

Pottery workshop at The Gables

The immensely popular TV show 'The Great British Bake Off' would not have survived its first season if it was filmed in a warehouse under strip lighting.

The beautiful garden, rustic sets, and characterful judges were as important to the show as the skilful competitors.

Understanding the importance of setting, two local potters, Lyn Baynes and Jennifer Maxwell, are offering a pottery workshop on February 24 and 25 and March 9, at a unique and spectacular location near Wainui.

This is a follow-up from their first workshop in November, which was a great success.

They believe the charms of the wonderful old property, The Gables, will provide a blend of creativity and relaxation for participants, enhancing the whole experience.

This is not the 'falling asleep' form of relaxation, but a letting go of the world outside and becoming absorbed in uniting brain and hands, in what must be one of the oldest of human crafts.

They are sure it is much easier for this to happen sitting in a studio with some of the most amazing views in Canterbury.

Whenever potters turn their gaze from their work, they look through a large studio window and down Akaroa Harbour, through the Heads, to the blue Pacific beyond.

The studio sits beside a courtyard edged by vibrant flower beds that thrum with insect life. Across the courtyard is the venerable 170-year old totara farmhouse, which was owned by the Warner family for generations.

This became the home and renovation project, in 1998, for Lyn Baynes and her late partner, Chris Broome.

Lyn is a potter and a chef, as well as being a spectacular gardener.

She and Chris had been hugely influenced by travels in Italy and Italian foods, which inspired them to run small group cultural and culinary tours to Italy for 18 years.

Cooking adds another vital strand to the Pottery weekend – food. Morning coffee and lunch are an excursion through Italian cuisine.

Food miles are just a few meters from the vegetable garden and orchard to the kitchen, by way of the chooks.

Well fortified and 'in the zone', participants are led by Lyn and Jennifer through the entire process of creating pottery, from preparing the raw clay to the fired result.

On the third day, when pieces have cooled from the kiln, participants will return and learn to wax and decorate their pieces, painting and airbrushing with under-glazes and glaze before refiring.

This comprehensive course means beginners can work alongside participants with previous potting experience



Participants at a previous workshop at The Gables.

by *Laura Jones*

and all are encouraged to move at their own pace.

Jennifer and Lyn are experienced teachers so the teaching is clear and not rushed, which is perfect for a practical class.

Results of the first workshop included an amazing array of pieces - a tribute to the human imagination and supportive mentors.

There were wheel-thrown bowls and beakers that grew up under hands that never knew they held such magic.

A surprising number of sculptural forms were human and animal inspired, ranging from a merman to an assortment of New Zealand birds.

This may have been influenced by Jennifer's characterful hand-built animals on surrounding shelves.

These will be very familiar to people who visited The French Shop, on Rue Jolie in Akaroa, which Jennifer ran, with her husband Geoff until 2014.

Like Lyn and Chris, the Maxwells, had also become 'half-European', leading regu-

lar small group holidays to France.

Sadly, both Chris and Geoff passed away during the last four years. But Lyn and Jennifer's lives retain the sound foundations of the decades and experiences they shared with their partners.

Jennifer still holidays on their canal boat in France and Lyn spends months at the 'trulli', a traditional limestone home in Puglia, southern Italy, that she and Chris renovated.

Both Lyn and Jennifer describe returning to pottery to cope with their loss.

As Jennifer said, "I badly needed something to occupy my hands and heart and I turned naturally back to clay - dived back down the rabbit hole, in search of solace, and the comfort of the past.

"And down there, I found, with my fingertips, old friends and new."

Now they are turning a new page by helping others to discover the magic of clay in a beautiful and nourishing setting.