

# Apprenticing

by RAYMOND BUB

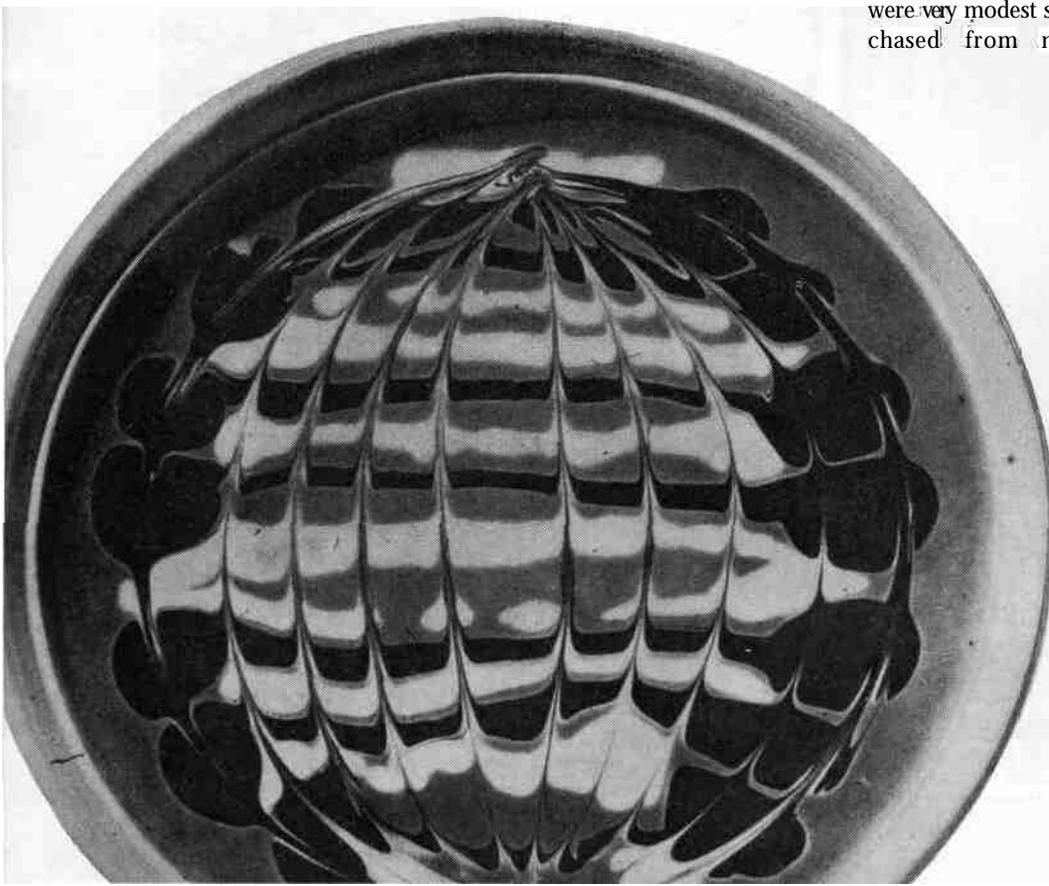
*Photos: Raymond Bub, Ed Leder,  
Colin Pearson, Paul Soldner*

WHEN I GRADUATED from a rural high school in 1966 and set off for Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, I had no intention of working seriously in ceramics. As a matter of fact, my goal at that time was to study engineering. Nevertheless, I now find myself working in partnership with my friends Gordon and Tally Lavin to establish a pottery in Eastham, Massachusetts.

Upon entering the engineering program at Swarthmore, I found the subject interesting, but it seemed only to deal with how-to questions. Substituting English literature as a major was no improvement, and I changed my area of interest a second time to sociology and anthropology. I would probably have made further changes if I had not run out of college years and graduated with a B.A. degree in sociology and anthropology in 1970.

My interest and progress in the field of ceramics began at the time I made my first change of major from engineering to English literature. At that time I was also considering the study of sculpture. With this in mind, I went to the art center at Swarthmore and obtained some clay from which I fashioned some small beetle figures and (I blush to say it a *Winnie-the-Pooh*). Upon completion, these pieces were not what you would term successful in appearance, more like a uniform electric kiln brown. But, I was still interested. Since sculpture was not offered as a course, I decided to take a non-credit ceramics class, reasoning that the experience could later be applied to the study of sculpture.

