

## Terra Cotta Pottery



Ulrike von Schwerin/the founder of Terra Cotta Pottery arrived in Botswana in 1982 and promptly fell in love with the country. A trained ceramist from Germany, she came to visit relatives who were working for the German Volunteer Service. As she traveled around Botswana she couldn't help but notice that the traditional pottery seemed to be dying out. She remembers thinking that maybe she could do something to help renew interest and pep things up a bit.



But first she decided to stay and then got a job as a cook in the Tuli Block. It was during the time of apartheid and the owners of the lodge weren't keen to have her mixing with the locals. She was lonely and her closest friend was the cleaning lady. This woman took her to meet her 82 year old relative who was a real old fashioned potter. This lady taught Ulrike the traditional pottery shapes, how to polish the pots with a stone and gave her recipes for clay including one which included termite soil, crushed black volcanic rock and some mica. The basic idea then began to form for Ulrike that perhaps she could stay and help in some way.



The Gabane Craft Village was just beginning so Ulrike, brimming with new-found en-



thusiasm moved into a local house, accepted a local salary and started training with one woman. The two of them had to dig their own clay with a pick and shovel and to experiment with different clays. It took over a year and a half before the right mix of Serule and Kanye clay was found. Pelegano Pottery was just starting as part of the village craft center and so they began making the pots and experimenting with animals and creating the popular tortoise bowls.

In 1989, Ulrike returned to Europe but she had decided that Africa was where she wanted to be so she and her husband left on a motorbike and rode all the way through Europe and Africa to Botswana. (She still has the motorbike.) She went back to work at Pelegano Pottery training potters and then after awhile she decided to go on her own. She and her husband built a wonderful house in Notwane which includes her pottery studio.



Ulrike's pottery is inspired by nature and her pots reflect this with animal bowls, leaf shapes and vases with quills and seed pods and all sorts of other natural bits and pieces. At some point, her friend Nananjana Mothlalamme, who had worked with her decided to join her, and then seven years ago Wendy Keorapetse Photsima joined them. These ladies do much of the throwing, modeling, glazing and painting though Ulrike is trying to get them to produce items totally on their own for an upcoming exhibit.



You can find bowls, pots and other unique pieces from Terra Cotta Pottery at Botswanacraft and World. They also exhibit in various places including the Village Craft Center.

The Village Craft Center.

