



Interpreting tradition

Jamie Zane Smith uses a small stone to finish a pot in his studio at La Vista CSA Farm in Godfrey.

Potter blends native patterns with a modern aesthetic

By Danette Watt

Jamie Zane Smith rolled a ball of clay into a snake and, added it to the loop coil pot on the potters' wheel set atop his worktable. Using a scraping tool, he smoothed the inside of the pot as the wheel turned.

"Some purists would look down at this combination of traditional and modern techniques," Jamie said.

As an artist, Jamie is less concerned with using a bit of modern equipment than he is of preserving the art forms of ancient Native American potters.

Jamie, 32, is the resident artist at La Vista CSA Farm in Godfrey. He and his wife and their two young daughters moved to the area after Colleen was hired to work at the farm this year.

After earning a bachelor's of fine arts

degree from Western New Mexico University, Jamie decided to get serious about his art. He asked his uncle, Richard Zane Smith, another well-known potter, if he could apprentice under him.

"I used to watch across the table to get his techniques," Jamie said. It was his uncle who introduced Jamie to stamp impressed pottery.

Jamie gets his pottery inspiration from ancient Native American pottery and is himself Native American, of the Wyandot tribe. About a year ago, he had the rare opportunity to visit the archives of the National Museum of the American Indian. There, he had access to pottery from the ancient Woodland Mound Builder cultures.

"I just called them up and told them I was interested in seeing the archives. I was escorted by someone who was part guide, part guard," he said, laughing.

As a way of celebrating his ancestors'



Jamie draws his motifs from nature and traditional Native American patterns.

legacy, Jamie incorporates corrugated Anasazi style and Mound Builder stamp patterns into his own art. The Anasazi are thought to be ancestors of the modern Pueblo tribe. The Mound Builders were pre-historic inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley, home to its largest site, Cahokia Mounds.

Working in his small studio at La Vista

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Jamie hand carves a wooden stamp, using each one only once to create a unique work of art.



Farm has added another unexpected dimension to his work.

"There is an energy of community here, a spirituality, which makes sense since (La Vista) started as a ministry," Jamie said. "The pieces I've made here have picked up on that energy that's closer to nature and Mother Earth."

Recently, he has integrated a new element into his work by pressing wet clay into living tree bark.

Jamie gathers and processes all of his clay and most of his other materials, including paint. He uses a wood-fired kiln because he says it "connects me even further to the process that my ancestors employed to create such elegant ware."

Over the years, his art has evolved, becoming more integrated from concept to finished piece.

"I think of a (pot's) form while I design and carve my stamp and also consider the colors I might use as well," he explained. "In the past, these were separate steps."

A pot, however, doesn't always end up the way he first envisions it, allowing instead for the process to take the lead.

"My pottery isn't dictated by the original idea," he said. "I like it when spontaneity happens."

“ My pottery isn't dictated by the original design, I like it when spontaneity happens. ”

JAMIE ZANE SMITH
artist



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