

Eric KNOCHE



STORY BY PAUL M. HOWEY | PHOTOS BY TIM BARNWELL

Our interview began on a small island off the coast of Greece, continued in Istanbul and later Copenhagen, and finally wrapped up in the picturesque town of Gothenburg, Sweden. I presume it's picturesque. I wasn't there. Instead, I'd been chasing, via emails, Eric Knoche (pronounced ka-na-ka) on his country-hopping trip as an ad hoc ambassador of wood-fired pottery. He helped build a new wood kiln at the Gulderagaard Ceramic Center in Skælskør, Denmark, and set up an exhibition of small works at Gallery Sintra in Gothenburg. He began his travels teaching at a ceramics school in Bavaria and will end with a residency in Estonia.

Global travel and Eric's education and career have been interwoven for a long time. In 2002, he went to Thailand to teach English but was soon asked to teach a sculpture course at Ragamangala University. "It was a little tricky, since few students spoke English and my Thai was pretty bad," says Eric. "But the fact that it was challenging just meant I had to ... really stretch out to give the students a valuable experience." He later spent six months in Japan as a short-term apprentice to Living National Treasure, Isezaki Jun. From him, said Eric, "I

learned about the power of slowness and lightness of tradition."

When he was in high school, and even in college, Eric was primarily a painter. "Initially, I was really snobby about clay work and was convinced it was a much lower form of art." He had a fleeting interest in glassblowing, but was quickly dismayed to learn how much gas was used in the process. So he decided to reconsider clay. "At the time, making a living from selling small, functional things seemed much more feasible than trying to sell large paintings," he says.

"But then I touched the clay ... Clay is just such an amazing material ... both demanding and forgiving, it can be softer than water and as hard as stone, as delicate as an eggshell and more durable than anything else humans have ever made... For me, the material itself is endlessly fascinating."

While he'd often heard how difficult it is to have a profitable career in art, he says, "In my opinion, being an artist and making a living from your art are two entirely separate things," adding that he knows amazing artists who make very little money and others of considerably



*"Everyone is an artist whether they like it or not."
- Eric Knoche (Photo by Frank Bott)*



less talent who make a great deal.

"I have found that the most effective way for me to make salable work is to not make anything with the intent of making it salable. I am grateful to have found out early the work that people respond to and buy is the work that I make purely because I want to make it."

When asked why he prefers wood-fired kilns, Eric responds, "Honestly, the first thing that really attracted me to wood

kilns was the sound. ... gas kilns can sometimes sound like a jet engine." He says that when he encountered his first wood kiln, the only thing he heard was "a soft but powerful drawing sound from the entry and exit flues ..."

He says the effects from certain styles of wood kilns are uniquely appropriate for his work, and adds he finds the process endlessly fascinating. "To fire successfully is not a matter of jamming wood in a hole. I think of my relationship with the kiln like I think of my relationship with clay: a constant dialogue."

So what brought him to Asheville? "Honestly, I came to Asheville for the first time to visit a girl. That part didn't exactly work out like I thought but, once I had spent some in Asheville, I was hooked." While walking through the River Arts District one day, he came across Clayspace Co-op. There, he met Josh Copus, the founder, and the two hit it off. "We've been a pretty tight team every since."

Eric says he has no proprietary information about his creative process.

"I'll tell anybody anything they want to know about anything I do. Knowledge functions best in the public domain."

"My work tends to evolve out of itself rather than from a specific concept. Mostly I just make things that I am curious to see, but the interaction of pieces with each other is very important to me."

To learn more about the artist and his art, visit ericknoche.com. His work can be seen in our region at Blue Spiral 1 in Asheville (he's part of a three-person show there through July 26), and at Crimson Laurel Gallery in Bakersville where he's curating a wood-fired show, July 1 through August 31 (see story on page 99).