

# Putney Post

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Many of us can relate to gazing at our coffee cups. However, some people are willing to visit art galleries to gaze at Naomi Lindenfeld's coffee cups—and bowls, platters, vases, fountains, lamps, butter dishes and other items. Others simply use them every day. Naomi has been the ceramics teacher at The Putney School since 1998 and has influenced many students in that time. There's something about making beautiful vessels from clay that resonates with this issue's special section on sustainability (pg. 13). Here's Naomi on clay, pottery and teaching:



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Clay spawns from the elements of earth, water, air and fire and has been used for thousands of years to make both everyday utilitarian wares as well as ritualistic objects. I had my students make blessing bowls on the first day of the semester and asked them to talk about their visions and goals for the class as they

worked on them. The idea was for the bowls to hold those intentions and, once they were glazed and fired, the bowls could also hold their jewelry or watches while they worked with clay.

**I had an experience recently of making a funerary urn for a woman.** She told me what a beautiful ceremony was held and how much it meant to have her mother's ashes in a beautiful vessel that was custom-made by hand. She and her daughter buried the urn and did Gypsy dances around it.

**I've been developing and refining my hand-built, layered, colored clay technique for over twenty-three years.** I layer colored clay into a block and create patterns by pressing tools down into it, then slice and roll the slices out with a rolling pin. Or, incising designs and rolling the block flat again creates a multi-dimensional effect. The flat sheets of clay are then constructed into shapes. Recently, I have been working with taking that layered colored clay, using the wheel to form the pieces and then faceting the sides to reveal an agate effect.

**It means something to me as a potter to hear that a mug I made is someone's favorite and they use it every morning, that a vase I made is used for lilacs every spring, that the fountain I made brings serenity to a massage therapist and her clients.** I feel that beautiful hand-made pots can enhance the presentation and taste of food, contribute to the beauty of a bouquet of

flowers and bring a humanity and warmth that would otherwise be lacking.

**The act of making pottery can be meditative and pleasurable.** I'm very drawn to patterns and the flow of movement found in nature. I work with layers like those found in rock striations, wood grain and shells.

**Dance is also an important part of my life.** I've taken dance classes most of my adult life and am one of the founders and organizers of Dance Express, a DJ dance in Brattleboro, Vermont. It seems to me that, the more my body moves, the more my pots dance!

**I encourage my students to bring their pots to life by giving their pieces gesture, drama and definition.** Surfaces can be textured, carved and sculpted to achieve more dimension, vibrancy and interest. One can develop an eye for a pot that feels constricted or overworked versus one that has some breath in it and is animated.

**A certain amount of time has to be devoted to learning the basics of clay technique and control, as well as gaining a repertoire of different construction methods, before being able to be truly expressive.** The infinite possibilities of what can be done with clay, along with the challenges of working with it, is what makes pottery-making so compelling and keeps me (and the not-faint-of-heart) interested in exploring and conquering it.