

Larry Spears Uses Original Glaze Techniques to Create Unique Pottery

“I am primarily a self-taught potter,” says Larry Spears.

Don’t let that fool you. Mr. Spears’ work is accomplished, technically impressive, and beautiful. He has been crafting wheel-thrown stoneware and porcelain pottery for more than 30 years, and over that time has studied with professional potters from the United States and Europe.

Mr. Spears is a potter whose unusual teapots and functional items are widely sought by collectors for their unique shapes and glazes. He has been recognized with awards at art exhibitions and art fairs.

He develops all of his own glazes and often combines several glaze techniques in a single piece. He holds up a large bowl whose colors and textures seem to drip and flow organically on its surface.

“This is an ash glaze,” he says, pointing at a solid expanse of smooth color. “I use ashes from a friend’s fireplace.”

He uses a sprayer to apply it evenly to the surface.

“This is a reticulated glaze,” he says, pointing out a highly textured area. “I have to tweak the formulation to fit the clay body.”

A thick glaze, it is applied with a bulb syringe, and the piece is shaken to make the glaze flow. The result is a beautiful combination of careful planning and pure chance. The pieces are usually reduction fired in a down-draft gas kiln, but he also employs raku, pit-firing and wood-firing techniques as well.



Mr. Spears began his career as a hobby in the late 1970s. His passion eventually led to a full-time career and a gallery in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. In 1996, he relocated to Brown County and opened Spears Gallery on State Road 135 South.

“Brown County provides daily inspiration,” he says. “This is a unique landscape.”

Some of the functional pieces Mr. Spears makes are meant to interact directly with that landscape. In addition to bowls, cups and pots, he makes ceramic bird feeders, bird houses, fountains and bird baths, all designed to withstand outdoor use.

Mr. Spears shares gallery space with his son, Kyle Spears, a professional photographer. Having his son’s work and a darkroom on site have influenced him as well. In fact, he has taken up photography part-time.

“Many years ago, I did work with black and white photography as a hobby,” he says. “With my son’s passion for this, I have rediscovered the art form.” He’s been successful here, too. One of his images was selected for a juried exhibition at the Art Museum of Greater Lafayette in Lafayette, Indiana.

Mr. Spears’ work can always be seen at Spears Gallery, which hosts events and workshops for beginning and intermediate students several times a year, including “Clay Day,” where the public can choose from a variety of clay forms, glaze them, and then watch them fired.

Spears Gallery is also one of the working studios participating in the Brown County Studio and Garden Tour the last weekend of June each year, as well as on the Back Roads Studio Tour the entire month of October.

More information about Larry Spears and his artwork can be found at www.SpearsGallery.com or www.BrownCountyStudioTour.com.

by Michele Heather Pollock