When I enrolled in the ceramics course, the facilities were very modest some kickwheels, clay and glazes purchased from nearby Wallingford Art Center, and an electric kiln. Under the auspices of Kit Snyder, who began teaching ceramics at Swarthmore at the same time I enrolled for the course, the pot shop soon evolved into a flexible, sophisticated work area with clay mixing apparatus, an expanded raw materials inventory, several electric wheels, a reduction kiln, a raku kiln, a salt kiln, etc. Witnessing and being involved in the growth of this program served to crystallize my interest in ceramics. My next commitment stemmed from a com-



*Left: Porcelain plate (in bisque state) with combed slip decoration; produced by the author at Swarthmore College, 1971: white and brown slip on a green background, 9 inches in diameter.*

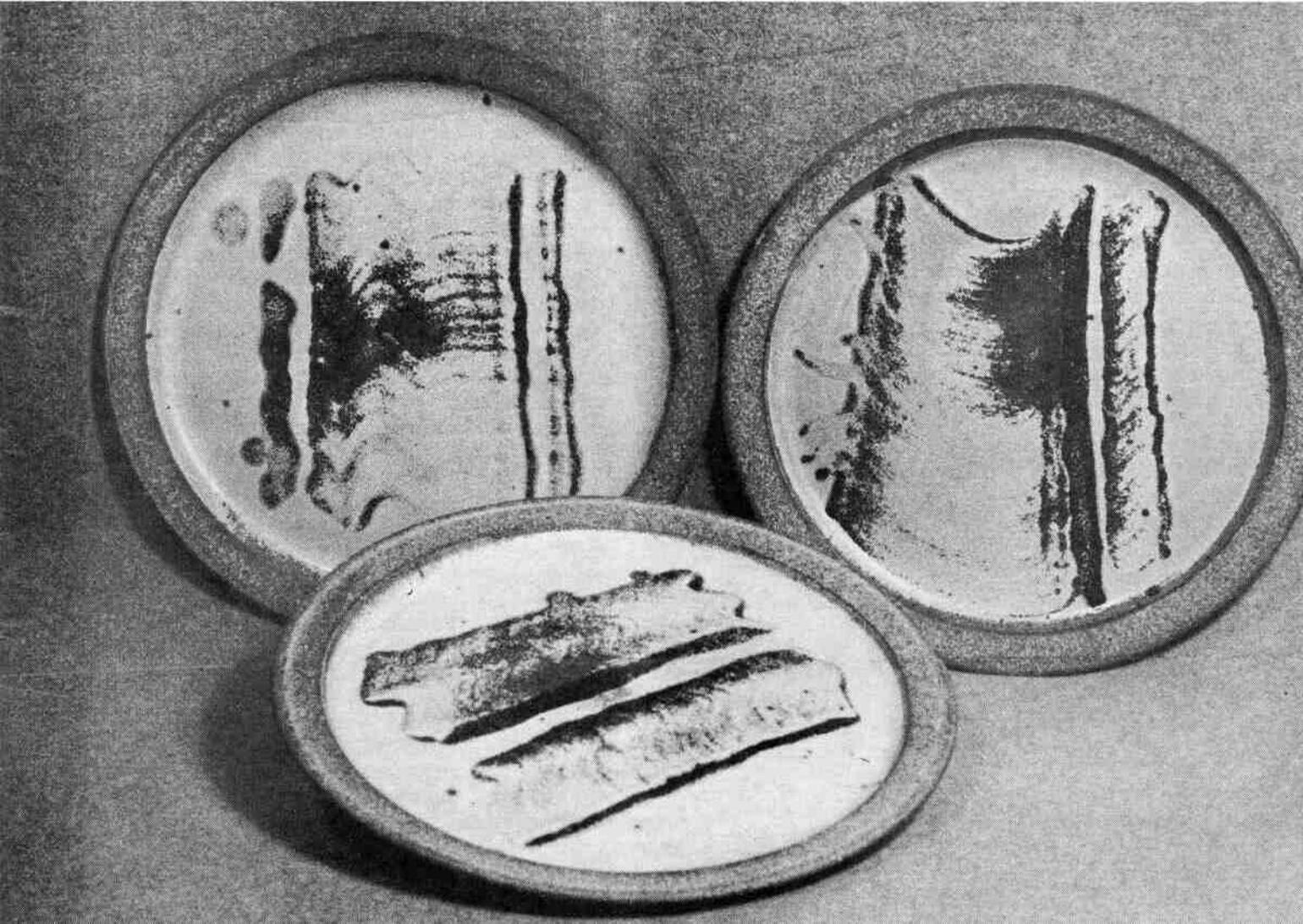


*Above: Covered pot with handle pulled across an inset lid, by Raymond Bub.*

*Below: Stoneware dinner plates with slip decoration, by the author.*



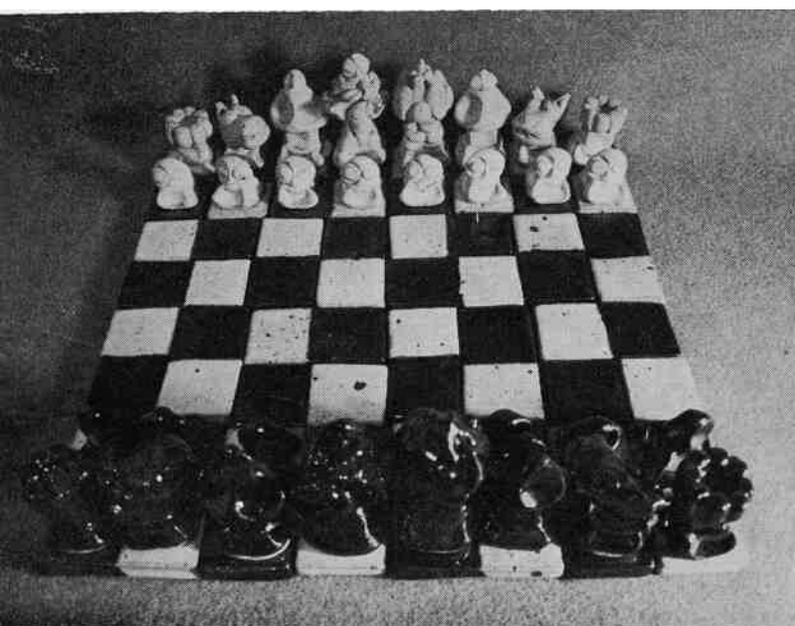
*Above: Stoneware covered, coffee pitcher with partially unglazed and reduced body; 9 inches tall. Produced at Fort Hill Pottery by Raymond Bub and Gordon Lavin, 1973.*





*Above: Stoneware dinner-ware with glazed and unglazed surfaces, by Raymond Bub, 1973, made while an apprentice with Byron Temple.*

*Below: Stoneware chess set with handmade tiles and pinched chess pieces that reflect the plasticity of the clay.*



bination of luck and personal contacts. I was fortunate enough to meet Paul Soldner, who was giving a workshop at The Wallingford Art Center, and when I asked if he knew of any potters who needed an untrained assistant, he offered me a summer job at his home in Aspen, Colorado. Our arrangement was verbal and vague—a five day work week in exchange