

CLAY CULTURE

the scott collection

by Sam Scott

Having an early passion for making was the driving force behind Sam Scott's early collecting habits, while the abundance of high-quality Pacific Northwest ceramics motivated him and his wife to be life-long local collectors.

Getting an Early Career Start

In the late 1960s I took a ceramics class in high school and began a journey with clay that continues today. My teacher, Bob Gee, was a large influence in the early years. By 1972 I was ready to transfer from community college to a university. Around this time I ran into Bob Sperry's work at a gallery and decided to transfer to the University of Washington (UW) where he taught. I was unaware at the time that Bob, Patti Warashina, and Howard Kotler were teaching there, but it did not take me long to realize that these three people were helping change American ceramics in the latter part of the 20th century. What had attracted me to Bob's work was the incredible over-glaze brushwork he was doing on his pots at the time and within a couple of weeks I purchased a wine decanter from him. This first piece set the tone for the work I would collect, first by myself and later with my wife Dianne. It was a good decision as a student to acquire the work of all three

of my instructors and over the years I have been fortunate to add more of their work to the collection. Collecting pieces from artists we know means a preponderance of the work is from those located in the Pacific Northwest.

The Drive to Collect

As a ceramic artist who makes work that people collect, it is no surprise that I am a collector. One of the great joys of being a maker is when another artist wishes to trade work with you. I have had only one occasion where I approached another potter asking if they would like to trade and the response was "why would I need more pots?" all others are very receptive. One of my first experiences with trading was when Bob Sperry wanted to trade work with me. Mutual admiration is a major motivator to collecting. The desire to have distinctive work that communicates skill, perspective, ideas, or the point of view of the maker has been a strong directive.





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1 Entry cabinets. This what you see as you enter our home. 2 Patti Warashina's *Cooling Kiln #2*, 1970. This is my favorite piece in the collection because it was my first introduction to her work and because of the humor in the piece, which is present in much of her work. 3 Sam and Dianne Scott with part of their collection. Left to right: Patrick Horsley, Tom Coleman, Patti Warashina, Deb Schwartzkopf, Ben Sams, Jamie Walker, Bob Sperry, Matt Allison, Akio Takamori, Damian Grava, Robin Hopper. Wall diptych by Bob Sperry. 4 Howard Kottler's *Look-Alikes*, 1972. This was one of a set of plates I got from Howard while in school. 5 Bob Sperry's wine decanter, 1972. This was the first ceramic piece I purchased.

Over the years my wife and I began to develop an interest in American art pottery: Rookwood, Roseville, Weller, and George E. Ohr. We would go to antique shops and auctions looking for pieces, but given most of it was made in the eastern US, it was quite an effort locating the work. But we enjoyed the time we spent searching for it and what began with less expensive production work from the 1930s, evolved to collecting the early hand-painted work from the 1890s to the 1920s, which of course was considerably more expensive. So, our Art Pottery group is not large but contains some well-loved pieces that we house in a 1930s Art Deco-era display cabinet.

First Impressions?

When guests enter our home the first thing they encounter is a display of ceramics. Even before you come in, you become aware of our interest within entryway cabinets. Our collection is full but not overwhelming, numbering around 250 pieces. One comment about our home is that it has the feel of an art museum. As we went to auctions looking for ceramics we kept running into wonderful 19th- and 20th-century paintings at reasonable prices so we purchased those as well. This helps to create a gallery atmo-

sphere. Often, where a piece is located directs the engagement of the viewer. Above the fireplace is a Bob Sperry black and white diptych, which tends to get the most comments.

Finding a Favorite

As I engage with the work, there are so many pieces I love for various reasons. But one piece that stands out for me is a Patti Warashina *Kiln*. She did this series of small kiln sculptures in the late 1960s to early 1970s just prior to my arrival at the UW. They were more expensive than a young college student could afford, but I had always regretted not getting one. Many years later Dianne and I were at an auction and miraculously found one. We have several of Patti's pieces but I treasure the kiln more probably because it was what she was doing when I first became aware of her work.

Use and Display

Many people have working collections and enjoy engaging it in their daily routines, but we keep the work securely out of harm's way, safely displayed. Although many of the pieces are cups, we use my own pots primarily, which also gives me a chance to see how successful my decisions have been when resolving design issues.



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6 Akio Takamori's *Couple*, 2006. 7 Sam Scott's vase and Akio Takamori's bowl on a table and Jamie Walker's sculpture on the wall. 8 An Art Deco cabinet filled with American art pottery, a wall pocket by David Keyes above the cabinet in the center, and two early Sam Scott pieces on each side of the cabinet.

An Evolving Collection

Over the years our approach to collecting has evolved. Many factors, like knowledge, accessibility, financial security, and space have impacted our collecting decisions. But as I point out to my wife, you can't have too many pots. I tend to be the acquisitions manager and she curates the display. I like the work to be left in one place so I know how to access it. She continually moves things around. I must admit that her pairing of different pieces and seeing the work in a new place forces me to reevaluate it in a new context; often times I see it in a new light.

Impact on Studio Practice

Generally, the major impact of our collection on my own work is based on the immense quality and diversity that these selected artists produce. It helps me engage my studio practice in this context, always striving to maintain quality and my voice. But on occasion seeing a particular piece over time has directly influenced my work. For many years I have loved Bob Sperry's blue bottleneck vase. The mechanical aspect of throwing contrasts with an organic, almost spine-like texture sculpted on each side. It influenced my series of black and white bottles with handbuilt necks that combine a crisply thrown form with a biomorphic, hand-built neck. Although the connection may not be obvious, it was my attempt to achieve the same quality Bob did in his piece.

the author Sam Scott, a ceramic artist since 1968, teaches at Shoreline Community College in Shoreline, Washington. His work is widely exhibited and resides in collections including: the American Museum of Ceramic Art, Shimpo's Corporate Collection, and the International Museum of Contemporary Ceramics in Buenos Aires. Scott's work has been extensively published including: *Making Marks by Robin Hopper*, *Best of 500*, *Pottery Making Illustrated*, and *Ceramics Monthly*. To see more visit www.samscottpottery.com, Instagram @samscottpottery, and Facebook: Sam Scott.