farm further up the Lions River, in Lidgetton. Then Robin and Joy Standing, both potters, moved onto a smallholding up the hill from us, on the other side of the main road. We also had great friends living in Nottingham Road, the De Roubaix family. Wim painted and sculpted, and his wife Tina made beautiful batiks. Up the road from them, deep in a patch of indigenous forest, were Andy and Helen Shuttleworth—both accomplished weavers, and very special people!

I'd had an idea for a while of creating an 'art route' between our various Midlands studios. I was inspired by the Wine Route down in the Cape, which Michelle and I had visited before, and I just couldn't let the idea go. Being far away from customer bases like Pietermaritzburg and Durban and Johannesburg, we all needed something like this to sell our work more efficiently. The Midlands was at that time fairly remote and certainly not a place to go looking for artworks. In fact, it was barely explored by many Joburg people who flashed through 'that' stretch on the main road before they got to Durban.

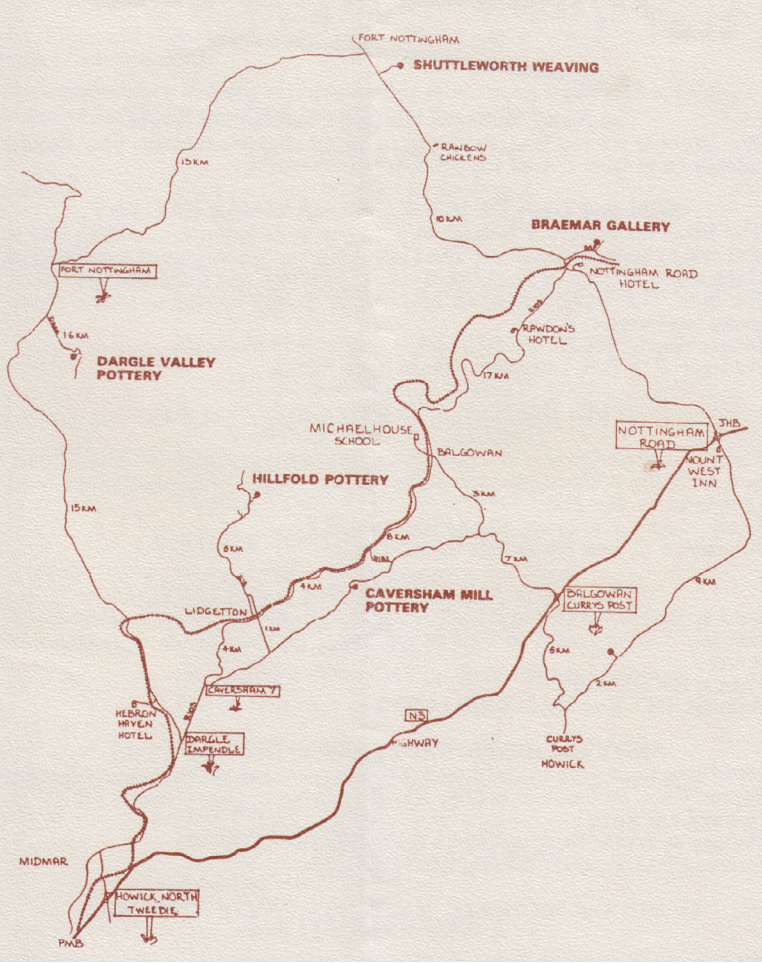
We each had our own loyal following and unique mailing lists and I suspected friends would be reluctant to change this status quo. But I spoke to Jenny about it, and she was encouraging. I asked her what we should call it, clever me! She phoned me back after a few days, and said, 'The Midlands Meander ... and now you can pay me!' I did! Then I took the plunge and invited all of the artists around for dinner and a bit of a booze-up, just for fun, just this small group. We did them proud, with super food shared around the kitchen table, an abundance of drink and finally a swim in the pool afterwards, around midnight. And I said to them, 'I am going to set up the Midlands Meander—or words

to that effect—and you are all going to be partners in this amazing project.' I didn't mention sharing mailing lists, or anything. Thank goodness we were all pissed and thrilled with the idea. Imagine that, when I'd been convinced that they would all say an unreserved 'No!'

So that is, roughly, how it all started. I remember it being a lot of work and hassle, with Michelle writing up addresses and me drawing maps. I spoke to several local hotels, and some, including Rawdons near Nottingham Road and the Hebron Haven Hotel in the Dargle Valley, agreed to advertise on our first little brochure, which I had drawn by hand and printed off. And then we decided to hold a 'rolling' Midlands Meander Exhibition at each studio and, quite frankly, the rest is history. We got such a lot of friendly advertising from all of the magazines and newspapers, because I suppose it was novel and they loved the idea of an original venture. We even got TV interested and they did several filmed bits on us! It worked so well, and people enjoyed it hugely. I can't understand why more creative practitioners don't think of doing it themselves.

It was also good for a large number of local people who could finally get decent employment, particularly if they were disabled in some way, and couldn't work physically on a farm. Although Fée Halsted, who started Ardmore Ceramics, was never a member of the Midlands Meander, her first sculptor Bonnie Ntshalintshali was a great example of this, as she was slightly disabled. In fact, quite a large number of Fée's studio artists were disabled, but this made no difference to their success. Her wonderful Ardmore people made such a difference to the artistry of clay, and to this day they are one of the major successes of the Natal Midlands.

My mate Tim Morris saw what we were doing and he in turn set up the Crocodile River Ramble, which lasted for quite a while in Muldersdrift in the (then)



Transvaal. There have been other similar ventures, but the Midlands Meander is by far the most successful and is still going strong. It has become very big now, quite beyond what we had in mind at the time. And it has changed a bit, with not only artists' studios but eating places and special activities on offer too.

For us, it filled the need to attract buyers to our studios and to cut out the shops in between to some extent. It also meant that we each got a better idea of what

people actually wanted from us. There is nothing like buying a piece of artwork from the person who has made it. I think it also stopped people speeding through from Durban to Joburg, and opened up the Natal Midlands to more discerning folk, who enjoyed looking around at the local art and craft on display, eating at some of the excellent restaurants, and enjoying the beautiful views and rustic surrounds. I am proud of the part that I played in this whole project ... although one gets pretty small acknowledgement for it!







*Mural for the Natal Playhouse in Durban 1984*



## CHAPTER 7

### FLOODS (1987)

By 1987 Malcolm and Ros Christian had come down from Joburg and chosen to live next door to us. Malcolm had bought the chapel just up the road as a studio, and built a home in front of it. It was great having friends right there. Malcolm is a consummate printer, and he had the most interesting folk down to work and produce in his studio: the very finest of fine art lecturers and artists, including people like William Kentridge, Andrew Verster and Robert Hodgins. We made many more friends and new acquaintances through Malcolm's wonderful printing business, and he and Ros are still there. So is Fée Halsted, who came to live in a thatched house just across the river from Caversham Mill after we had left, and started Ardmore Ceramics.

I had a fellow called Phineas Mweli working for me at the time. He had worked at Michaelhouse as a painter and had come to me via Robin Standing, who had employed him in his studio at the school. He was great and we worked well together, with Phineas making and wedging up clay, and doing quite a lot in the studio, keeping it clean and packing kilns. He even made little guinea fowl out of clay and some oxen too, which we sold really well. He loved the Mill too! I built him a home there and I paid him reasonably well, I thought, and he was satisfied. But boy, the local farmers didn't agree! He got hell from them as, once word was out, many of their poorly-paid staff wanted a salary rise! I once saw somebody drive across the bridge and deliberately splash him from a puddle. I didn't take too much notice of these folk, but it came to my attention that they were not happy with my 'spendthrift' ways. I guess that the Midlands Meander didn't please some of them either, although I can't think why not.

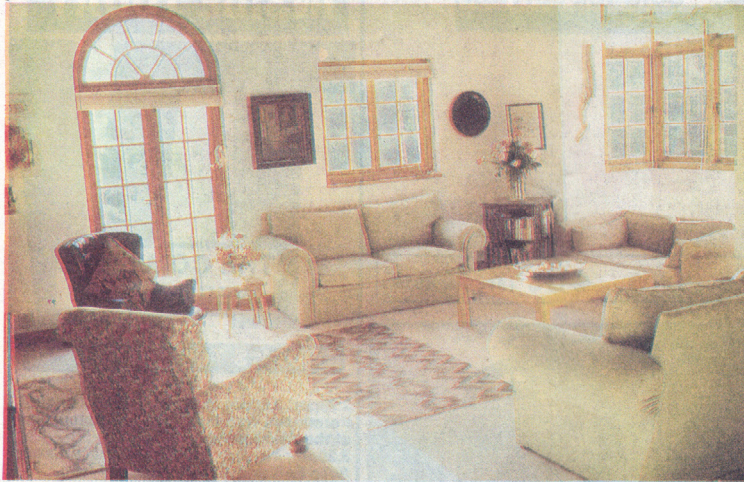
All around there was a sense of rising racial tensions. Around this time, when Michelle was driving into Howick to fetch Sarah and James from school, she came across bodies lying in the road. The victims had been shot by the police. It was such a shock for her to see something like this, and although we knew as well as anyone that the country was falling into chaos and confrontation in the State of Emergency in the late eighties, we just couldn't believe it. The violence was suddenly very close to home.

I vividly remember at one of my exhibitions chatting to a group of Natal University folk, including old friends Prof Deneys Schreiner and his wife Elsa, who asked me what I thought. When I said that I was thinking of leaving the country, a couple of other people there were incensed. What to do? We were doing very well out at Caversham Mill, we had great friends in the area and we loved our home! On the other hand, Peter and Gill were living in England and they had made it clear that they would do anything to have us safely there. Besides, Michelle's sister Janey

and her husband Dave had moved out there too. Our son Jamie was doing well at 'The Browns' School, but we worried about him, and we wondered what his future held, and how we were going to cope with him moving forward. We had taken him to all the experts around Natal, but they were not aware of the Autistic Spectrum then, and though they gave us good advice, of course we felt that there could be more specialist help in the UK. Sarah was happily at school in Howick and she had great friends around, with Bridget De Gersigny and Sally Christian living almost next door. However, where would she go next? We were not truly enchanted with the local so-called 'good schools', which were all single sex!

Then there was my work. I was a good potter, of a particular type, and I had made quite a name for myself doing what I do. There is a lot that one can make with clay, but I had decided, early on, that I would throw and I would make useful items! I had been accepted into the higher ranks of the Potters Association, and had in fact led Natal into it, while my friend Tim Morris was doing an excellent job influencing the Transvaal branch. I sold most of what I made from Caversham Mill, but I also got involved in a number of other events and exhibitions. However, I felt that the long hours of relentless work were having an effect on what I was able to produce. It was not that I was too busy, or that my work was suffering in any way. It was that I was sure there was more to this! I could do better, and the very best potters in the world were in England.

So, with this and that and the other things (mostly Jamie and the dire political situation) Michelle and I decided to go. This all makes it sound as if decisions were made in a rather mindless, impulsive way but that is not so. We spent ages deliberating over our future, and the futures of our children. I had my mum and a brother and sister still in the country (dear Dad had died by then), so there was a lot to weigh up. On the other hand, we were not going to go that far away, and we had our children to think about. Goodness me, it takes a lot of time and careful consideration.



TASTE and elegance: the comfortable sitting-room of the renowned Natal potter, David Walters, as it was before the deluge swept through the home.



AFTER the disaster. Most of the family's furniture was washed away, and the little that they managed to salvage was completely ruined.

# Paradise swamped

'...the torrent was heading for us, and we realised we had to go at once.'

