Wortman studio unique, functional pottery

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Features Editor

"It is great work; I don't have to get dressed up, and I get to play with dirt every day," said Emily Wortman of Wortman Pottery Studio and Showroom.

Nationally known potters David and Emily Wortman have owned and operated their studio and showroom since 1977. They offer high-fired functional stoneware pottery.

High-fired means that it is put in a gas kiln at 360 degrees to increase the hardness and durability of the piece. Stoneware is the type of clay that they use. The pieces that they make, such as dinnerware, mugs, bowls, pitchers, candle holders and platters, are functional for kitchen use and are dishwasher and microwave safe.

Both potters received degrees in ceramics from Tulane University in New Orleans.

"When we first moved from New Orleans to Lafayette we worked out of our garage," said Emily Wortman, "but we have to deal with a lot of fire, so, their family and run their business.

The couple stays very busy with raising their three children, looking after their horses, dogs and cats and designing and making unique pottery. Every day they work at their potter's wheels creating new pieces, glazing pieces from the day before or putting the finishing touches by firing each piece in the kiln. The process to create one piece of pottery takes several days to complete.

The Wortmans do not offer pottery classes because their individual work keeps them too busy. In addition to having their own collection at their studio, they also sell to different galleries around the country and attend several craft shows every year.

"Divine intervention" is what Emily Wortman believes is what gives her fresh and interesting ideas to create new pieces every day.

"Ideas just come to me. My pieces are more sculptural than David's, whose primary goal is to make nicely elegant simple shapes with a nice glaze that are subtly elegant and are functional to the kitchen and are something you want to use," she said.

"I think that the secret to making beautiful yet functional pottery is you have to like what you do. You have to want to do it and always know that what you do is not perfect. And you can always do better as you continue and experience new things and see other people's work and incorporate it into your work. You have your own different vision, so it does not come out the same. It is very different."

Many students visit the Wortman studio to get ideas and learn new things about pottery.

"Students come into the showroom and look around, but if they don't pick up the piece and weigh it in their hand, look at how the handle works, feel the smoothness, then it is a big glaring light that they are not a potter," said Wortman, who believes that pottery requires observing the tactile quality of the work.

"You can't think that every piece is perfect and precious. Ideas have to evolve and change. You can't lose your edge and quest for making it right. You have good days and bad days, but your ideas are constantly evolving, which is neat," she said.

For links to other pottery Web sites, directions to the studio and pictures of the potters and their work, visit www.wortmanpottery.com. Their hours of business are Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. or by appointment.