

BILTMORE VILLAGE

Dickens Festival in Biltmore Village

The annual Dickens Festival will take place in Historic Biltmore Village. The Festival provides two days of merriment, music and memories in December, plus additional on-stage vocal and instrumental performances by local artists. December dates are Saturday, December 1 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Sunday, December 2 from 1 to 5 p.m.

Saturday night will feature a concert from 5-7 p.m. by Simple Folk, Asheville's well-known musical entertainers, performing traditional folk, holiday seasonal and mountain holiday music.

Throughout the weekend, there'll be more than 30 groups of musicians, singers, storytellers, carolers and other entertainers performing on the stage and the streets of this picturesque village of shops, galleries and restaurants.

Buildings in the Village will be outlined with more than 250,000 tiny white lights. Replicas of the original streetlights have been installed throughout the Village. Shops will be open until 7 p.m., with many of the shopkeepers clothed in Victorian-era garb.

There will be horse-drawn carriage rides on the tree-lined Village streets and a treat for your taste buds when you stop and see Sakshi Gantenbein, the "Chestnut Roaster."

For additional information call (828) 274-8788.

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Modern Raku Ceramics in Biltmore Village

BY SARAH MEAD

Jann Welch and Scott Haines are both North Carolina Raku artists who are pushing the envelope of Raku. The Raku ceramic technique has its roots in the techniques made famous by Chojiro, the son of a Korean ceramic Tile maker during the 1520's in Japan.

Sen-no Rikyu, who was considered Japan's Greatest Tea Master, favored Chojiro's tea bowls and eventually Chojiro's Tea Bowls gave fruit to a whole branch of ceramics called Raku.

Chojiro used techniques, borrowed from Korean tile makers, that used thermal shock and low firing temperatures to keep the clay from hardening and vitrifying. The resultant teabowls had good insulating qualities, so they kept the tea warmer longer, and they were softer and therefore more pleasant to hold.

Those characteristics were important to the Tea Masters who espoused the concept of 'Wabi', which emphasized humility and a focus on simplicity. The ancestral tea bowls of modern Raku ceramics were simple, handmade, darkly colored black and red bowls, suitable for holding in two hands. After Chojiro's death, his son, who carried on the tradition, was honored with the family name of "Raku". Their descendents, the Raku family, have continued producing these traditional ceramics, and the craft is now practiced, in Japan, by the 15th generation of that family.

The traditional Japanese Raku was different in a number of ways from the modern Western version of Raku. Traditional Japanese Raku was always formed by hand; they used specific types of clay, and lead glazes. Modern Raku is no longer restricted to specific clay bodies, nor is it always formed by hand, and lead glazes have been replaced by safer alternatives. In addition modern Raku is not considered functional, but rather for decoration, as a result it has diverged from its roots and become eye-catching and at times almost flamboyant. Modern Western Raku is not used to hold water, and because it is soft, it is susceptible to

breaking easily and not considered suitable for dinnerware.

In 1960 Paul Soldner is attributed with developing 'Post-Firing Reduction' which is one of the major characteristics which distinguishes Traditional from Modern Raku. He took red-hot ware and placed it into a closed container with combustible organic matter, which reduced the air by sucking the Oxygen out of it. The end result was an exciting and un-reproducible array of colors and metallic lusters. Raku ceramics created using these techniques are often vividly

colored and may be sprinkled with cracks from the thermal shock induced in the process. Another side effect of the rough thermal shock involved in the process is that many pieces break or shatter and never make it out of the studio thus significantly raising its cost to the artist.

In 1998, Jann Welch, who is represented by Bella Vista Art Gallery in Biltmore Village, won second place in the Old Santee Canal Juried Show for her innovative hanging Raku Torsos. Jann Rolls the clay into large flat 'canvases' and then hand sculpts then into sensual frontal and back female Torsos.

She has used colored metallic luster glazes as well as white crackle glazes as backgrounds for her pieces. Once they are fired she puts hanging fixtures on the back and they can be hung like two-dimensional paintings on the wall, albeit with a 3 dimensional look.

Like all Raku artists Jann experiences high loss rates from thermal shock, which is all the more unfortunate because each piece is a unique hand-sculptured work of fine art. One of Jann's vertical pieces was fired lying on its side and serendipitously the glaze ran



Raku Torso by Jann Welch



Vase by Scott Haines

across the mid-ribs of the torso leaving a scarlet hued metallic 'belt' draped across the figure that was breathlessly vibrant and unique. Jann's pieces show how far modern Raku has come from the simple, hand-held, lead-glazed austere colored tea bowls of 16th century Japan.

Scott Haines, who is also represented by Bella Vista Art Gallery in Biltmore Village, builds large thin-walled vases and pots with crisp clean designs and employs a wide range of low-fire and metallic glazes. Scott's pieces are wheel turned, meticulously crafted and embellished with a variety of images, including Celtic designs, swirling fields of glazed dots, and simple charcoal colored Zen-like Cranes on white crackle back grounds. One characteristic common to all Scott's pieces is the very fine detail, and careful attention to symmetry and balance. A testament to his control of

the clay is that even his larger pieces are very lightweight due to the thin walls of his pieces. While traditional Raku tea bowls were simple austere, hand-formed heavy and unfinished in appearance, Scott's pieces exude fine stylish workmanship and are light in weight but bold in concept.

From the austere and simple beginnings as hand formed tea bowls in Japan Raku has emerged as a medium of Fine Art, from hand-sculptured torsos by Jann Welch to meticulous finely worked pieces by Scott Haines.



Vase by Scott Haines