**Sue Segar**

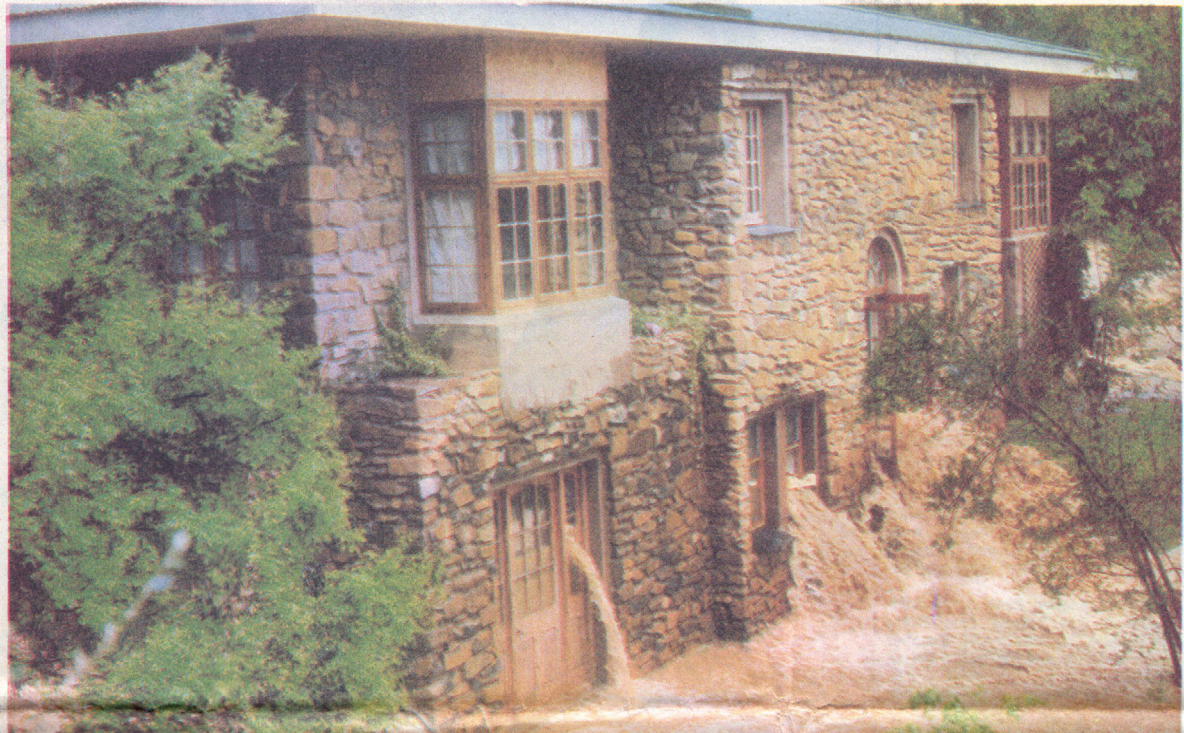
THE renowned Midlands potter, David Walters, had almost finalised the sale of his R300 000 dream home — the beautiful Caversham Mill Pottery — and was all set to move to England with his family, when Natal's disastrous flood struck.

Only hours after the first rains fell last Monday night, the famous old yellowwood mill was rocking and water was seeping into the studio and self-built home of Natal's most prominent potter.

And when that happened David, his wife Michelle and their children, Sarah (9) and James (6), were forced to turn their backs on their beloved home of eight years and consider their own safety.

Before disaster struck, the view from David's studio was superb. The sturdy mill — which David and his late father Taffy rebuilt about eight years ago — overlooking the stony Caversham bridge and the bubbly Lions River were as much an attraction to Midlands meanderers as the popular pieces created in his workshop.

The scene is unrecognisable now. The river is a muddy torrent, edged with uprooted trees, broken rock and debris. The bridge has been destroyed.



"We started worrying on Monday night, when the rain fell so hard that it filled the entire space under the bridge," David told reporters yesterday. "Then water was streaming over the bridge and around its sides — just metres from the mill and the studio.

"We realised the mill could be washed away, so Michelle and I and a few labourers used sand-banks to try and divert the water.

"It was soon clear that this wouldn't work. The water was pounding down the river so fast, crashing huge rocks together with the most terrifying sound. Suddenly we saw the mill collapse under the pressure of the water.

"We then saw a torrent of water heading for the studio — and we realised we would have got at once.

"We locked the studio and our home, and put bags of clay in the doors to stop the water. Then we took the children, the dogs and the silver and went to stay with neighbours."

David said he returned to his home the next morning to find the house almost submerged.

"The water was up to the top of the walls of the house. Most of the furniture in the studio and the house had been washed away. Even the furniture we rescued was completely ruined."

David said he was "more than devastated" about the loss of most of the contents of his studio: "It was full of the most beautiful showcases, pot-

## Potter's dream home wrecked

tery and equipment. Most of that was washed away."

The Waltersers are staying with neighbours and doing their best to repair their home so that potential buyers may see it looking as good as possible.

"There is so much to be done. We were hoping to move to England in December, but we will have to postpone that. I want to see Caversham looking its best before I sell," he said. "It was like a little paradise. Looking at all the destruction, it's hard even to remember what it was like before.

"If Caversham were still my 'everything', I would be distraught, but luckily we have focused our emotions on the place we have bought in England."

The Waltersers have bought a house in Kenninghall, Norfolk, which was built in 1450. There is an old Georgian chapel on the property, which David will transform into a new studio.

THE house awash: torrents of water pouring out of the windows and doors of the once-beautiful home. The house was valued at R300 000 before the disaster floods struck. Now the family is trying to



DAVID Walters hard at work on his pottery in his studio before the floods struck, destroying much of his work. He was "more than devastated".

## Many roads still affected by construction work

CONSTRUCTION work is still taking place on a number of flood-hit Natal roads, and motorists are urged to exercise caution this weekend.

Here is a comprehensive list of most of the affected roads:

**Durban to the Free State and Transvaal:** Construction work is taking place on the concrete section of the N3 between Camperdown and Pietermaritzburg, and also near Balgovan.

The old R103 is closed between Tweedie and Nottingham Road, and motorists should also exercise caution when travelling on the N3 between Escourt and Ladysmith.

The AA also warns that access ramps are being built at a site known as Heavitree, 6kms from the Estcourt/Loskop off-ramp, and the double carriageway has been narrowed for two kilome-

**Daily News Reporter**

tres.

At the Gilbert City turnoff, north-west of Ladysmith, the new freeway intersection is under construction, and a 60 km/h speed limit is being enforced.

The alternate route from Estcourt is via Winterton, Bergville and Oliviershoek Pass on the R615, which is closed to heavy traffic, but open to light vehicles.

Trucks and cars towing caravans are advised to travel on the R23 from Ladysmith via New-castle and Volksrust.

**Durban to Golela via the N2 on the North Coast and Zululand:** The new weigh bridge is open at Gingindlovu, and passing lanes are being built on the main road 343.

The R34 between Nkweleni and Empangeni is closed to traffic although the Sodwana Bay Road is in a fair condition. The Cape Vidal road is in a poor condition.

The old North Coast Road from Virginia Airport to the Umdloti is being resealed and there are stone stockpiles obstructing visibility.

**The Natal Midlands:** The only major route open to through traffic is the R33. Traffic between Pietermaritzburg and Greytown is being directed via the R33 and the R614 to Wartburg and via the R613 through Dalton and back to the R33 in Greytown.

The R74 between Colenso and Greytown is open to light vehicles, and so is the R33 between Greytown and Dundee.

Motorists are warned that the

R74 halfway between Greytown and Muden is being realigned and repairs are underway on the Jamieson Drift Road.

The Richmond/Hella road and the road north of the Sani Pass Hotel are both closed to traffic.

**Durban to Kokstad via the South Coast:** Construction work is being carried out on the N2 at Amanzimtoti and traffic is reduced to a single lane for short stretches.

Resealing is also taking place for 20km along the R78 in the Umbumbula area, and between Port Shepstone and Harding, so motorists must be careful of loose stones. The Harding bypass has been opened to traffic, but construction is still taking place on a five kilometre stretch of the R56 south of Matatiele, and the road is closed between Richmond and Ixopo.

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Just about then, when we had somebody interested in buying the Mill, and we were thinking about buying a lovely property in Norfolk, disaster struck. It was on 28 September 1987, Michelle's birthday, that the rain fell and fell (it was a cut-off low pressure weather system) and the level of the river rose and rose, and loads of trees from along the neglected river banks upstream came washing down and blocked up the arches of the bridge, so the floodwaters diverted. They came down the sluice channel for the waterwheel, washed away the road and the small bridge there and went right through our buildings. The old Mill building was ruined, entirely washed away with all of my wheels, clay and pots, plus my showroom fittings, but my other studio building survived. Our home was inundated, but also survived.

And we were there through it all! We watched the water rising, bit by bit, running over the lands below the house, making the waterwheel spin around faster and faster, and then finally bursting through the front door and rushing into our home. We did what we could do in the house, like packing things up into higher

rooms, even though obviously we didn't realise the level the water would eventually reach. We also packed up the car with various things (our photos, some clothes, Sarah's favourite yellow shoes, some pots, the dog and both of our children) and we drove out of the gate sliding and splashing, just as the water was entering there!

We spent the night with Malcolm and Ros Christian, bless them, and in the morning, although the flood was abating, I could see the damage. Our buyer disappeared instantly but, apart from that, everybody else was as kind as could be. Our neighbours all came around, and helped us take things out of the house through a window in Sarah's bedroom. My friend Charles Lloys Ellis drove down from Joburg with an employee of his to help me out. And my brother Taffy and his boys came too, and helped me build onto the studio, so that we could use it again. Thank goodness I was covered by insurance, because the local flood relief authorities didn't think that we had lost anything much, and decided not to help. They gave us nothing—no money or other assistance at all! I have never been sure why, especially as it was one of the worst floods ever to hit Natal.





## CHAPTER 8

### ENGLAND (1988–1999)

We decided to take a ship from Cape Town to England. It seemed right to float off into the future, taking time out as a family after these stressful months.

We booked on the Achille Lauro—in that window of opportunity after it was hijacked in the Mediterranean, and before it sank in the Indian Ocean. It was big and fairly comfortable, and the Italian staff catered superbly. Well, they must have because, although I felt a little seasick, I didn't ever miss a meal! We stopped over in what was then called South West Africa (now Namibia) and the Canary Islands. As we approached the south coast of Britain for the last bit of the journey, the sea turned awfully rough and I got very seasick. I have a feeling that they must have switched off the anti-rocking outfit on board. At last, just before we went off to sleep, there was England in the distance. What a relief!

We woke in the morning, sensing the boat still at last. We realised that we had docked at Southampton, and that everybody on board had already left! Gone they were—the whole lot of them, including all the sailors. At least my car was sitting on the dock, with its key in its ignition. But that was it. There was nobody to give us breakfast, or help us carry our stuff, and nobody to say goodbye to; a completely abandoned ship. So off we went too. We simply walked down the gangway, got into our car and drove out of the docks, following the road to Norfolk.

To begin with, we rented part of a big, old Baptist Church Farmhouse in the village of Kenninghall. (Michelle's parents had bought it before we moved over.) The old—and I mean old—'hall house' dated from 1450. Though ancient, it was in quite good nick, and had been lived in for ages (not always by humans, as at some stage it was apparently used as a pig shed). It was a fairly big, well-balanced building, with an upstairs gallery around three sides, reached via two staircases in the front hall, just after the front door. Peter and Gill had a bedroom at one end, the children slept in the attic, and Michelle and I had our bedroom on the first floor. Our living room and kitchen were on the ground floor. I woke up on the first morning there with my head frozen. I had never been so cold! But it surprised us how quickly we got used to that aspect. We enjoyed living in this old place, with its wooden beams plastered into the walls, its ancient staircase, and the way the whole house wobbled when you opened the front door! We were also getting used to new people, some of whom regarded us as awful South African foreigners and the worst type of racists. And, of course, I had to get going with my pots! I had been able to join the Suffolk Craft Society before I got there, and I learned pretty quickly how fortunate I was and how well it was run, a complete godsend.

Before settling into our new life in England, we fixed up Caversham Mill as much as we could, and managed to confirm a buyer: a fellow from Swaffham in Norfolk! Yes, indeed. We sold the property to one John Buckle who lived just up the road from us in Kenninghall, and who wanted to use the studio for his paper restoration business. Although we didn't get exactly what we wanted for the Mill—in fact far from it—we did OK. It all helps!

Once Caversham Mill was sold, Peter and Gill and Michelle and I reached a consensus that we wanted to buy the Kenninghall property together. It suited us in many respects, particularly because there was ample space and we could all live and work there comfortably. The garden was generous, with a flat, grassy area to one side of the house for Peter to grow his veggies in—protected from the wind, which was pretty chilly up there. It was surrounded by beautifully built walls, almost as old as the house. Magnificently pruned against the old red bricks were espalier fruit trees: apples, apricots, plums, figs and more. In time Peter's kitchen garden would produce a healthy abundance of asparagus, rhubarb, beans, berries, lettuces, carrots, and even gem squash.

In the garden beyond, but still on the road, was an old Particular Baptist Chapel, formally Georgian and built of knapped flint.<sup>14</sup> It was set back from the road, with two rows of smart, raised sarcophagus-styled graves in front, and masses more graves around it, all with names on. (One had written upon it, as a constant reminder, 'Be Ye Also Ready'!) Sunday services, we were told, used to start early in the morning and went on until sunset. Inside there was a baptismal font, a large pool in the floor in front of the pulpit, where people went in to be baptised 'total immersion style' (in the summer I should think!). Water from the roof came

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<sup>14</sup> Kenninghall Baptists called themselves 'Particular Baptists' in light of the fact that from their inception they followed the practice of 'Strict Communion'. (They might more accurately have been called 'Strict and Particular'!)



down hand-thrown ceramic downpipes that ran under the floor, so it stayed full all the time.

