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The Making of the Oktoberfest Mugs

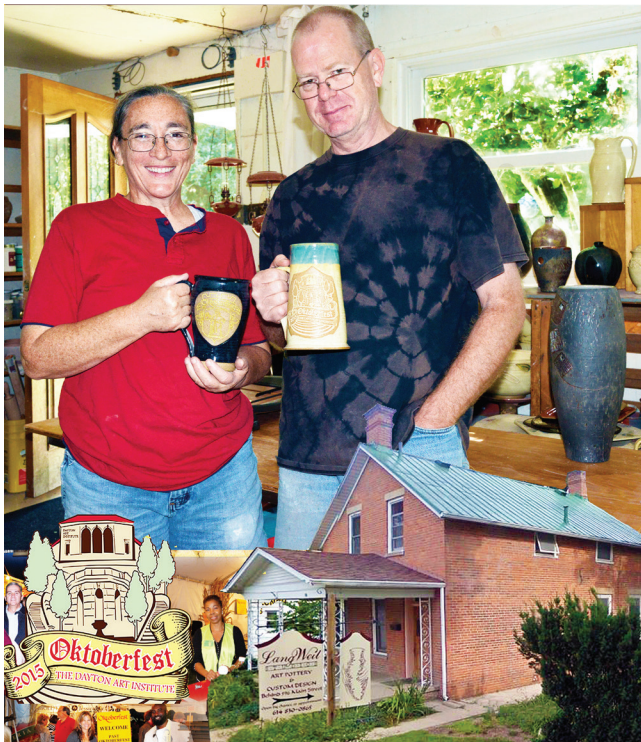


Photo: Walter and Sandra Weil of Lang Weil Studios 596 Main St Groveport, OH 43125. Phone 614-830-0865 and email: langweil@columbus.rr.com
Media: Functional Ceramics, Decorative Ceramics

The Potters Wheel

The Making of The DAI Oktoberfest Mugs

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By Horace Dozier, Sr. / Editor

It was a short drive to Lang Weil Studios in Groveport, OH from Dayton but that made the anticipation even greater. With my wife Juanita our task for the day was to interview one of the local masters of pottery, Walter and Sandra Weil. Groveport, a small community about twelve miles west of Columbus, OH, was lined with historic homes and businesses one of which was our destination. As we drove closer to Walter and Sandra's studio, on the left we could see the sign in the yard "Lang Weil Art Pottery". Their home was in the front and the sign directed us to a separate building behind their home where their studio was located. Walter met us at the door and upon entry the introductions began after which, we were given a tour of the workspace, tools and equipment. As Sandra began the demonstration for making the Oktoberfest Mugs, I would document the steps involved with photos while the interview proceeded. The photos on the preceding pages tell the story of *The Making of The DAI Oktoberfest Mugs*. Sandra explained the process this way. "First, the mixing of the clay because we developed our own clay and glazes from raw materials ordered and kept in bags until needed. We have developed a specific recipe and weight for each of the sizes of mugs for the clay pug". Asked when did you start making mugs for the Oktoberfest? "We Started in 2007 the year of the monk mug" answered Sandra as she was mixing clay in the Pugmill Mixer. "Several layers of material's in these buckets are put through here one batch at a time to pug out and it's going to pug out into these logs of clay. The Pugmill is for mixing, depressing, airing out and extruding pugs (clay logs) of different sizes for production projects. After the clay logs are made, they are placed in a bucket wrapped in plastic until ready to be cut and weighted. Remember, years of experience is required in order to properly judge the amount of clay needed for the proper volume of liquid according to their sketches and

we do prototypes for the shapes. We have developed a specific recipe and weight for each pug over years of throwing clay, after the pug is checked for proper weight, we are ready to move over to the potter's wheel, where the magic happens."

Walter added, "we work very closely with the Chair of the DAI Oktoberfest and the Chair tells us what shape they want. Alexis comes up with the logos and we work with her to make sure the logos will fit the form. Chairs get to pick the design for the mugs and they must be a volunteer with 6-7 years of experience to earn the honor and privilege to become a Chair for the Oktoberfest. We love being part of and making mugs for the Oktoberfest. The community support is phenomenal!

When asked how many mugs you make? Sandra replied, "700 of the large, 650 of the small, 125 of the shots. The large mug is thrown to be ¼ inch thick all the way to the bottom and across the bottom. We throw 15-30 a day but are limited because of health concerns, it hurts keeping the body in this screwy position for long periods of time. We use a potter's chamois to clean off the lip of mugs before removing them from the potter's wheel to the shelves for drying and it must set until leather hard before firing. The whole process of making the clay, weighting the clay, throwing the clay, attaching the handle, label and firing twice can take two to three days. The packaging consisted of individually wrapping the mugs in plastic with our card inserted and packed in boxes to be delivered to the Dayton Art Institute."

Sandra and Walter met while attending the Columbus School of Art & Design (CCD) while majoring in fine arts. Walter studied design and Sandra fine arts, unknowingly to them a common interest and desire for 3D Art could only be matched by the attraction for each other. They began working together on projects for pottery shows where they were very successful. Walter and Sandra traveled to many art shows to sell their pottery, but their favorite was always the DAI Oktoberfest. Setting up a booth along with all the other artisans from all over the country was the highlight show of the year. It would be 4-5 years before they would be asked to take it over. Walter and Sandra had previously submitted mugs to the committee for consideration and the committee liked their work

very much but had someone already doing the work. It wasn't until the artisan from Wyoming who was doing the mugs decided the logistics was too demanding and they were offered the opportunity. In order to meet the Dayton Art Institute schedule for upcoming Oktoberfest events, Walter and Sandra had to begin working on the mugs immediately following each Oktoberfest. The Dayton Art Institute committee likes to use local artisans for the making of the mugs and the mugs reflect the differences in style over time. Today, the new mugs are more contemporary in design and these changes in styles are also present in the Dayton Art Institutes new Renaissance and growth.



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