for sleeping quarters in his studio, meals and social functions with the Soldner family, the use of a car, and the opportunity to utilize the studio facilities and materials on weekends and evenings. (A surprise bonus at the end of the summer was a potter's wheel which is now in use at our pottery in Eastham.)

My tasks included carpentry, bricklaying, wine making, welding, etc., and I was genuinely enthusiastic about learning to master these skills. Pottery was peripheral to my daily duties, but central to my thinking. I learned that a 20th century craft potter must be his own architect and artisan, able to understand the processes which contribute to making and running a business which takes raw materials and converts them into finished products.

At the end of the summer, I returned to Swarthmore to be Kit Snyder's technical assistant at the art center. In exchange, I received sufficient wages to share an apartment with a friend, and the use of the center's facilities to make a few pots to supplement my income. In the spring of 1971 I taught an evening class at Bryn Mawr College to augment my modest finances. My duties as technical assistant helped me to understand the responsibilities of maintaining a supply of materials and equipment for the production of different ceramic products.

After a year as Kit's technical assistant, I had a fair opinion of my skills as a potter, but I did not feel sufficiently confident in my abilities to make a firm commitment to ceramics. At the suggestion of Byron Temple, who had taught a semester at Swarthmore during my student days, I applied to English potter Colin Pearson for an apprentice position. After a lengthy delay (because of the English Post Office strike), I received a favorable reply and I went to the Quay Pottery at Aylesford in Kent, England to begin work.