The place had fallen out of use as a place of worship many years before. Mr Mackay Miller, the owner, was a publisher. He kept the chapel full of books, among many other bits of rubbish such as old carpets from his house—a load of junk, really. It was full of planked seating, and had some back rooms with the oldest loos I had ever seen in my life: drop-it-into-a-bucket type loos made of holes in a plank. There were three in a row, and then a littler one for children, so they wouldn't fall in.

We decided that the old chapel would be just the right place for our new pottery studio. We would have the studio downstairs and a showroom upstairs where visitors could buy pots and see us working—but not touch! The building had a projecting doorway annex, with an arch above the door. We chose this spot for a sign bearing the name we had chosen, so that the Chapel didn't lose its identity: 'The Particular Pottery'. Although we bought the Chapel together with Michelle's parents, the reduced price we got for Caversham meant that I had to go and borrow money from the bank to get our new pottery started. I met my bank manager, Pat Witty, in Diss and because I had never had to borrow money before (and haven't needed to since) I wasn't sure what to do. I invited Pat to come to The Particular Pottery and see what we were doing. She gracefully accepted and arrived with another chap, to look around. Then, without hesitating, she loaned me 50,000 pounds, with interest to start accumulating after only six months! I was truly astonished. What a blessing, and what a wonderful first meeting. I was and forever will be grateful to Barclays Bank. I confess that I still bank with them—and why not!

On the other side of the walled garden, behind the house, was a tall and spacious agricultural barn. It was pretty old and appeared tatty at first, with some of the wood on the outside rotten and falling off. But the oak beams—which were huge and beautiful—were mostly still strong. They were up off the ground, on top of a low wall, so they were out of the wetness too. As one would expect for a barn, it was a lofty space running one way, with tall, wide doors and access through the middle for a cart and horses to go right through, loading or unloading on their way. The bit where the horses stood while the wagon was being unloaded was also roofed, so the whole building was T-shaped in plan. Beyond the big and more recently built sheds that stood behind the barn was a long, beautifully built brick stable block with high, arched doors. There were some remnants of wooden planking on the cobbled stable walls, and its back was built into a bank next to the old Baptist Church next door. Unbeknownst to us (but apparently not lost on everybody else), was the fact that the bank built up from the constant digging of graves over the thousand or so years the church had been there!

The stable building was set back from the road and, although it was smallish, we decided to convert it into our home. It had four horse stables plus a tack room, and another—probably a feed room—at the end, all in a long row. We made our rather larger bedroom downstairs at the end of the building, near the only bathroom (behind the stairs). The lounge was next, then a kitchen, and on from that a nice conservatory that I bought. The dining room was half of the conservatory and it was built onto the kitchen as a part of the old store room that was there. We kept most of the room, and added the conservatory onto the front of that. We used the original stable walls and doorways, although two of them were converted into windows. I had some stained, lead-lined glass windows put into the rounded sections over the four outside 'doors', which looked wonderful too. They were designed by a local artist, and showed the change of seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter. The children's bedrooms were in an upstairs section we had to build from scratch, as there had never been an upstairs before. One was above our bedroom, and the other above the sitting room.

The build was fairly hellish. But I learned fast, and loved it all. In South Africa we are simply not used to things like skylights or the strict laws pertaining to plumbing and electricity and that sort of thing—or the dislike of planners for ordinary front doors! (They had to be suitably brown, wooden stable doors.) I had to put reinforced iron bars into the wall at the back, and that ran under the floor too. We put a great big Swedish woodburning fireplace into the lounge, and although I had to take out all of the old bits of wood from the stables, we kept the brickwork intact and naked, and did our best not to alter it too much. Well, except for loads of insulation. At the end of all our battles with the exacting and long-winded planners, they wrote to me and said that I could sell the building if I wanted to because I had done such a good job on it. This was excellent news. But at that point we certainly had no intention of selling.

It was a super place to live in: comfortable in summer and warm in winter. And our children loved it. They were both getting on and settling down—Sarah, by now at the local school close by, had become friends with a girl of a similar age living across the road, Zia Wordingham. And Jamie was being well looked after. He was taken to school by taxi every morning, and brought home again. He initially attended a local school but, after assessments, the authorities sent him all the way into Norwich, to The Parkside School, where he received a specialised education with other moderately learning-disabled children. He was very happy there.

I have several vivid memories of our time living there. One was the day that Nelson Mandela was released from Victor Verster Prison after being incarcerated by the apartheid government for twenty-seven years. We sat in our living room on that Sunday in February 1990 and watched it all unfold on television—such a momentous event. We felt so far away!







Another vivid memory from that time is a visit from Tim Morris and his family. It was wonderful to see them all. Looking back on their stay with us, it's clear that Tim had come to say goodbye. He came to see only his mum and ourselves on his visit. Although we knew that he was unwell, we didn't realise just how intolerable his depression and other illnesses had become. Tragically, not long after he got back to South Africa, he took his own life. This was very hard for us to accept, but with hindsight we understood that life had become a relentless battle and he had just had enough. He was a great and talented individual, a master potter, to whom I owe so much. And he could not have been kinder or friendlier towards me and my extended family. We shall not forget him.

By this time, we had come to appreciate how very discerning the English pot-buying public are. They demanded a very high-quality product, with clean, well-designed glazes and neat and tidy foot rings, and they wanted something unique—for a good price! In South Africa, I had become used to my work being regarded as quite special. Here I was a relative nobody, and I had to prove that I was OK. It took time, but in fact we got there. It's difficult trying to explain how all of this works, but it's really patience and hard work that makes the difference. To our surprise and relief, the English customers were very tolerant of us. They liked the idea that we were from South Africa, and that we made slightly different pottery from the other potters around. We were happy to learn from our new milieu and adapt to the more exacting market. Looking back, my pots did become more refined. It certainly did me good to be working in a climate where the potters are good, and committed to their work.

When we got to England, the economy was in full swing, and it was fairly easy

to sell pots. But the longer we stayed, the more difficult it became. However, one gets so much more out of selling the pots yourself. You learn, and you meet people, and you find out what they want. I had also taken my big gas kiln over with us, so I had that advantage too. We supplemented our income at this time by making moulded ducks, in a variety of shapes and sizes. This gives somebody who comes in the opportunity to buy something, at least, and I had a local friend, Val Garland, who came in once a week to make them. They sold well.

Unfortunately, English customers expected me to make the same things over and over again! This was not particularly interesting for me, as I wanted to make new things: experiment, use different clay, fire my pots differently, and come up with novel pieces. So, this is what I did. I began by making items similar to my Caversham Mill repertoire, but then moved on to make pit-fired pots. This means placing them into a low firing in a pit in the garden. (Don't try this in winter!) When you burn paper or sawdust, some of the scorching is visible in black marks on the pot, while some of the black can be achieved by putting sticky paper tape on the pot, or even by painting or dripping wax on it. It's a difficult thing to do, but such a blast to get it right!

I was also working quite a bit in porcelain by this time, and had discovered Potclays, who made my clay body. I made mugs and jugs, bowls, plates and platters, vases and urns—but obviously no ovenware. All of these items were heavily decorated with loaded brush marks, depicting colourful flowers and fruit. And, of course, I continued decorating with my signature landscapes. At last, The Particular Pottery was becoming known, we were making a decent living, and we were feeling less and less like outsiders.



*The Black Barn by Daryl Nero*

## CHAPTER 9

### THE BLACK BARN (1990–1995)

I couldn't stay away from a renovation project for long! I was dying to do up our barn. In many ways, I was glad to have gained experience by starting with the project on the stables, because converting the barn into a home was an enormous and challenging job. Perhaps I was not initially aware of it, but there were not many barns available for renovation, and most of them were not right in the middle of a village. At that time there was resistance to converting agricultural buildings into homes.

I guess the fact that The Black Barn was set quite far back from the road, and had trees in front of it, counted in our favour. It was big, beautiful, and very old—the date 1794 was carved on a wooden beam in the spare bedroom. Mr Mackay Miller, who owned it before us, had recently had the roof redone, with felt under the tiles, and new wooden joists underneath that.

But where to start? A local architect called David Cummings drew up the plans for us, and he designed a superb home with showrooms, galleries, four bedrooms, two sitting rooms, and a large kitchen and dining room. We knew it was a big barn, but we didn't realise just how large until we looked at David's plan! With such glorious views, we decided to build our kitchen and living room upstairs, and to sleep downstairs. The living room would be a spacious, tall room, reaching right up to the top of the barn, with glass along the front set two metres up inside the building. That meant there would be a bit of a verandah along the very front, and in order to preserve the 'barny look' of the whole, you wouldn't be able to see the glass from outside when you were downstairs looking up. Clever! It seemed necessary to show the barn to its fullest height and splendour inside, with all of the oak beams visible. So, we made the upstairs quite open, with walls only where the kitchen and living rooms were, on each end of the barn. Otherwise, it was open all the way up to the roof, with the dining room overlooking a wide space at the top of the stairs.

I had spoken to Ian Fleming about the building project, and he was keen to tackle it. I suppose that not many small builders get an opportunity like this. He was a really nice chap (multi-talented too—a specialist electrician as well as a builder) and he was very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about working on a Grade II listed building. I paid him by the day worked. This included wages for his mate Alan and another fellow called Ted, who was pissed every day after lunch in the pub down the road! Even if we were working on a high scaffolding, he was pissed, and so of course I worried about him. But Ian told me that his wife (Ian's cousin) was also inebriated all the time and that, as this was their normal state, I shouldn't be too perturbed! Because the building was so tall, and we had to work at a height some of the time, I got our neighbour's boyfriend, Magnus, to come on board as well. He was a high-level building worker, and very good too. Quite a crowd, but they were really nice

fellows, and we all got on well. We would sit down to Earl Grey tea and biscuits together each morning. And so, slowly but surely, it all came together.

The only bit that didn't look like it belonged to a barn was the front door, which I found in a scrap yard down the road. It was probably Victorian—made of old stained glass inserted into a wide door, with little bits of floral glass on either side and above. (Easy to break into, I suppose!)

The plan inside was unique. On entering you faced the back of the staircase. However, you could look straight up and see all that loftiness above you, with the uprights on the stairs all around—a deliberate arrangement and a good one. To your right, beyond a couple of internal glass windows, was the special fireplace wall: a wide, 'old brick' column which started on the ground floor, with a small wood burner in the ground-floor sitting room, then up through the floor of the main sitting room upstairs, to a bigger fireplace, and then on up through the roof. The fireplaces had to have double-walled, stainless-steel pipes—long ones, all the way up (by law) and a tad expensive, as you can imagine.

To your left was a hat and coat nook, with a door to the spare bathroom that led into the spare bedroom. From the spare bedroom, one could look out over the fields towards Banham, with nothing more out there but our mixed hedge at the top of the field. Sarah and I had some sweet Angora goats out there for a while, but they were too much trouble to look after for long!

In front was the vast showroom area, half the entire ground floor of the barn—going away to the back windows and double doors, where the horses used to stand, and a bit extending to your left as far as the back wall as well. Ian took a lot of time and trouble over the new walls to this section. He built them using the original



oak. Only the top and bottom beams were big beams of oak that I had bought after many oak trees blew down in the storm of 1987. They were also cheapish!

Staying downstairs, you could walk around the stairs and through a door into the downstairs sitting room, and then on into the children's bedrooms, with their bathroom to the left. This was all snug and warm, even in the winter, and it was where we popped our TV. The children's rooms both looked out from the brick-built end wall of the barn, into the garden and lovely, tall trees—including a huge walnut tree, which gave plenty of nuts. If, on entering, you went straight on, you came to the back of the barn, and could look out into our pretty walled garden (which we were able to create when we took down the sheds) through big, double-glazed windows. These were angled above you as well, with a double door out and then another door to your right which led into our bedroom. This was enormous, with an en suite bathroom, and had glass all along the front, which continued along from the other side. Another window looked out at the same view as the one from the children's bedrooms. As our bedroom was outside the barn itself, we built a glass extension (double glazed too, I have to say!) between the back wall and doorway of the barn and the entrance to our room. It all kind of fitted together and was intriguing.

