

# A GOOD POT...



Text and pics: Rika Franken

Everyone knows that "beauty lies in the eye of the beholder". That is why it will always be impossible to judge which work of art – or music – is "good" and which "bad". Thankfully, it makes for this world's diversity, with all our different tastes.

However, we all seem to have some opinion on kitsch, and know when something is just too "busy" in appearance, affects us negatively somehow (sometimes intentionally), or the colours just don't go, or something is simply faulty or broken...

Well, having been asked by Artefacts to write about what should constitute a "good pot", and as a person fascinated all my life with nature and clay – and consequently fiddling with it – I can say that the ultimate pot for me should perhaps be the one most closely reflecting or embodying Mother Earth. No doubt there will be people howling in outrage, and defending the shrillest colours and weirdest inorganic shapes, that may render a pot useless for anything pot-like whatsoever. Hey – that's ok!

Clay and glazes, whose ingredients are all derived from Mother Earth's belly in the form of metals, oxides, crystals and suchlike, and are mixed by people in the cleverest combinations, actually already dictate for us potters our natural limits. However, as in all art, one should never forget that an artist is doing what he or she does mostly from a deep need, or 'calling'.

A pot is always made from earth, and was originally created to help us in our daily life by keeping water and food cool, fresh and safe. We acknowledge Mother Earth to be adaptable; in the same way, a clay pot is malleable in our creative hands, assuming its final shape slowly, when it becomes ready to serve us.

Any serious potter will feel a strong challenge to capture some of Nature's intricate textures, colours and shapes and diverse creatures and – of course – add to this his or her own individual flair. Just think of the surface of a particularly beautiful rock, or the delicate colour changes and designs on a variegated leaf, and try to emulate it: it is almost impossible! It fills us with deep respect, reverence, wonder and appreciation of this never-ending inspiration called Nature...



**Teapot and jug:** Andrew Walford  
**Mother Earth:** Velias Ndaba  
**Pot:** Rika Franken

But is it? The technique I use, Raku, demands just that! The more cracks smoked in deep black by organic matter, the better. Sure, some pots won't hold water, but the pot is still part of Mother Nature, and as such, attractive, and may have other uses after all.

Ok. Next: a pot is too thick and heavy. That was a bad thrower – or was it? Again, in Raku, thicker pots are needed to withstand the shock of heat or cold and produce those attractive surfaces and cracks. However, for delicate dinner crockery you would want to go elsewhere, and hold a light vessel in your hands. Marvellous! We have all these choices!

Ok. What about a designed or painted pot?

A pottery designer (my real job) should always take the material into account. Fragile material warrants designs that go with the flow and don't intrude too much, so stylisation could be a great advantage. If it is a flat surface design, it should emphasise and complement the shape of the pot rather than destroying it. But here we may get into troubled waters again: sometimes anti-aesthetics are needed to get a particular message across.

Yes, pots, like all art media, can be perfect to convey important messages – a kind of message-art. A poem; a memory; some injustice; or any other theme depicted on a pot can find its way into the daily lives and homes of people, and might – who knows – make them think a little every time they look at it.

Enough rambling. Let me conclude that if anyone out there has an "issue" (we all do), and I mean a pressing one, grab a piece of clay and make a pot or whatever, and think of Mother Earth a bit. It puts us in our correct place and releases what needs releasing...

...perhaps the ultimate "GOOD POT"? ■

