

# Rika Franken,

Text and pics: Rika Franken

Rika von Schwerin-Franken was born and grew up in Germany and finished her schooling and ceramic studies there too.

She came to Botswana in March, 1982, and worked as a cook at Tuli Lodge where she befriended an extraordinary 82-year-old lady potter from a nearby village. She became her unofficial apprentice and learnt traditional Tswana pottery, its complicated ingredients, where to find them, burnishing and the know-how of dung-firing techniques.

When she left Tuli Lodge, she worked as an artist at the National Museum in Gaborone and moved into a local hut in Gabane village. Several attempts to start a pottery with a local potter failed, until Gabane's Pelegano Village Industries became interested and listened to her enthusiastic plans to revive the dying local African pottery and make it attractive to tourists by starting a pottery there, also providing employment for village ladies.

The pottery expanded from one to seven ladies and was eventually successfully localised. Pelegano Pottery is still running today under Martin Kabwe.



Rika Franken



Wendy Keorapetse Phatsima

With her long-time helper Wendy Keorapetse Phatsima from Gabane, Rika recently started her own little pottery called Terra Cotta. After experimenting with wax resist techniques, they became interested in Raku, an ancient Asian firing technique, which became beautifully "Africanised".

The glaze colours are limited to a lovely matt turquoise, inspired by the colour on ancient Egyptian pottery, and matt terracotta browns. Natural Raku colours are off-white crackles and mottled smoky grey, the natural clay surface penetrated and the character formed by the smoke process.

The pots are unique works of art, which cannot be replicated. Rika is still inspired by Botswana's unique environment and uses local materials, thorns, leather, beads, and glass etc. to decorate her pots. Shapes are organic, often hand built, thrown or part-thrown. At times she gets taken in by social issues or themes, which she then depicts in stylised form on the pots for exhibitions: a kind of "Message-Art".

The pottery is sold at World Design and Botswanacraft in Gaborone, Ghanzi Craft and in shops and lodges in Maun. It is hoped to expand and export at some stage.

*Any orders, such as particular, personalized shapes, images and messages are welcome. Contact Terra Cotta on 3161654 / 71307427 or email [rmf@info.bw](mailto:rmf@info.bw)*

## In Praise Of Pottery

Text and pics: Rika Franken

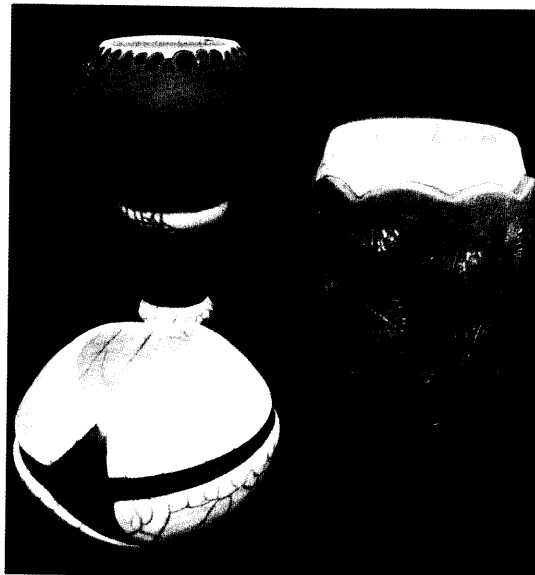
Whenever I happen to visit somebody in Botswana's lands areas, cow and goat bells resound in my senses to let the peace and nature soak into my soul, and to take in the silent, still lives of some remaining thatched huts behind wooden fences, their mud yards at times strewn with old and forgotten utensils which just seem to belong there, all content, half buried in the sand...

And there they are: the old clay pots, belonging too, with their lovely warm colours straight from mother earth, and truly shaped like her too!

Each pot looks up at me like a character telling its stories of feasts and family, propped on a tyre or half discarded, some all wobbly or with a rim smiling with broken teeth... They live forever, don't rust, don't rot, and broken pieces tell of human habitation everywhere in the world.

We can be proud: the cradle of mankind – and pottery – is

right here, in Africa! Long before biblical times the oldest carbon dated pottery shards to date were found buried in the ancient mud of the Nile valley.



While in Northern Africa pottery is still thrown today on the ancient designs of kick- or push-wheels and is the realm of the working male, here in Southern Africa it is purely a ladies' activity. Traditionally much purifying and ritual went with it, and every lady had her special ingredients and where to find them.

I learnt Tswana pottery in 1982 from an extraordinary old pottery lady, Mma Lebotse, 82 years old, when I worked as a German cook in Tuli Lodge on the banks of the Limpopo. She personally used mica glimmer, termite soils and tiny, black volcanic sand splinters only found in a certain bend of a certain streambed...

Her home was decorated inside with beautiful clay shelves, and outside, amongst other things,