All the rest of the windows had to fit between the oak beams inside the building, so they were all bespoke—made out of wood to exact sizes, and double-glazed and openable. The glass extension was also made to exact sizes, as was the staircase. I had some luck with the outside woodwork of the barn itself, because when I phoned the place to order it, they said that they didn't have any planking for lapped weatherboarding as wide as I needed. (The stickler-for-detail planners were keen to have it all exactly the same as it was before.) But they reassured us that they could order it from Norway. So that's what we did. It was superb wood when it came, but we had to paint it all black!

Upstairs led one straight onto the dining room floor, with more views out the back over the walled garden. At the far end, I installed a wooden, hand-painted screen depicting the children playing, to prevent anyone falling downstairs through the gap between the floor and the windows—Sarah sitting astride a huge cart horse that belonged to the farmer Mr Womack next door, and Jamie on his bike. (The new owners have had this restored, bless them!)

If you turned right at the top of the stairs, you walked under some oak beams, up a few steps, ducking under some of the huge beams that held the barn together, and through a glass door into the top lounge. This was big and formal, with its fireplace and comfortable chairs and sofas. Steep ceilings, lots of windows and the beautiful brick wall made it special, and in the winter the light seemed to pulsate

through the big windows in the front. We used it mostly for entertaining, but I was working so hard in my studio that I can remember falling asleep one evening when we had friends over!

On the other side of the stairs was a landing area, with more stairs going up into the open plan attic, and a double door into the huge kitchen, which was the centre of the home. It was big enough to sit at a table and eat as well as prepare meals—and the outlook was exceptionally wonderful. One could see all the way down the driveway to a huge beech tree, and then all the way across the fields towards Banham, with hedgerows and more trees in between. We could reach out of the windows and pick handfuls of elderflowers, which I popped into our pancakes for breakfast in winter. And in the depths of the autumn, the view looked just like the Natal Midlands.

We had a separate scullery area, with a fridge and machines to do all that sort of stuff, although we didn't use the dishwasher for so long that it rusted up. I threw it away. There was also a big and essential heater unit there, hanging on the wall for our hot water and for heating the entire barn. I never understood it all properly; it worked on gas and was a little expensive.

We had put down long water pipes for the heating under the floor boards downstairs, on top of insulation, so it was possible to be warm. I had bought the oak floor boards from a reputable local company but, after we'd put them in, they began to dry out and shrink! This was a bit of a nuisance, and Ian and I wondered what to do about it. In the end we decided to glue in another small piece of oak, just where the crack was, and around one centimetre wide. The people who sold the floorboards to me were happy with this idea and supplied the very dry oak strips for free. It took a little time, and my old routing machine was not really made for this, but we got it done and I must say that the floor now looks amazing! Our knees, however, were a little worn out.

Then we needed insulation, inside the weatherboarding, for the entire building. Again, when I phoned the supplier, he said that they didn't have any at that moment—only some rubbish boarding that they had made up for a chap in northern Europe that he didn't want anymore. I could have it cheaply, because it was double the thickness required in England. Well, yes please! This duly arrived and was difficult to unload (we had to use thick gloves because it had developed an electrical charge in transit). It was quite different from anything that I had seen before: with plaster board on one side, then a layer of dense blue insulation several inches thick glued onto it, and then aluminium sheets glued onto the insulation material. It was so beautifully made and yet we had to cut it all up, fit it between the upright oak beams, and then plaster it all. Quite a lot of work,







*On the right hand page – an aerial view of the Kenningball property.*

*Travelling up Church Street, passing Church Farmhouse built on the carnsar (raised bank) turn left onto the property. To the right is the Black Barn with the Stables set behind. The driveway veers to the left passing the garage complex and the walled garden in the centre of the frame. The roof visible next to the beech tree is the Particular Pottery (Chapel) with the red roofed kiln shed to the left of it. In time, this building was to become The House behind the Chapel.*

but we had a superbly warm barn after that! Michelle cleaned down all of the interior woodwork with soap and water, and then used litres of Danish Oil to seal it beautifully. Of course, it smells good too. (She remembers this very well—I can't think why!) It gave the interior of the building a warm and sophisticated appearance, with the old oak beams looking cared for, clean and wonderful.

All of this work took over six months to complete but we loved living in the barn. It was certainly large enough for us—a little too big in winter, when we ran from one warm room to another! We were able to have some gorgeous exhibitions in the downstairs showroom. We had several shows of my porcelain and a show of Toff Milway's salt-fired pots at one stage, which sold very well. We had Toff and his wife Georgie up to stay, which was fun. We also exhibited Reggie Hynes's lovely private collection of work by many different potters. He was the Vice-Chairman of the Suffolk Craft Society—a job that I took over years later, after he had died. And then there were the exhibitions of work by local potters like John Chipperfield and Jonathan Keep, and Kerry Richardson's and others' jewellery plus a Persian Carpet Show curated by Rufus Read, a wonderful fellow from Scotland. It was a brilliant exhibition space and, when not in use as a showroom, we had a reversible ping pong table with some racing cars for Jamie laid out on the back. Sarah had some great parties in there, although one of her friends ran straight through the glass wall because she couldn't see it! Fortunately, the glass was shatterproof and she was relatively unscathed.

We lived in The Black Barn for about five happy years. I celebrated my fortieth birthday there, attended by dear friends from all over the world. Charles Lloyds Ellis came from South Africa, and David Myburgh from London; Mac and Magdeleine MacIntyre Read came from Wales and we had lots of local friends around too. It was quite a bash! Of course, there was plenty of space for people to stay over.

Although she had resisted at first, Sarah was by this time settled into Thetford Grammar School. When we asked her why she didn't want to go there, she said that it all looked rather ancient and tatty, especially the library! Well, we had to explain that it was over a thousand years old, dating back to 1066 and the Battle of Hastings. Then she understood why it was just a bit worn around the edges! I am sure she didn't fully appreciate at the time how lucky she was to have so few pupils in her class, and that the children there were discussing which universities to apply for, and whether they would study medicine or law. At the local school the girls would entertain ideas of becoming a hairdresser or suchlike.

Sarah made some very good friends at Thetford and she is still in touch with some of them. She inevitably went on to the Norwich School of Art and Design, which

she loved. Jamie also settled happily at school in Norwich and, though he didn't seem to be learning much, he had some great friends and was content to be there. He was a very grown-up fellow by this time.





## CHAPTER 10

### A HOUSE BEHIND THE CHAPEL (1995–1998)

Almost inevitably the time came to make another move. My father-in-law Peter started to get restless. I agreed with him that they needed a smaller place, but we couldn't afford to buy their share of the Chapel as well as have the huge Barn. We chatted about it all, and they decided to sell their side of the Church Farm House (they had already sold off the half we had rented initially). They then decided that with the proceeds, they wanted to buy the Chapel from us. We went along with the idea for some time and started looking around for another studio but, in the end, they changed their minds. We ended up buying the Chapel from them, and they moved off to Suffolk to live in an attractive smaller house in Halesworth. This was a surprise and, although quite welcome in its way, we wondered what to do next.

It took quite a bit of discussion and deliberating but in the end, almost inevitably, we decided to build once more!

We sold the Barn for a good price to a high-flying couple. Susan Downie was a dermatologist at the hospital down the road, in Bury St Edmunds, and Alan was a Professor of Science at the University of Norwich up the road. It happened that Kenninghall was about half way between these two institutions and ours was such a beautiful property that they were thrilled with it. They still live there, although both are now retired. We correspond and have been friends ever since and we have visited them in the Barn, which, as I said before, they have restored to just the way we had it, plus they have built some stairs on the outside, down from the kitchen into the back garden—a good idea.

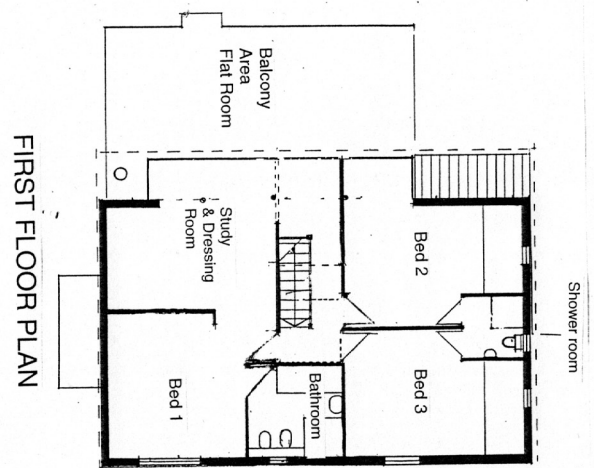
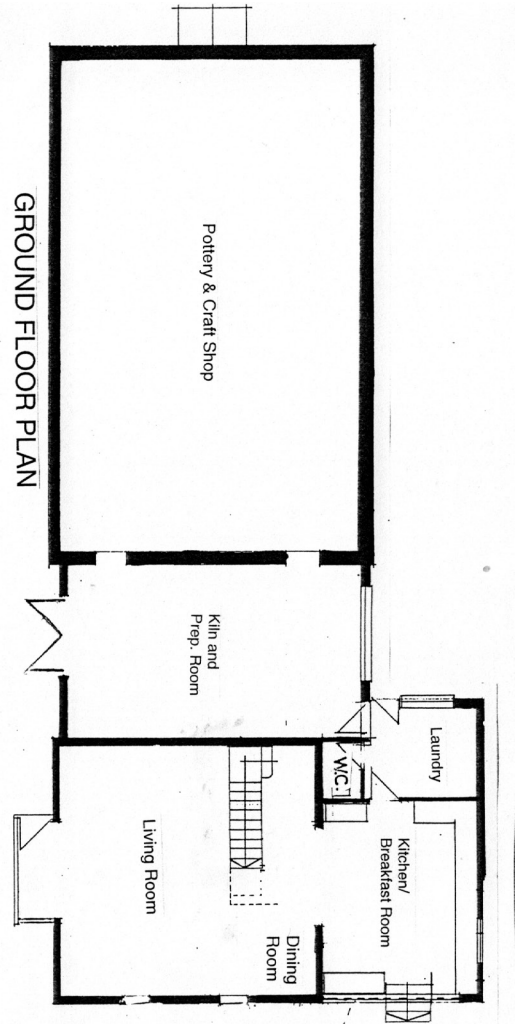
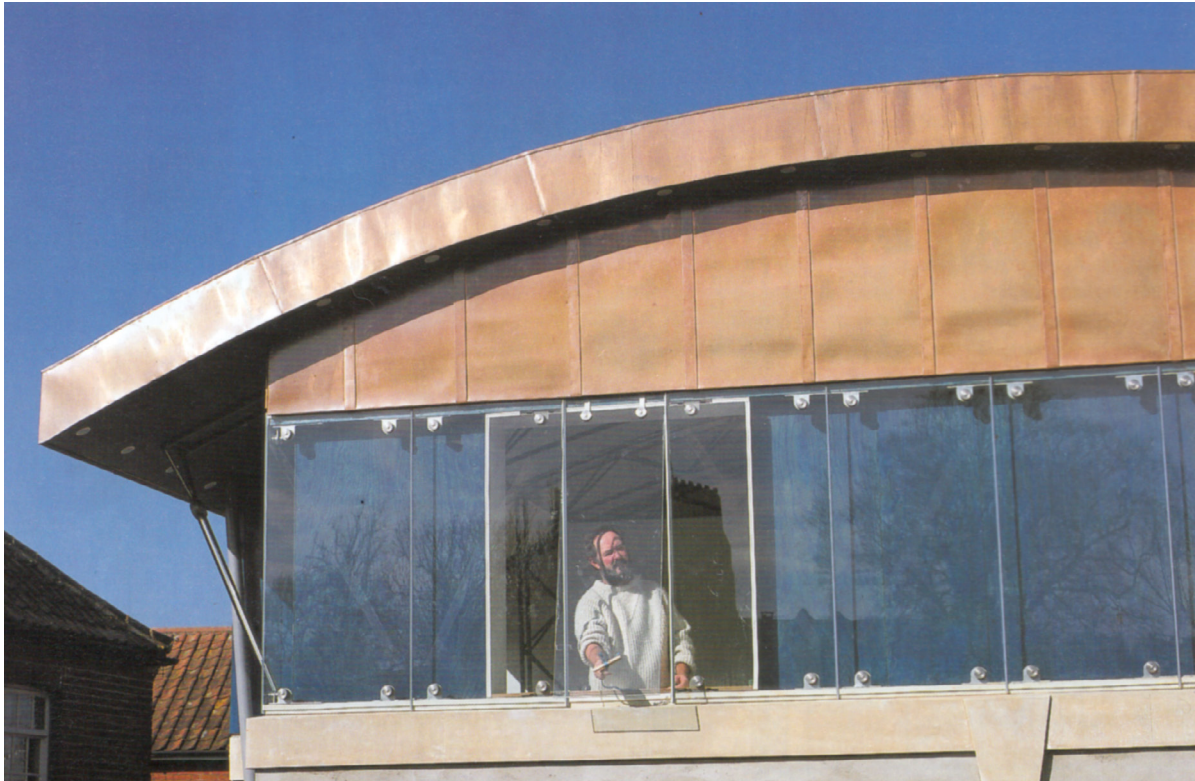
We rented a house just up the road, while I built our next home onto the back of the Chapel. It was just beyond the confines of the graveyard. We had decided to use David Cummings again and he designed a new home that was striking and very contemporary. Because it was situated at the back of the Chapel and not easily visible from Church Street in the front, he felt able to create something really new and exciting. Plus, we wanted the modern new extension to contrast with the historic Chapel. We also loved his idea, and went along with all of his radical plans! We were not really prepared for what he came up with but on reflection we liked it very much. By this time, we had met Paul Booker and he and his older friend Morris were pleased to be involved with this building. I am not sure how Morris felt about it all, but Paul loved it and they both put in some really tricky building efforts on our behalf. Paul now lives in KwaZulu-Natal, down the South Coast, so if you want a true building expert, please go and find him!