I stayed with Colin Pearson and his wife Leslie for a year, learning first that I did not know how to throw properly, then learning to throw correctly. My work at the Pearson's began with restorative carpentry and redecoration of their three hundred year old home, Wickham Lodge. It was not until the fourth month of my apprenticeship that I was fully occupied with ceramic duties, production throwing, glazing, clay mixing, kiln duties, etc. I lived as part of the family, taking meals with them and participating in decisions of communal interest. Free time was spent on short tours around the area, weekends in London, cheering the local soccer team, watching BBC television, and meeting a number of potters. I also managed a short trip to France, and a tour of the countryside and potteries of western England.

Upon returning to the United States in June 1972, I contacted Byron Temple to ask if he would be interested in taking on an experienced apprentice. We made a verbal agreement which lasted until August 1973. My wages were adequate to rent a small apartment and keep an old car running, and I was allowed the unlimited after-hours use of the studio facilities to the extent that my work did

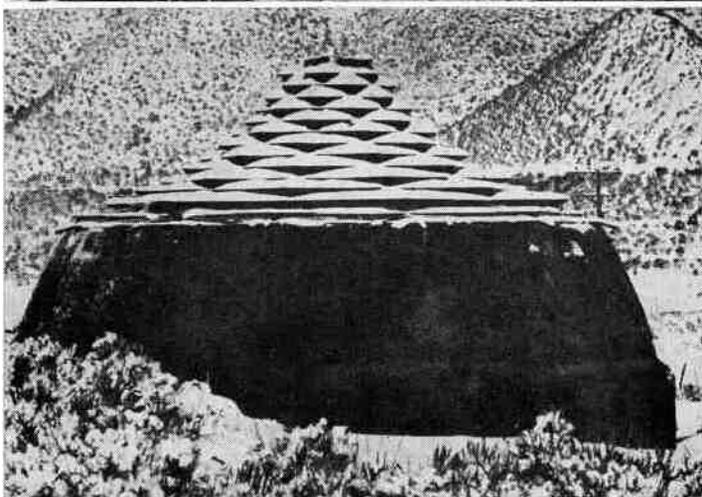
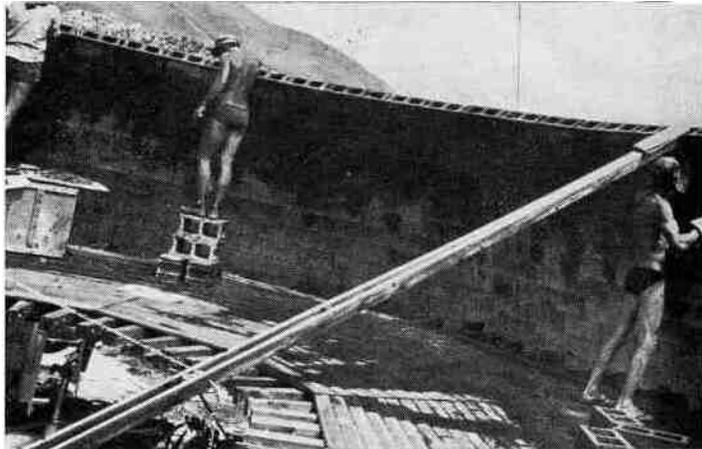
not interfere with regular production. The pots made in my free time were sold to supplement my income. My regular duties at the studio included production throwing, and working at the Temple pottery was especially helpful in learning to run a pottery as a business, mastering such procedures as no-breakage packing and shipping, efficient re-ordering of supplies, a logical filing and records system, and the maintenance of a flexible catalog of salable ware.

After the completion of these periods of apprenticeship, I now feel sufficiently confident of my skills to work on my own, and I believe that Gordon, Tally and I can make our pottery in Eastham a successful business. We have built an 18-cubic-foot, propane-fired, downdraft kiln and are beginning production of ware.

Apprenticing with potters and meeting other people who have had similar experiences have enabled me to define some of the problems which may be encountered by the aspiring apprentice. The first concerns remuneration. Most potters are unable to pay much more than a subsistence salary, and may prefer to reimburse the apprentice with room and board, the offer of workshop experience, and free or inexpensive use of materials and facilities for the individual's own ceramic development. This is both a burden and an opportunity for the apprentice, who must fit into family life without disrupting it. As a family member, the apprentice may be asked to help maintain the house, do laundry and cleaning, etc., and he will most certainly be expected to assume an equal share (if not more) of the clay mixing, glaze preparation, and kiln responsibilities.

