

The Evolution of an Idea

RAY BUB'S REASSEMBLED RING TEAPOTS

by Paul Park

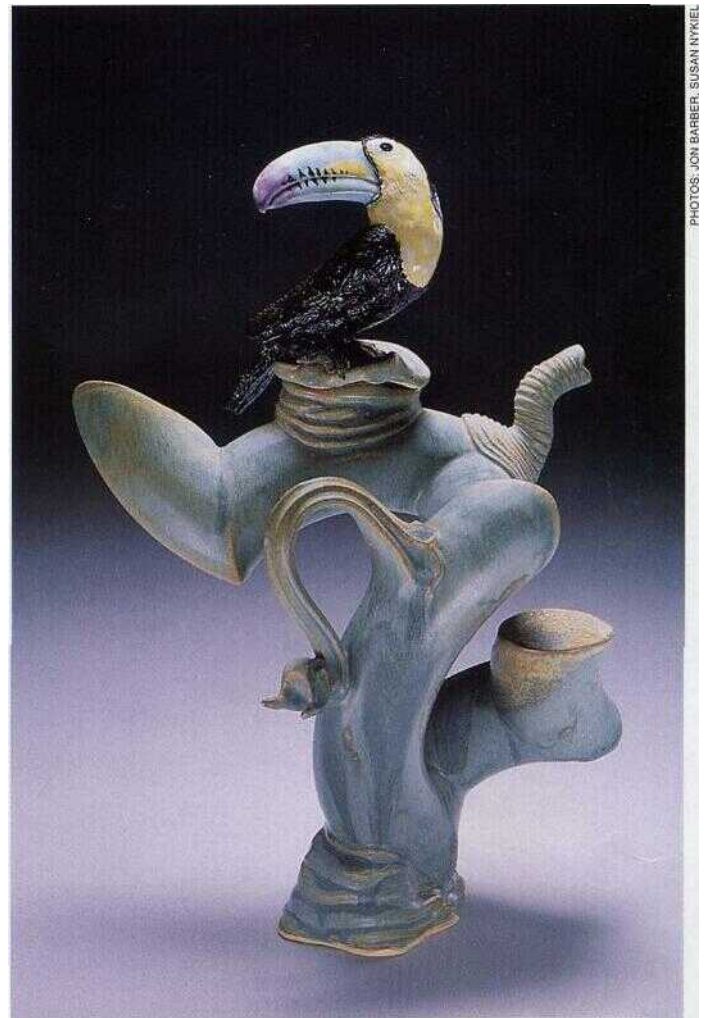
The teapot has fascinated ceramics artists in both the East and the West for the past 600 years. It is the queen of pottery shapes, a formal puzzle with limitless solutions. As a result, the challenge of making something new, a unique and compelling functional teapot, is a demanding one.

Ray Bub has been making pottery and teaching students at his Studio in Pownal, Vermont, for 34 years (see "Teaching in the Studio" in the November 1995 CM). He had been intrigued with the teapot format for some time before he took his Southern Vermont College class to the Bennington Museum to see the pottery collection in the spring of 1995. After that study trip, one student, Dylan Lawson, mentioned that he would like to make a ring vase similar to the 18th-century ring flask (made to fit around a man's forearm) in the museum's American folk pottery display. Bub showed him how to throw a hollow ring, then attached an oval base and a bottle neck. Afterward, the demo remained in the studio.

Soon, Bub started thinking about adding a spout, handle and lid to this traditional ring vase shape. The resulting teapot had an elegant and pleasing form, but was almost mute in its completeness. Bub's first instinct was to give it a voice by adding some of the hand-sculpted animal figures he'd been putting on boxes since 1992. So he added a spotted jaguar to the lid, and perched another on the inside surface of the upright ring. He then made several upright ring teapots with different animals.