The new build was based on a barrel vault, conceptually and as a true shape. The ground floor was built partially on top of the existing kiln-room walls, with a bit of extension at the back which was all in line with the existing walls. We then took the old roof off, and picked up the kilns with a big mechanical lift, and deposited

them in the room next door! Then we put up an arched steel framework, on top of which we built a barrel-vaulted 'roof' of boxes we made on the curve. They were more than a foot deep, and were filled with insulation, with ceiling board underneath. These we heaved up on top of the steel—not easy, as it was so high up! We bolted them into place, and to each other, and added some more pieces of boarding on top. (You have to use your imagination for this.) We then got a company from the north of England to come down and cover this all with thick copper sheeting, cleated at the top of each piece, so it curved over the shape of the roof. This was expensive as we needed a lot of very long copper pieces! (A gutter was included into the design, just before it reached the edge.) As the overhang was considerable, we had to install stainless steel bars which branched near the top, and connected into the steel framework. At the bottom these were bolted into the walls right on a layer of screeded blockwork, making it windproof. It looked amazing, and I was hoping that it would achieve a natural verdigris patina in time. But unfortunately, we were not there for long enough.

Under the copper domed roof and attached to the steel struts there was a bank of ten-millimetre-thick, triple-glazed windows all around the building. The walls, which were to be closed in, were made of flat wooden sheets and placed behind the glass, with a smallish gap of four inches or so, on top of the blockwork. One had no means of accessing the spaces where the glass went over the boxed-in interior woodwork, so that aspect had to be carefully considered.

The windows were left unobstructed, along with the bits that opened out from the bottom, with a hinge at the top, for opening and letting in a breeze. These were not easy, as nobody had thought how to connect them, so I was left to fiddle around with some brass fittings. I even put some rubber bits down the sides to stop breezes coming in when they were shut! The whole structure was connected



to the building with tremendously strong stainless-steel studs. Of course, they had to be in exactly the right place, with holes drilled into the glass before it was heat treated. Paul and Morris made a huge success of building this whole thing to such exacting measurements and levels. We painted all of this woodwork quite a deep stained blue and, my goodness, it looked smart!

It was not really a huge building, but it was big enough when you considered the Chapel as well and quite wide inside. I had a flat-roofed space between the two buildings under which I put my kilns, but basically it was easy to fix it all up and make it work. We were delighted with our new home but I am afraid that some of our neighbours were not. (We were accused of stealing their view!) They made a fuss and wrote to the papers and the local authority, demanding that I should be instructed to take it down. But they never actually came in to see us about it. On the other hand, the Breckland Council must take credit for being open-minded, and Dave won an award for his design, just when we were getting hell about it all! It just shows you.

The plan was pretty easy. One entered through a wooden, blue-painted and glazed window-box-like structure, and stepped right into the spacious living room area—a big, bright, square room which used to house my two kilns and my in-laws' kiln as well. The stairs ran to the second floor towards the back of the room, which made space for all of our living room furniture, plus a dining room table and chairs. In the rear section of the room there was an open, square section in the wall that led into the kitchen. Large built-in cupboards ran along the back wall opposite the entrance, with a fridge and stove to one side. Up a couple of steps to the right, there was a glazed double door which led into the garden and another dining table set near the door as well. Through a door to the left one could reach a downstairs loo, and all the heating apparatus, washing machines and so on were in another room before a back door. On the left was another door into the back of the studio area, where my kiln was, plus racks for finished pots waiting to be fired.

Upstairs, one arrived in a lofty open space with a curved ceiling, with the steel strutting holding the roof on clearly visible. It was full of bookcases and plenty of children's toys. Turning right again one came through a door into our bedroom, with an en suite bathroom on the left. We had two big windows looking out over the fields and into the front garden. If you turned sharp right, you entered our dressing room, a big area which I also used as a study. It had a huge wardrobe in it, and views towards the walled garden. Sliding doors opened onto the floor above the kiln room, with the Chapel roof beyond. Taking a left turn at the top of the stairs, you reached a door into Jamie's bedroom, and another opposite it into Sarah's bedroom, with their bathroom between the two. There was no spare room in this house, although we could double up the children and pop visitors into one of their

rooms quite easily. It sounds small, but in fact there was plenty of space, an effect heightened by the way the walls in the bedrooms went all the way up to the lofty, rounded ceiling. From inside the upstairs rooms, attractive and all painted green, we had fantastic views through all the glass attached to the outside.

I had gotten used to the various heating systems by this time and the one we used here was a little simpler than the one at the Barn. We still used underfloor piped hot water heating throughout, and again used gas as a fuel (basically because I had a bulk gas tank for my kiln-firing which kept the price reasonable!) In the Chapel itself, we put in a long, fat electrical cable in sand under the brick tiled floor. It got hot at night with the help of a big transformer in the cupboard at the end of the room. If you left it on you would use daytime electricity, which is so much more expensive, so it all had to be carefully timed. But we managed to keep ourselves warm everywhere in the house in winter, and it was a pleasure not to have to venture out onto the snow.

We simply loved living in the home behind the Chapel. I suppose that we had become used to moving home every five years or so, and we liked the changes, and the new experiences. And I have to say that my work seemed to like all of this too. One can get into a rhythm of making pots that is quite good in terms of sales, but a little boring too in my view! I definitely needed the stimulus of new premises, a new rhythm, and new customers too. I also now had the entire Chapel to myself, so I could do whatever I wanted to, and I really wanted to knuckle down to potting after all the faffing around with building!

I had the space and the desire to make more extravagant pots. Looking back, I went into some pretty upbeat, extroverted decoration at that point, covering my tall urns and large bowls with colourful painted apples, pears, grapes and flowers and wild leaf decorations, with deep matt blues inside, quite hotly fired in my big reduction firing kiln. This brought out the intricacies of my decorations, and the colours were deep and beautiful. The public acceptance was very rewarding. By this time, I was exhibiting annually on the Country Living Fair in London (for years as their preferred demonstrating potter) and I was given exclusive working space to do this while people watched me at the wheel. I was also a member of the Norfolk Contemporary Craft Society, where I exhibited occasionally, and of the East Anglian Potters Association. (We used to exhibit their members' work annually in the Chapel.) I remained a member of the Suffolk Craft Society, where I exhibited twice a year in Aldeburgh and in Bury St Edmunds. I was now on the Committee and, as I mentioned, later became Vice-Chairman. The Chairman was usually a member of the upper crust and, while I was there, it was Lady Carlisle, wife of the Minister of Defence under Mrs Thatcher.



At around this time a friend of mine was on the Council of the Craft Potters Association in London, which met once a month. She asked me if I might stand in for her at that meeting, as she was busy moving house. I agreed to, although I had not wanted to join up fully with them—I was already too busy. However, they have several membership sections. One was the top echelon, the Exhibiting Membership, as I recall. Then there were Members, and then Friends, or something like that. I became a Member and went along to the meetings hoping to meet interesting people—I did to some extent but found the whole experience rather stressful. There were studio potters like Emmanuel Cooper and Eileen Lewenstein (who was deeply suspicious of South Africans) and many other exciting folk, none of whom I was introduced to! I just sat there quietly to begin with, trying to take it all on board. And, of course, I had to travel down to London once a month to get there. This sounds easy but let me tell you that it took the whole day. I would leave early in the morning to catch a train in Diss, travel two hours to London to get myself to the offices in Carnaby Street in time to start the meeting, and then do the whole thing in reverse to be home in time for dinner! It was hectic, but also interesting.

I became a kind of spokesman for the unheard majority / ordinary membership. I remember one particular meeting, during which the Council members were discussing new applications for Exhibiting Membership in the shop. Everyone was there and they all had opinions, but their views didn't seem to have anything to do with the quality of the pots under consideration! They said things like, 'I don't know him' or 'Who does he think he is!' or 'Who said we had to have somebody from Wales!' Things like that. So, I decided that I had seen and heard enough, and wrote about it all in my report back to the membership. What did they expect? Boy, were the Council annoyed with me! A woman from the Board came to one of my committee meetings just to crap on me about it! She was rude and insulting, but I have to say that my committee was fully behind me. I stopped going to those meetings but I did get a lot of support from the rest of the membership.

After living behind the Chapel for nearly three years, things were about to change a good deal. After her A-Levels, Sarah had decided to go to the Norwich School of Art and Design, to study sculpture. Our Jamie had reached the age of sixteen, when in Britain he was expected to leave school and go somewhere else. The authorities

decided that, because there was nowhere in Norfolk for him to go, he should attend Toynton Hall Specialist Residential College, right up in Lincolnshire. We drove up there to have a look, and it took us three or four hours just to get there. We were anxious about sending Jamie away from home for the first time, but reassured ourselves that perhaps he would enjoy a little independence.

How wrong this decision turned out to be.

We were advised that we should leave him there for a month or so before visiting him, which sounded a little tough to us. However, that is what we did. When we were eventually allowed to collect him, we were shocked by the change in him. He seemed out of it, vague and discombobulated, and when we arrived home, he walked upstairs in a catatonic state with a crap hanging in his trousers. We were distressed and worried but after a few days he seemed OK again, and we took him back. We would now know better. We did what we were expected to do, believing we were acting in his best interest and that the pastoral team there knew what was best for our son. But Jamie was not well there.

We don't truly understand what happened but we received a phone call one day to inform us that the resident doctor, an old fellow, had prescribed a drug called Risperidone for his 'schizophrenia'—without consulting us at all. We knew that he didn't have this diagnosis, and we had made that clear. We fetched him home again at once. But I have to say, he never recovered. He was moody, wayward, difficult, shaky and dotty and on top of it all he needed constant supervision. Now we do know that some disabled people reach some sort of a threshold at that age, and that things can happen to people that one doesn't expect. But we firmly believe that this was not so in Jamie's case and that he should never have been medicated without our permission. We should have been told that he was experiencing difficulties there. The British medical profession is generally unwilling to issue a Statement of Educational Needs for children with "unspecified" learning conditions. This would be an acknowledgement of a child's unique long term physical/mental needs and the government is then obliged to fund their ongoing care. So, it was all very odd. We complained, and the Norfolk authorities said that they would never send anyone there again. I suppose that was something. But it didn't help us or Jamie at all.



*Roubaix House by Daryl Nero*

## CHAPTER 11

### BACK TO SOUTH AFRICA (1999)

I had been out to South Africa several times to see my mum before she died in 1996, and to try to get an idea of what was going on back home. My brother Taffy was still living in Howick so I spent time there and in Cape Town with my sister Jenny, and visited Umzumbe with friends. But we were still anxious about the volatile political situation. I remember sitting in my brother's house, being lectured by him and my mother about how 'stupid' I was and how 'incorrect' to support the ANC.

I crept back to the UK but I have to admit that Nelson Mandela was the chap for me. He got my vote when he needed it—on 27 April 1994, from England!

Just as my pottery career was really taking off, home life was becoming more and more challenging. Although Sarah was happily engaged at the Norwich School of Art and Design, our Jamie was struggling. He had been a major part of our reasoning when we went to live in Britain, and now we had our British passports, were well-established professionally, and had made great friends. But with him truly in trouble, Michelle and I had to think again. And we had to think about ourselves and our daughter Sarah as well. It was hard having a sick boy at home in England, and it was difficult for him too. We were once again at a crossroads, and we needed time to think about what to do next.