A second consideration, which may or may not be a problem depending on the individual, is the type of training the apprentice expects to receive. Depending on the degree of an individual's development of skills, and the size and requirements of the pottery, the performance of various tasks unrelated to ceramics may be required. As Paul Soldner's assistant, I was assigned non-ceramic-related duties. Nevertheless, I was able to learn from him, observing him at work and absorbing his style by living with his pots in all stages of production. While working at Swarthmore, I attended to the day-to-day running of the pot shop (ordering of materials and policy decisions were left up to Kit). At neither of these places did I produce ware for the studio, but rather as a bonus for the performance of other tasks. At the Pearson's I received specific ceramic training in production techniques, and at the Temple pottery I was exposed to the business aspects of producing and marketing ware. Although the learning process may be more frequently by exposure than specific instruction, the apprentice should expect at least to witness all facets of the potter's work, from the ordering and preparation of materials to throwing, glazing, firing, sales, and record keeping. Actual participation in each of these aspects of the craft may or may not be part of the apprentice's training.

There are of course, certain differences between working in a production situation and learning in a school environment. No school can require its students to enter the spirit of another man's work by imitating it item by item—an experience which I consider both humbling and broadening. In the apprentice situation, the degree of flexibility and aesthetic experimentation is limited by the fact



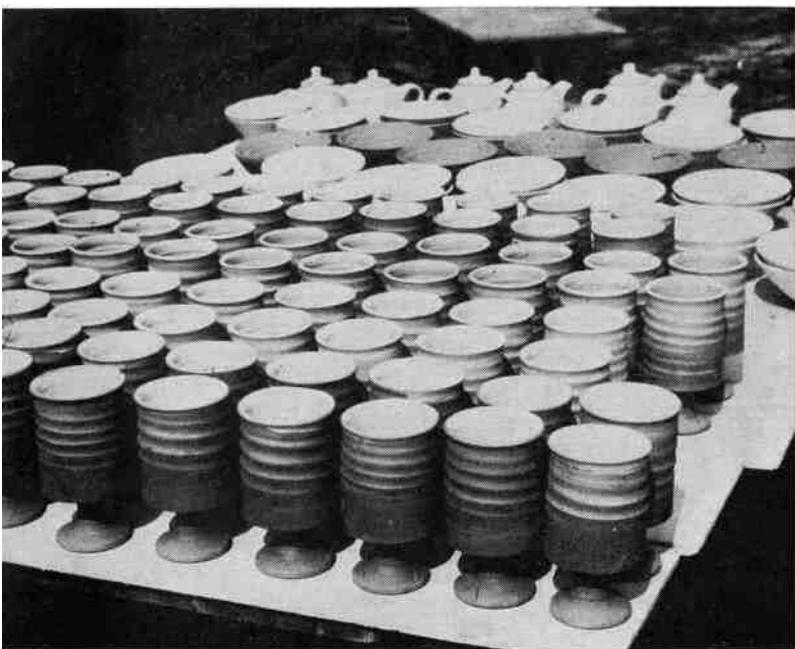
*Top: An apprentice's duties may include a variety of work experiences as shown here Melissa Holmes, left; and Raymond Bub, center; help construct an unusual "beehive" utility building with Paul Soldner, right.*

*Above: The completed "beehive" utility building has been sprayed with cement, and a roof of triangular forms added. The building will serve as a pottery workshop/ bunk house.*

*Below: Byron Temple works at the wheel in his studio.*

*Bottom: Byron Temple's studio in Lambertville, New Jersey.*





*Above: Wickham Lodge, the Pearson residence and Quay Pottery, a converted, carriage house; on the Medway River in Aylesford, Kent, England.*

*l. left: Quay Pottery ware made by Raymond Rub while an apprentice with Colin Pearson.*

