

I have taught more than 150 ceramics workshops during the past twenty years, and have had countless rewarding experiences in doing so. Over time, my teaching skills have developed and my own pottery has benefited from the interaction I have had with students. My sense tells me that most of my students have also enjoyed these classes and grown through their experience. I love teaching and consider it a privilege to be asked to travel and teach workshops, sharing my knowledge and skills with students in other studios.

As exhilarating and intense as a workshop can be, they do have their inherent limitations. In a traditional college program, the teacher/student relationship develops over a period extending anywhere from a semester to several years in length. Even in a community or private art center, the student and teacher usually work together for at least ten weeks. This ongoing rapport is precisely what is missing from the typical short-term workshop. No matter how many steps forward are made during a workshop, the student is on his or her own after it is completed, and the teacher often never sees the student or their work again.

In 2002 Monique Giard, the director of Centre de céramique Bonsecours in Montréal, approached me about teaching a unique two-part workshop. I would work with her students in Montréal for one week, during which we would begin individual projects to be completed over the following six months. At the end of this time, the group would travel to my former studio in Kansas City, Red Star Studios, for a group critique, to discuss the challenges and successes of the prior six months, and to exhibit their work in our gallery. I was excited to pursue this idea, but it never quite came to fruition.

In the summer of 2005, I mentioned the idea to Meira Mathison, the director of the Metchosin International Summer School of the Arts (MISSA) in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Mathison thought it was a great concept and decided to include this class as part of the summer workshop program at MISSA. She and I have discussed and refined the focus over the last year, and the following description is an excerpt from this year's catalog:

An Eight-Month Journey: Throwing... Personal Style... Developing a Body of Work

During the two weeks at MISSA, students will embark upon the journey of developing personal style. Once some degree of proficiency is achieved on the potters' wheel, the next step is to bring personal expression to the anonymous thrown pot. Look both inside yourself and outside at your external environment. What inspires you? Music? Nature? Architecture? Bring as much information about yourself as possible; slides or examples of recent pots or other artwork, your journal, music or anything else relevant to who you are as an individual. At the end of our two weeks, you and Steven will choose an individual assignment to be completed over the next eight months.

The final stop on our journey will be February 28–March 2, 2008 (scheduled to coincide with NCECA in New Orleans) at Center Street Clay in Sandwich, Illinois. Students will bring completed work for critique and a group show. While the show is being hung, we will share our experiences. Bring images, insights and challenges to share with the group. The culmination will be a public opening of our show at the Center Street Clay Gallery on Sunday March 2nd.

The international focus of this workshop makes it noteworthy, but I am especially excited about working with students over an extended period of time and still have it fit within the context of a workshop. It's my hope that this will encourage similar classes in other venues and a general rethinking of the variety of workshops offered. No other art media offers the breadth of workshops that ceramics does, but after working on the implementation of this project for the last year, I realize the depth possible simply by expanding the constraints and the expectations of the typical workshop.

There are many other ways to make the workshop experience more beneficial for both students and teachers. One idea I plan on implementing between the initial two-week segment of this workshop and the conclusion is the concept of follow up critiques by way of video conferencing. It might not be quite as effective as with the teacher holding a student's pot, but it does provide

a venue for ongoing critical input after the workshop is over. We've all got webcams on our computers. Why not put them to work doing something productive?

I can easily imagine a mentor and student relationship in which they meet once or twice a year, either at a workshop or NCECA, with monthly webcam critiques in between. What about the possibility of critiques being offered for a fee on an hourly basis, similar to the way music lessons are taught? A fair and straightforward fee structure would allow a student to set up appointments without feeling like they were asking for a favor, and the teacher to be compensated for his or her time. Just think how beneficial this kind of ongoing mentorship could be to the non-traditional student whose main educational input is from workshops!

In many professions, continuing education is the expected norm. Teachers have to take a certain number of credit hours every year to keep up their certification. My therapist schedules a monthly meeting with her mentor to discuss particularly difficult cases with someone she respects, and the fresh eyes help her figure out ways to help her problem clients. Continuing education and ongoing critical input is just as important for artists. The novice needs it to stimulate growth and the professional to keep their work fresh and vital. Ken Ferguson said, "The best thing you can do is dig a deep well, because deep wells don't dry out in the hot summer. They still have water in them, and the shallow ones dry out. So you've got to dig a deep well. If you do that, you can have ideas forever."

For other perspectives on viable alternatives to traditional college programs in ceramics, check out Don Pilcher's article "Looking at Learning" in the November 2006 issue of *Ceramics Monthly* and my article on ceramics residencies, "Common Ground," in the January 2006 issue.

the author Steven Hill is renovating an 1885 Italianate mansion with Kim Miner to house Center Street Clay, located in Sandwich, Illinois. They will offer fully residential workshops for small groups. For further information, call (815) 570-2030.