Our boy was out of it, really, and we were in a bad space with him. We simply had to find some solutions. We had held out hopes of being able to sort out all our problems in England, but these had been dashed. We couldn't find anywhere close by that could manage someone with his severe condition, and we couldn't contemplate sending him far away again. I can remember thinking that Jamie really needed to be somewhere where he could run around in the sunshine outside, and feel well again—with no shoes on!

So, after twelve years in England, we decided to return home.

Once we had made that decision, it all seemed right and proper. The idea of returning to South Africa one day had always been attractive. The country had changed out of all recognition by this stage, with an exciting and committed new government led by President Nelson Mandela. I was thrilled by this aspect. There were problems of course: we had to sell our property, and there was Sarah who had just started her tertiary education at the Norwich School of Art and Design. She seemed quite happy in Norwich, and had pretty much left home by this stage. She was a sensible, grown-up girl, and she had a fellow in tow by that time—James Woodhouse. He seemed like a good chap, and we liked him. Plus, he had folks just down the road. Michelle's parents were still in Halesworth so it wasn't as

if we were abandoning Sarah. But still, it was hard for us and harder still for her!

We managed all of this as best we could, and finally, at the end of 1998, flew out of Heathrow. We landed in Joburg, where we stayed with my sister Jenny and bought a smart Renault station wagon. Then we travelled down to the Cape, via Pietermaritzburg, to stay in Jenny's flat in Sea Point. We immediately started looking for a suitable property to buy, somewhere we could live and work. But, as Jamie was so ill, we needed to look for doctors and for other help for him as well. It was a hectic time, and I must tell you that I have quite forgotten most of it! Jamie was fully autistic, on the wrong medication, and having some violent episodes as he also had bipolar disorder. And we were living in a flat with an open balcony, very high up: a nightmare. While we were out there finding a home—in Franschhoek as it happens—I was trying to keep in touch with Sarah by standing on the road outside the flat, feeding five-rand coins into the public phone. It was quite a busy time, in both a good and bad way.

We decided to rent a house in Franschhoek and keep an eye out. Eventually we were able to buy a huge erf with a big, old house on a back road—Dirkie Uys Street. It was conveniently near the middle of town and right next door to the Dutch Reformed Church, just across the river. We had the option of making the erf larger still by buying and consolidating the bit of land next door; this had always been a part of the place, but was actually a separate erf. The bottom erf of the property had already been bought, and the owners developed new businesses there, memorably the Tourism offices, followed by a pancake restaurant. We needed quite a lot of land, because I never fully appreciated how much space my gas kiln should need. It was the same old kiln that I'd brought back from England. I knew that I didn't want close neighbours constantly grumbling about the smell of burning gas, or the smoke that issued from the kiln in the early part of heating up! I had to have ten big bottles of gas, which exercised the building inspector quite a lot! I used an old friend of Jenny's, John Sweetnam, to do the



plans for the house renovation and he made such a great job of it all that we never changed a thing. But we did need a builder because, although the house was huge, we needed even more space: not just room for the family but also several large showrooms, and a fairly big studio for me. I found a building contractor called Ann Boonzaier down the road. She was just what we needed. She was really knowledgeable—a good woman in a man's world—and we loved her (although, I have to say, her men were not truly up to much). We got stuck in, and despite all the rude comments from the local authority and the building inspector, who was a little tyrant, we got the job done.

Roubaix House was quite an old house, and a building of historical significance, although nothing like as old as any we had experienced in England. Built in 1910, it was one of Franschhoek's oldest Victorian buildings and it needed some careful treatment, especially in the front, where people going by would see it. We did everything that the building regulations demanded. With the exception of the windows! The local authority wanted big-paned sash windows, where most of the sash windows that I could see were small-paned. We had words about that aspect in the chambers at the Town Hall, but I won in the end. The building inspector remained a challenge, but I learned to stand in the bottom of the holes dug for foundations when he came so that he was taller than me! He fussed about everything, and I suppose that he thought that I didn't have a clue about building. In the end we managed to get him on side, but only after he started bringing an armed policeman with him! To give you an idea of how tricky he was: we decided to build a small wooden shed in the garden for our lawnmower, and stuff like that. He made me paint it the same colour as the house—a kind of grey—even though it was down at the bottom of the lawn, behind a big bush where nobody could see it! Ann was fine with most of the building work that needed to be done, with the possible exclusion of the upstairs flat balcony area. This had to be concreted all at once, so we hired a big pouring outfit from the concrete people, and got our chaps running around with wheelbarrows between the steelwork. That all went fine but, as you probably know, concrete is not waterproof, and forever afterwards we had leaks in that roof. Thankfully the new owners have covered it up with new rooms, so it can't leak anymore! The house had been cut off from any electricity before we bought it so that was a good excuse to start all over again, which is what we did. All of our electrical work was done by local electrician Philip van Rensburg, and what a great job he did; we never had a thing go wrong. We are still friends, plus his wife Sue is a very good potter.

As we got near the end of construction, it became necessary to get an artisan woodworker in. To our astonished glee, Paul Booker turned up. He had fallen in love with a girl who lived in KwaZulu-Natal, and had come out to live here. It was

such a wonderful gift to have this expert working on our new home, and I have to say that the carpentry got beautifully done in the shortest time! He married Sally when they were in Franschhoek, and it was great to have them 'on side' and staying with us just at that time.

The original house had a front verandah and a wide, double front door set between great big sash windows. So, that is where we shall enter, just off Dirkie Uys Street. Once inside, one looked down a short 'passage' to an arched opening which led into my studio. On either side of the entrance were big, tall, square-ish showrooms, both with sash windows, as they were part of the original home. The room on the left had the most beautiful one I had ever seen, looking out of the side of the building into the garden. It was square in shape with small panes and the thinnest, most beautiful woodwork, with inside shutters that closed just perfectly. One looked into the garden, across a tiled open verandah, past an almond tree towards the river, although one couldn't see the water from there. But you could get a glimpse of the church next door, through the oak trees that grew all along the river side, and one could see up into the mountains in the distance. It was truly inspirational. On the other side of the entrance was a gallery that was central to the building, and it ran through a squared archway to the next gallery room, which was where we had our sales counter. The doors between these rooms were beautiful: wide yellowwood doors, with the original, old-fashioned hinges. Only four of the original doors were still there.

In front of the 'counter' gallery, up one step, was another room. It was also square but with narrower sash windows, and a door leading out onto the front verandah again. This room was painted a dark oxblood red, a colour that showed off the ceramics beautifully. Each of the other display rooms was painted with paler, more subtle colours, with the exception of the one wall next to the front door, which was painted a dark teal. We had a variety of boxes, glass and wooden stands, and thick shelving on the walls made by Nelson, a local woodwork specialist. All designed to set off the pottery. It looked spectacular! Then behind the counter were the stairs leading up to the house part. There was also a door leading to another showroom, off my studio. This one was used for showing off the dinnerware that turned into a big part of our offering from this studio. There was a loo behind this room, and then through another door was the kiln room, which occupied a back room almost the full width of the house.

My studio was huge, and sat right in the middle of the house. It was south-facing so that it didn't get too hot in summer. Big and wide, it used to be the kitchen of the old house, but we added on an *afdlak* and took out an old loo that was right in the middle of the older kitchen! I placed my wheels at two out of the three



windows at the far end of this, and had an enormous yellowwood and Oregon pine table in the middle. We put up shelving all around, except where there was an old built-in shelving unit, with glass doors. We used all of this space for a variety of interesting things, like big meals for friends and pop-up dinners for paying guests. We could fit eighteen people comfortably around the big table in the studio, and we had enough chairs. We also had various chef friends, like Reuben Riffel and Duncan Doherty, as well as Hetta van Deventer from La Motte, who came and cooked wonderful meals for people. Christopher Duigan (of Music Revival), a virtuoso pianist from KwaZulu-Natal, came to stay quite a lot—every year in fact. He played his piano in the Dutch Reformed Church next door, and had other musician friends come and play with him as well. He played his piano in my studio too. I really miss it!

Upstairs the house was quite different. At the top of the stairs, one entered our '*woonkombuis*', a big area taking up the entire north end of the building, with a kitchen at the front end of the room looking over the road; a dining room with a table and chairs, and two serving tables, in the middle; then the stairs, and then the open living room with sofas and chairs, and a wood-burning fireplace, looking into the garden. There were huge sash windows all along the room, with views out across to my sister Jenny's house (she moved down to Franschhoek too) and up into the mountains on that side. Doors ran from the kitchen to the front verandah and from the living room to the covered verandah at the back of the building. This went all around the living room, and spread out along the top of the kiln room, looking out over the garden and village, away up into the hills. Spectacular!

The front verandah was also beautiful, because it looked up into the mountains over the thatch-roofed home across the road, and down along Dirkie Uys Street with the river running by. It also had doors into the big study in the middle of the house, and into Jamie's generous room, which was on the corner. Inside, there were more doors from the study onto the other verandah and one could walk through and into our bedroom area. This had a wide entrance with a huge cupboard in it, plus a door to our bathroom. Then you entered our bedroom, which was on the front corner. We also looked way across the valley and down into our garden, and

we could see the river running along. Our property ended across the river, at the top of the bank near the Dutch Reformed Church *dominee's* house.

We lived in this home for twenty-one fulfilling and happy years. Franschhoek was good for us, with a lot of people turning up to stay in its hotels and guesthouses, and many (mostly foreign) tourists who understood what I was doing and making. I played a small part in the tourism efforts in the village: I was on the Tourism Board for ages and responsible for hiring our most successful CEO, Jenny Prinsloo. Before she came, I used to ring her every year to ask Nedbank (where she worked) for some money to allow us to pay Christopher Duigan to play his piano in the village. She always said yes and we began to get on well. One day while we were chatting about things, I told her that we were looking for a new Tourism leader. Well, she applied and of course she got the post, and I can say without a doubt that she was the best we had ever had! (She was also from KwaZulu-Natal, where her father was a politician called Bill Sutton.) Sadly, she died in a motor car crash on her way to work just a couple of years ago. However, her legacy lives on and Franschhoek has the most successful Bastille Day celebrations as well as many other events that she put in place. Under her guidance, the town has become one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in the Western Cape, and we certainly benefited from that.

Out at the back of our house I built a carport over some foundations that were there already. After a year or two, I decided to build a room on top of the garages, and this was a most successful venture. With three sliding sash windows down each side, this room was a winner. It felt right on top of the world! Open and clean inside, it had enough room for double beds, chairs and a low table, plus a bathroom and kitchenette too. It was so spectacular that we eventually let it out to people visiting the village, and they loved it. It also came in handy when Sarah finally finished off her degree in England, and came home—along with her partner at the time, James. He has since left, but we all had a happy time in Franschhoek. In fact, Sarah built a home there for herself, right next to the one that my sister Jenny built—both on bits of our land that we sub-divided for the purpose. There was a lot of it!



## CHAPTER 12

### IN THE STUDIO IN FRANSCHHOEK

The plates I made were of varying sizes and came in three different types: mains plates, fish plates, and side plates. I made bowls of many sizes too: pudding bowls and a successful soup/pasta bowl, as well as double bowls—that is, a bowl fitted inside a bigger bowl, with a wide-ish rim. I also threw tea cups and saucers, mugs, and wine goblets. There was so much that one could order, once you had made your decision. I could make a dinner service of six, eight or more settings, with your stamp on it, all carved by me out of plaster of Paris. And the stamp design was up to you: either initials or a family crest, or something like the pomegranate that I stamped into a dinner service for members of the Rockefeller family from America. I made hundreds of dinner services over the twenty-one years we were there, many for pretty interesting folk—mostly from abroad—who came to Franschhoek specially to order their dinner set!

I made dinnerware for plenty of local restaurants too, but especially for Rust en Vrede in Stellenbosch, which I am still doing. The Rust en Vrede experience is exceptional, and so the dinnerware needs to be special too. I made them so much to begin with: cups and saucers, tea pots, sugar bowls, on top of all their plates, bowls and pasta bowls, plus squared hollow clay extrusions used for presenting dessert biscuits or handmade chocolates, butter dishes, and salt shakers. Such a lot! Over time, there have been three chefs resident there but all of them have wanted something a little different. David Higgs was the first, and he got the owner to commit to a quality product! David made him start from scratch with the crockery, I discovered, which is why he came to me for his plates. He ordered plain white plates, made from porcelain, with a bare, unglazed rim, stamped with R&V—although we soon changed that to ‘Rust en Vrede’. The side plate had a thrown spiral texture to it, where I put my finger into the clay as it went round. Beautiful! And David was an exceptional chef. He was patient with me, realising that I needed time to get things right. He was willing to wait because he knew that my dinnerware lasted well; they still use it, although I imagine some of it must have broken by now. He bought it all in around 2008, but after a few years he left the restaurant and we have been working with two other chefs (one after another) since. I have never met the owner of the restaurant—and I don’t suppose I shall—but I admire him for what he has done there. It is a fine restaurant—well worth the visit, and good value!