*Below: Colin Pearson at work outside his pottery.*



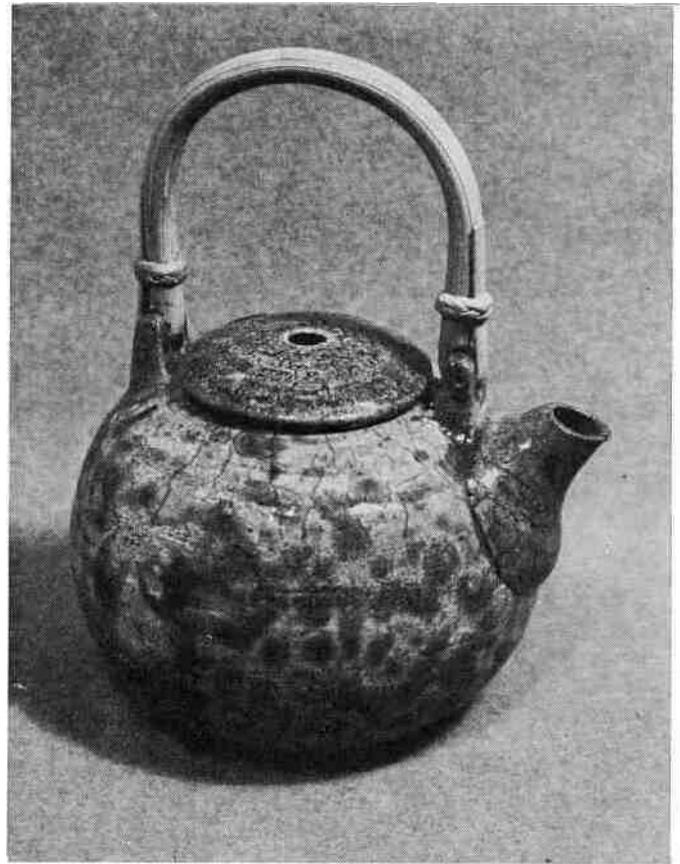
that the potter must make economically successful ware—money influences aesthetics and production decisions. The apprentice who does not at some point in his training confront this economic reality may find it difficult to exist without outside support when he is on his own. Since most of the Western world subscribes to the ethic of originality in works of art, there is a natural opposition to the subordination of personal aesthetics to the judgment of another individual. Making another potter's shapes and submitting them to his assessment can serve both to define this ethic of originality and diffuse its potency. To admit the interdependence of our ideas with those we find in the work of others is valuable training, as well as a stepping stone to the development of personal standards.

While working at the Pearson pottery I received what I consider to be some valuable advice, and I offer it here to other aspiring apprentices. "Remember that working for a potter is a temporary growing and changing situation and allow yourself to be immersed in it rather than fighting for day-to-day independence. It will later be discovered that more was learned than you could have realized, with no harm done to your own ideas."

A final consideration: How does one secure an apprentice position? As has been true with my own experiences, luck and personal contacts are important. Add to this determination, a flexible outlook, and a willingness to attack various unrelated tasks. The most satisfactory approach to obtaining an apprentice position is to contact potters in person; this applies to England as well as the United States. The personality of the apprentice is an important consideration, particularly when the pottery is a small enterprise necessitating close interpersonal relations.

In the United States, the best places to try are workshops, summer school programs, colleges and universities, and locations where it is possible to meet and talk with potters. In England, it has recently become more difficult to obtain apprentice situations for two reasons. As an active member of the European Common Market, Britain must first advertise available jobs in member countries before soliciting elsewhere. Although this restriction has limited opportunities somewhat, there are a number of apprentice positions which are described for tax and customs purposes as work-study programs; these programs are not subject to the restriction. Secondly, the British Crafts Council has instituted a system of grants to help potters pay apprentices; only potters who take apprentices from the British Isles are eligible. The Craftsmen Potters Association, William Blake House, Marshall Street, London W.1., an organization which has a membership including most of the producing potters and potteries in southern England, publishes a booklet on members and their work which may be helpful in selecting places to apply (POTTERS, AN ILLUSTRATED DIRECTORY OF THE WORK OF THE FULL MEMBERS OF THE CRAFTSMEN POTTERS ASSOCIATION: \$3.50 (U.S.) including postage), or contact potters at Harrow College of Art in London.

If inquiring by mail about an apprentice opportunity, consider the potter's time and do not ask for involved replies; include a self-addressed envelope for return correspondence. As my experience proves, it is possible to secure a position in this manner. Look, ask, and try to be pleased with what you find!



Top: Raku teapot with cane handle, by Raymond Bub, 1973, made while an apprentice with Byron Temple.



Above: Stoneware coffee mugs by Raymond Bub and Gordon Lavin, Fort Hill Pottery, 1973.



RAYMOND BUB is a studio potter who recently set up the Fort Hill Pottery with Gordon, and Tally Lavin in Eastham, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. They produce a variety of ceramic objects including some rather unusual forms such as hurricane lamps.