

# Case Study: Ceramic Pottery Maker - Harry

## What do you do?

I produce my own pottery for sale. Just about everything I make, I sell in my own shop.

I work in a lot of different styles, and produce primarily three different kinds of work: high-fired functional stoneware (dishes, kitchen items, etc), porcelain work including classical oriental styles, and low-fired sculptural pieces, like decorative masks.



## What is your background?

While studying psychology at university, I lived with an apprentice potter. At the end of each day, we would talk about our work, and I started to find his job a lot more appealing. But I finished the degree anyway, setting up practice as a psychologist while taking as many pottery courses as I could.

I took a year off work to pursue more training. Then I just kept making pottery, selling at local and regional craft shows. In 1980, I moved into my current studio, focusing more on selling from there.

## What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

Almost everything ceramic pottery makers do is visually oriented. You have to be able to picture an idea in three dimensions, and then carry it through. Anything you can imagine should be possible. Clay is extremely versatile.

You have to have a passion for pottery because there's a large amount of uncertainty, especially in the beginning. It takes confidence in your abilities to get through these times.

## What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

Having experience with the creative process would make it easy for ceramic pottery makers to move into other types of artistic or craft work. Many also teach pottery.

Also, it's common for pottery makers to have another part-time job to supplement their income, especially during their early years. If they don't want to make pottery any more, they can pursue that other career.

## What changes will there be in the future?

One thing that won't change significantly is the way pottery makers do their work - the same processes have been used for thousands of years. Chemistry can improve glazes, and computers can regulate kiln temperatures better, but these advances don't make for huge changes in the form.

## What are the biggest challenges in your job?

I feel drawn to experimental work. That's my nature. It's more challenging and exciting. However, the financial reality of earning a decent living pulls me towards creating pottery that will sell. I am a constant battleground for these two opposing wills. It's tough to balance my time effectively.

## Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

I think it's a bit harder to get started as a ceramic pottery maker today than it has been in the past. Knowing what you're doing is essential, and there seem to be fewer quality training programmes now. Space to pursue your art is also harder to find because of rising property prices.

## What do you like about your job?

Making a really successful piece is probably the most satisfying thing about being a ceramic pottery maker. When I remove my pots from the kiln after firing, sometimes there'll be a piece or two that turns out better than could have possibly been expected. It's these bits of magic that keep me going.

## What do you dislike about your job?

Money is a constant challenge. Many ceramic pottery makers have second jobs, and those who are fortunate enough to work at it full-time need to work very hard to earn a good living.

Hauling work and displays to fairs is not my favourite activity and something that I don't do much of anymore. Running a shop, however, ties you down to retail hours. There are no perfect solutions.

## What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

Try to get some exposure to pottery making. Try it out, take some courses or work with an experienced potter. You'll know if it's for you.

If you decide to pursue a career as a ceramic pottery maker, get as much education as you can. A good education will give you the technical knowledge and exposure to ideas that will allow you to progress throughout your career.

## A day in the life

8:00 am - 8:30 am

Firing up the kiln (an oven that hardens the pottery) and loading it with pottery.

8:30 am - 9:30 am

Mixing several types of clay to get a blend I like to work with.

9:30 am - 10:30 am

Packing some of the clay away for another day and kneading the clay I will use today.

10:30 am - 12:30 pm

Throwing clay (using the spinning wheel to form various pots).

12:30 pm - 1:00 pm

Lunch.

1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

Showing customers through my showroom. Receiving a commission from someone to make a custom pot.

2:30 pm - 4:30 pm

Flattening clay and cutting it into shapes to create various objects.

4:30 pm - 5:00 pm

Unloading the kiln.

5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Recording expenses and sales for the day.