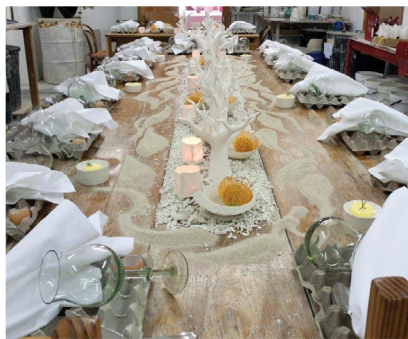
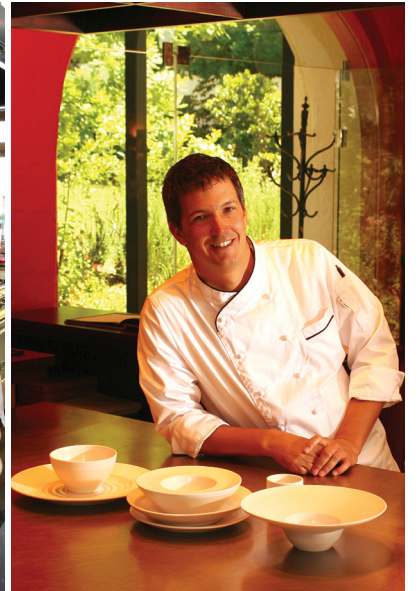
It is clearly not easy to make bespoke dinnerware, especially out of porcelain, but by then I was a very competent thrower, and I had found the best porcelain available. Craig Leslie at Cape Pottery Supplies took some trouble to find out what went into the production of an exceptionally strong and translucent porcelain body. In the end I added Molochite to the recipe, which I think makes it stronger. Anyway, Craig still makes it for me by the ton and, as I love it so, this clay has become my own. Once you get started with porcelain, there is not much chance

of using other clays because you will have to clean up the entire studio before using porcelain again. The mess in a studio is one thing that bugs the hell out of a potter but I must say that you get used to making as little chaos as possible. I find it best to clean up after each job or at least in the evening so that you don’t have to start again in the morning with a great big wash and brush-up. That can drain all your energy before you even get started.

In the front galleries I sold my usual pots and a range of bowls with different decorations, plus mugs and jugs, tea pots and cups and saucers, vases and urns, pill boxes and ‘stick’ vases. These were roundish bowls, with the top cut down on both sides and sushi sticks popped through some holes in the top. They made spectacular vases, but were useful as something to eat out of too. I have always made big, thrown platters, and Franschhoek was no different. The porcelain was easy to throw into wide platters, and I had some spectacular glazes to pour—one over the other, which made them interesting. I also cut into the foot ring on the inside of these big platters, so that they could be hung easily from a wall ‘nail’ on the ring there, any way up that you want. My pill boxes have also been with me for ages, and I do like making them. My mum had lots of them and, before she died, she gave them all back to me. I have a cupboard full of them right now. They range in type, according to where I was when I made them, and also what glazes and decorations I was using at the time.

During our time in Franschhoek, I also started including coloured clay bits into my thrown ware. Rings of colour would rise as I was throwing and reflect the mark of my fingers. I would mix up some coloured powder into some porcelain, and put it out to dry a little. Then I would wedge it up and, voilà, there was coloured clay, ready to use. This was the fun part! I could pinch it very thin and round and place it ‘through’ the middle of a ball of clay, ready to throw. Then I







would put that piece of clay right on the middle of the wheel, with the coloured bit stood carefully upright. I would then throw the pot, and when I came to turn it at the leather hard stage, the coloured clay showed up in an exact double spiral, running up the pot and into the top. If it was a pill box, then the coloured clay would come right to the top, and become joined, making an interesting spiral shape. If you used more than one colour, then they would all show up! However, if you didn't place the coloured clay so precisely, then it showed up differently, and more imaginatively, tucked into the pot here and there. It will always show a rounded and pulled-up feeling, but the results are usually fascinating. One can use all sorts of colours—even mixing colours that are readily available to make new ones. Of course, this works especially well with porcelain, which does not need glaze on it to be waterproof.

The best advice I have for potters who want to get on is to get into the studio as soon as possible in the morning: just after breakfast. This requires an enormous amount of self-discipline. Otherwise, you can think of so much else to do; you just don't get started. Naturally, when you have been throwing pots, they all need attending to the next day, and the turning and putting on of handles or spouts simply has to be done, otherwise the pots get hard and the clay won't stick. Clay is a very demanding mistress! After working with clay all my life, it is difficult to think of all the things I want to say about it really, because it all comes so naturally to me now.









## POSTSCRIPT

### NEWLANDS, CAPE TOWN (2019–)

Looking back, we sold our Franschhoek property just in time. We had tried to sell it to another potter, or at least somebody who could use it ‘properly’, just the way we had. But, in the end, we sold it to a local chap who was looking for a place to use as a guest house. What a pleasant end that was to our time there. He and his business partner are the nicest men. They were very accommodating and offered us the right price and plenty of time to find another place to retire to. I must say that they have repurposed Roubaix House beautifully—well, with the possible exception of the wall colour, which is pink!

After quite a long search we were able to find a lovely house, just up the road from Sarah’s home and pottery in the leafy Cape Town suburb of Newlands. When I say that we sold just in time, I mean that we sold up after twenty-one years, just in time for the coronavirus to come along and make us stay at home! So, we now live in a one-size-fits-all kind of a house, of good proportions—well-finished and a handy size for just the two of us. Fortunately, I still have space for my wheel and a smaller kiln, and I am still making pots! You can’t stop me!

We really enjoy being closer to Sarah. From time to time, when she has an exhibition, she needs a little help with her studio, and Michelle and I happily give it. She has had some excellent and varied shows there, and seems to enjoy that aspect of her business. She is making pots different from anything that I ever made, and she is using quite different glazes. She has just won a prize in the local Potters’ Association (Ceramics Southern Africa) exhibition, and her work sold well, although people had to make online purchases owing to Covid-19.

Michelle has settled comfortably into our new way of life and has put on the weight that she lost while looking after Jamie. But I must admit that I have

slowed down—quite a lot. In 2015 or thereabouts I had a smallish stroke, called a TIA—a Transient Ischemic Attack—which set me back a bit. I suppose that with all the pressure of work, looking after Jamie, running the studio and so on, I had been overdoing things. Thinking has become a bit of a struggle since then. I can’t think of words, and peoples’ names too sometimes, which is embarrassing. But you get used to it. In the end, we all get old and have to come to terms with being mere mortals. One way or another, we all end up in the big house in the sky.

After living and working in more rural surrounds, it takes a while to get used to not having much of a garden anymore. But we brought quite a few of our favourite plants from Franschhoek, and have set them in front of the house, where there was just a small patch of grass before. They’ve taken well and hopefully in time they’ll grow enough to muffle the sounds of passing cars. We also have an enormous avocado pear tree, which reminds me of KwaZulu-Natal and gives us the most delicious avos, although they have a long way to fall!

So, God willing, life goes on.



*The 2012 Corobrik National Ceramics Exhibition opened at the Pretoria Art Museum on Sunday, October 7. This exhibition is presented by Ceramice Southern Africa and showcases the best work of the members throughout South Africa. International Award Judge, Daphne Correegan, from France, presented the prestigious Corobrik Award for the Best Piece on Show to Delphine Niez from the Eastern Cape. The award for Ceramics for Expression went to Katherine Glenday from the Western Cape and the award for Functional Ceramics to David Walters also from the Western Cape.*



## TRIBUTES

FROM FAMILY & FRIENDS (2022)

*Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?*

— Omar Khayyam

*How do you find the words to write about somebody who has been at the centre of your universe your entire life. I am not a writer, but I am going to try.*

*Firstly, and most importantly, he was my dad. The best dad I could have wished for. He was always around and we always had time. He worked from home, he built our homes! His family was his priority. I could go and sit with him in his studio anytime and chat, he loved to chat. He cooked dinner in the evenings and we sat as a family at the table, together. My early childhood in the Midlands was like a dream, discovering cabbage patch dolls in the vegetable garden and playing mermaids on the rocks at the bottom of a waterfall. We moved to the UK, and on the glorious long summer evenings we played badminton in the garden, and laughed until we couldn't stand. We always laughed, a lot. He was my best friend. He taught me to drive. He taught me about life. He supported me in all my decisions and believed in me. That's no small thing. He worked hard to send me to the best school. When I failed at maths he laughed and said he had too. He taught me how to change a car wheel and use a drill. How to paint walls and lay tiles. He taught me to try and do it, no matter what it was, because he believed I would get the hang of it, eventually. He was a dad that treated me equally so I never felt, as a girl, that I couldn't do what the boys did. I felt loved, a dream childhood in a happy family.*

*A connected and special family. I have only truly become aware of how special that is as I have grown older and seen how rare that is. He read me bedside stories in the evenings and later we shared books. (During my teenage years we read all of Terry Pratchett's books and laughed.) I walked in his foot prints on the beach, and we swam in the sea. He worked hard to give me the freedom to choose. I went to art school and he supported that unconditionally. I graduated and didn't know what to do next and my dad took me into his studio and he taught me. And this is when my dad became my mentor. He taught me how to make pots and gave me a direction, an occupation and profound joy in my work for the rest of my life. He taught me the business of making pots, the philosophy of making pots and the work ethic required, by example. We laughed some more, and we fought. It was a magical time. He helped me build a house. He guided me, quietly, and let me do it. It was such fun, hard work, challenging and rewarding. He taught me how to live out of the box, a fairly unconventional life based on his philosophy that life is short and you should try to do what you love every minute of the day, not just at weekends. He taught by example. He managed to fit a lot into his life. A good friend to many, warm, generous and accepting. A legend of a potter I have yet to see a better tea pot. He built a lot of beautiful houses which became loving homes. He was a committed husband and father who made that his priority and worked very hard for his family. He enjoyed good food and sharing it. My dad burned through life with his hair on fire, loving every minute. He loved making pots, he loved building houses, he loved his friends, and most of all he loved his family. My dad was my hero, and I will miss him every day of my life.*

*Sarah*

*David was our family's laatlammetjie, born with jaundice when I was twelve and heading for boarding school, university and travels. By the time I returned and married, the solemn little Buddha sitting in his pram had become a Fine Arts student and ceramics lecturer.*

*A diagnosed heart attack a decade later brought him to stay with us on our Muldersdrift smallholding, under orders to take things easy. 'Send him over to me,' said our potter friend Tim Morris, 'I need some help.'*

*Our daughters enjoyed having a young resident uncle who brought them, memorably, an LP with 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters'. All too soon he had left to marry Michelle and establish the first of a series of thriving potteries with her, both in the Midlands and for a decade in England – always with an eye to improving or adding to the old buildings they bought. Their last studio/home in Franschhoek became a beacon for many, both for his unique style and the bonhomie of regular gatherings of enthusiasts and friends.*

*After the grievous loss of my husband, David's warm invitation to buy a portion of their garden to build a home on brought me to the village, which led via their constant support to the creation of the Franschhoek Literary Festival.*

*His inspiring, ever-positive presence will always be missed by we who loved him and still enjoy his ceramic legacy.*

*Jenny Hobbs*

*It was with enormous sadness that I learnt today of the passing  
of one of South Africa's icons, David Walters.*

*He has been a huge presence in Ceramics Southern Africa in its 50-year history. Not only did he have the greatest skill in producing exquisite porcelain ware that found homes all over the world and in many illustrious places – I think dinnerware for Nelson Mandela – he has shared his huge experience in all things pot making with the members of CSA and many other craft and art people over many decades. He contributed significantly to the development and promotion of CSA and ceramics in general in South Africa and in the United Kingdom where with his wonderful wife, Michelle, they lived and worked for a number of years. One of his greatest achievements was the initiation of a significant body of ceramics brought by the William Humphreys Art Museum in Kimberley. This museum now holds one of the best collections of ceramic art in South Africa.*

*David promoted ceramics for many years in Franschhoek through exhibitions in their own beautiful gallery as well as ceramic exhibitions in and around Franschhoek, thereby introducing visitors locally and overseas to what South Africa has to offer in beautiful ceramic ware. He was one of the select few whose important contribution to ceramics in South Africa was acknowledged by CSA when he was introduced as a FELLOW of Ceramics Southern Africa.*