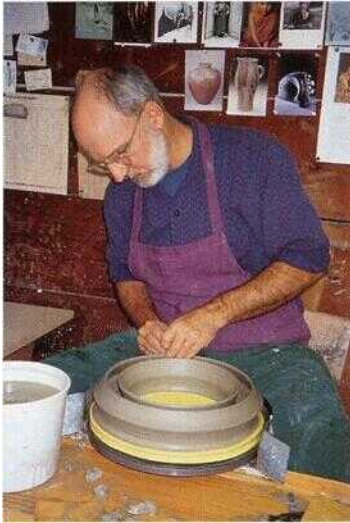
It was in the fall of 1995 that he made his first reassembled ring teapot. Again, there was nothing planned about the process: when the hollow ring was at the leather-hard stage, he had cut it apart with a bow saw, planning to reverse a couple of sections to create a zigzag profile to the upright ring. But the open ends of the cut-apart sections were unmatching trapezoid shapes that would not reassemble into a symmetrical closed form. Unhappy

the arc sections in different ways. Immediately, he was intrigued by the visual possibilities. He joined the arc sections together end to end and out of order, then put flat slabs on the two open ends. Then he added an oval base, a spout, a handle, a neck opening and a lid, embellished with a keel-billed toucan.



"Keel-Billed Toucan Reassembled Hollow-Ring Teapot," 15 inches (38 centimeters) in height, wheel-thrown, cut and assembled stoneware, fired to Cone 5 in oxidation.

From 1995 to 1998, he made numerous reassembled-ring teapots, all decorated with animal shapes—Madagascar chameleons, African elephants, African giraffes, king penguins, highland gorillas. Pacific puffins, ring-tailed lemurs, North American mountain goats, etc. He made some sales, but after paying corn-



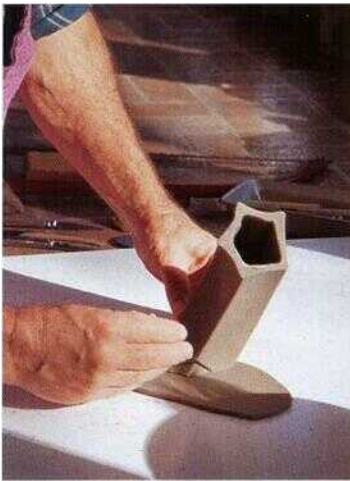
First, a ring is thrown by joining two walls at the top, trapping air inside.



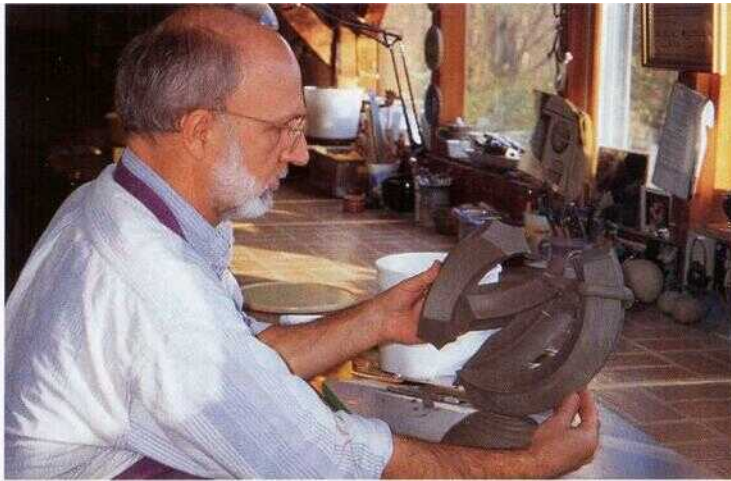
When the ring is leather hard, it is inverted and trimmed.



Sections are then cut at various angles using a bow saw.



The section is closed with slabs, traced and cut to fit each end.



When reassembly is complete, clay spacers and supports are added for stability during drying, then the form is positioned on a thrown oval base.



A handle is pulled from a lug attached to a ring section, then a thrown spout is shaped and attached.



The last step is to make a finial for the lid; several are made and the one that most successfully enhances the design is attached.