*Before coming to live in Franschhoek he and Michelle were the movers and shakers in the establishment of the now famous 'Midlands Meander' in KwaZulu-Natal that has shown the world's visitors the amazing arts and crafts of that region and in South Africa generally. His work is in many museums and private collections in South Africa and it is distinctive and instantly recognisable by the serene beauty of exquisitely thrown porcelain ware for the table. His ware was sought out by the top restaurateurs in the Cape: many of the 5-star fine dining restaurants sought his work as a complement to their food presentation. He loved creating special ware for special dishes in collaboration with top chefs.*

*He was also a great raconteur and loved good food, good wine, good companions and good conversation. His sense of humour was a source of great delight and merriment to all.*

*I will always remember his unique form of making a speech. It was when his audience experienced what magic is – he would sit at his wheel and throw the most exquisite pot; clay was his language and raison d'être. It was a performance that held the audience spellbound – one could hear a pin drop in the silence. A giant amongst the ceramic fraternity has gone but his unique ceramic ware and his legacy to ceramics in South Africa will live on. He will be greatly missed. Deepest condolences to his wife, Michelle, and daughter, Sarah. RIP Beautiful Soul.*

*Ann Marais*

*It was with great sadness and sorrow that I learned of the passing of David Walters last weekend. I will always be indebted to David for the support and encouragement he offered me.*

*From when I left school in 1975, interested in pottery, he offered me access to his studio. We built kilns together and spent many a university vacation in his Hilton studio in Pietermaritzburg.*

*Then later at his Caversham Mill studio in the Natal Midlands he and Michelle offered me an invaluable informal apprenticeship in running not only a pottery business as I worked alongside them and that picturesque Caversham waterfall.*

*The memory I will carry is David sitting at his pottery wheel in conversation, his hands fluent in motion between the repetitive potting movements and those gestures to help illustrate his story telling. A generous and wonderful life lived and I will miss him.*

*Jonathan Keep*

*It is hard to believe that bearded ball of energy has died. David was indeed 'larger than life'. It was not just his energy, but that it was so well and creatively focused. And all that with an ease of manner, charm, and gentle humour.*

*Although I had been a Friend of the Suffolk Craft Society for some years (and a friend of Reggie-n-Heather's), it was a surprise (and a steep learning curve) to find myself its Chair. Because I'd been a schoolboy potter, a maker of model aeroplanes and then an engineering apprentice I was good with my hands, but never thought myself a craftsman.*

*As an architect I was design trained, but builders did the making. I felt that the committee needed to be more visibly craft oriented. So I created the role of Vice-Chair, and asked David to take it on.*

*It was undoubtedly the most successful thing I did as Chair.*

*However, for me it was much more than that. It became one of the richest and happiest friendships in my life. David had so much energy that it flowed into us around him. And he was such fun: there was always a smile, a chuckle, or a wry aside. Over the years since you left we weren't often in touch, but comradeship remained strong as ever.*

*When the Covid lockdowns arrived I decided that I must mark the stream of identical weeks in some way. Whilst I normally wear a farmer's muddy greens and browns, at weekends I wear blue. And Saturdays and Sundays have their own coffee mugs. Today (Sunday) it's an Elizabeth Blackadder design of tulips; yesterday it was 'David's Mug', broad and stable (like him) and with one of his lovely flowers splashed on the side. In the living room his great fruit bowl, in the same style, sits centrally on David Gregson's limed elm table. They're daily reminders of that remarkable and loveable man. Thank you so much for sharing him with us all.*

*With my great sympathy and love to you all.*

*Roger Cunliffe*

### TREASURE HUNTING IN THE DEMOLISHERS YARDS

*Our friendship was founded on a mutual love of cement and the creative process of building.*

*We first met whilst we were both building homes in the misty heights of Hilton – at the time David was teaching ceramics in the Fine Arts Department at Pietermaritzburg University where I was a BA 'hippie' student.*

*On Fridays David and I would take turns in having a picnic lunch on one of our building sites. Our standard fare was a 'Boston Butt', a sun warmed Donnybrook Camembert and a fresh baguette washed down with a bottle of 'Tassies'.*

*One of these lunches at David's house carried on into the night and the bottle of 'Tassies' was followed by a bottle of Cherry Heering Liqueur.*

*It was near the end of this bottle that we felt a bit peckish and our conversation turned to what edible plants there were in the surrounding forest. David told me that the tall spindly cabbage trees which grew deep in the forest had large bulbs which the Zulus peeled and ate.*

*Fired up by Cherry Heering and our hunger we grabbed a spade and a torch and stumbled into the wet forest in search of an unsuspecting cabbage tree.*

*Slipping and sliding and covered in mud and laughter we dragged our prey back to the kitchen table where we peeled the massive bulb with a bread knife to expose its white flesh which we cut into thick bread-like slices. The taste came as quite a shock after the sweet liqueur and our hunger disappeared immediately.*

*On other occasions, when it was raining, we would retire to the bar at Crossways Hotel for drinks in front of the fire and a plate of delicious tripe. Over these lunches we would give each other advice on roof timbers, beam spacings and brickwork – we had both already decided that all building work was based on common sense which was something we learnt from our fathers, who were very similar, having grown up in the colonies with their unlimited opportunities where everything was possible; you just had to get on and do it.*

*Looking back I think this was the guiding principle for both our lives.*

*David taught me how to scout the demolishers yards in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, forever on the lookout for interesting doors and stained-glass windows, yellowwood and encaustic tiles – a lot of old Victorian buildings were being demolished at the time in the name of 'progress' so our scrummaging was constantly rewarded.*

*It was always a great joy to see the pit-sawn yellowwood beams which had been felled in the Karkloof forest in the 1850s come back to life as the grime was removed to reveal its beauty underneath.*

*David even took me to the breakers yard in Cato Ridge where they were stripping old*

*railway carriages made entirely out of teak. There we bought piles of teak shutters and before long they were transformed into cupboard doors in the houses which we were building.*

*Luckily there was always enough of these treasures to go around, although we once nearly had a fall out over a beautiful encaustic tile floor in the entrance hall of an old Victorian house which was about to come down – the dodgy demolisher had offered the floor independently to David, myself and many others. Luckily someone else got it and our friendship was spared.*

*We would dust off the treasures we found on these expeditions, and they would wait patiently in one of our garages as a reminder of buildings to come.*

*Around 1988, after David had been living in England for over 11 years, I received a call from him. He told me that he was missing Africa and his friends and family there and that he had decided that the time had come for him to stop following his head but rather to follow his heart.*

*I picked him up at Cape Town Airport a few weeks later and we spent several days together travelling the length and breadth of the Cape in search of his new home. He told me that Michelle had agreed to move back on condition that he found them a new house which needed no renovation as she was tired of living on a building site.*

*David's heart told him otherwise as soon as he fell in love with Roubaix House in Franschhoek – a beautiful old lady on a magnificent property with great bone structure but in serious need of a complete makeover!*

*From the forests of Hilton to the green hills of the Midlands, from the riverbanks of Caversham to the flatlands of Norfolk and from there to Franschhoek Valley – David was constantly building whilst in his spare time starting the Midlands Meander, serving on the Suffolk Craft Society and putting Franschhoek on the tourist map. In amongst all of this he even managed to make a few pots!*

*There are two of his buildings that stand out in my mind – the one is the stone house which he built on the banks of the Lions River in Caversham and the other was his barn conversion in Norfolk – both remarkable buildings and proud examples of his boundless enthusiasm and creativity!*

*Charles Lloys Ellis*

*I met David Walters, 'Taffy,' while studying Fine Art at the University of Natal Pietermaritzburg way back in the mid-70s. Rhodesia was then going through its war of independence, and I was a young lady a long way from home.*

*In the ceramics department, David tried in vain to teach me to throw on a wheel, but we decided that the failed attempts of slop in the bucket were far more interesting! He had the foresight to let me work with clay in a more painterly way, breaking the rules on how a student was expected to pass their subject.*

*David may not have managed to teach me the skill of throwing, but he taught me far more. He taught me life skills and how to manage a business. These skills have been with me ever since and have paved the way to Ardmore's success. For this, I am eternally grateful!*

*Upon completing my degree, Taffy offered me the opportunity to use his Caversham Mill studio, live in his Howick home, and run the pottery studio while he and his wife Michelle and family travelled abroad. There, I met Phineas Mweli and David's father Owen, who introduced me to the romantic writings of Voltaire. These six months were the tipping point in my life as they started me on the path to a career as a commercial artist.*

*Most importantly, David and the Walters family taught me the art of generosity: 'You buy people, not products.'*

*Here in the pastoral and scenic Midlands, we all remember the generous harvest table picnic lunches held at the Walters' Caversham Mill open days, when all the who's who drove up from Pietermaritzburg and Durban to enjoy good company and buy hand-thrown pots, batiks, and hand-woven rugs. The Midlands Meander was David's brainchild.*

*David had a wicked sense of toilet humour, and this still remains with me today! He taught me that humour is the best way to deal with adversity.*

*His buddies Malcolm Christian, Peter Schütz, and Andries Botha all took me under their wing as big brothers and played a vital role in my artistic career. Their support gave me confidence and made me brave!*

*When visiting David in Newlands, Cape Town, a few months before he passed away, he walked a little way down the street to say goodbye and left me with these parting words: 'Remember Fée, you couldn't have done it any better.' Even at David's end, he was selfless and kind!*

*Fée Halsted*

TALISMAN FOR TAFFY, FRIEND & FAMILY

Dear Taffs,

*We chatted just after your diagnosis and talked about life as a process. A word inseparable with this is relationship. Our evolution does not happen in isolation but is dependent on one another as context and driver of meaning in our lives.*

*Sarah brought to my attention how lucky you and I are for the friendship that we share; something rare, which I wholeheartedly agree with.*

*In 1977 on a cold misty Hilton day Schütz brought us up in his yellow beetle to introduce us to his special hillbilly friends. Still so fresh in my memory is sitting with you and Mikkers in your warm home drinking coffee from handmade mugs and listening to stories about your wedding performed by a drunken Reverend Graham Braysbaw. Names mentioned and language used becoming an indispensable part of our shared vernacular and mythology as time passed.*

*Then walking through to your studio, the first sighting embedded in my mind was an image filled with evidence of an unpretentious, disciplined creative life. Later I see you seated with head wobbling in time to the spinning of the wheel as clay is drawn into vessels, containers for food, drink or objects of preciousness and beauty decorated with your unmistakable calligraphy.*

*This natural joy, shared knowledge and wisdom found in you, remains a source of personal inspiration.*

*During the past 45 years we became fellow-travellers in building homes both local and distant. In all there were familiar connections that allowed the thread to be picked up again without interruption. This is now a deep source of comfort knowing that wherever we land up and meet again it will be as if time and distance does not exist. This is the thread that we search for, an enabling relationship of sometimes desperate parts that on coming together are ingredients in a rich recipe of celebration, achievement and suffering providing encouragement and nourishment. This is the succour that true friendship in nurtured with.*

*Over the past few weeks I have thought about you and the challenge that*

*you face and from experience, not by gazing at my navel, have put this into making an object. As with the outcome of the recipe it has fed me too with a drive that temporarily overcame my tremors by focusing on making this gift for you. Thank you and may it bring you joy, relief and help you look for beauty in giving yourself over to and trusting in the process.*

*I'm sure you will enjoy this part! After initially sharing my dream wish with you I went to do a piss. Now with my tremors it's best to sit not stand. The challenge is that getting dressed again can become a lengthy process and maybe a skirt might be a solution. As I turned around trying to get my pants done up, there in front of me on your bathroom shelf from the flood times and arranged below toilet rolls and other bathroom paraphernalia were four cowrie shells. These I had rescued from Schütz's Durban studio, so making a container for these seemed the right thing to do. The inexplicable thread continues.*

*The box is a memory echoing the beach at Umzumbe; the sky sunny or dripping with moisture reflected in a layering of colour and sea movement, the stillness of rock pools with Jamie's shadow causing life to dart for shelter; your Dan delving under the water line for red bait keeping an eye out for the next wave; or the footprints that we leave behind by in the simple act of walking, their size and tread calling our names, present and past, from small to large fudged by the tide or scampering of delighted dogs.*

*We remain evermore cocooned in the constant drumming of ebb and flow of the ocean all the while searching for the elusive shell, the cowrie and now occasionally diverted by the appearance of an ear bud.*

*May our joint search continue with plenty of meetings along the way.*

Malcomo

