

Tips and Time Travel from a Vernacular Potter

by Marek Drzazga-Donaldson



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These pages contain language that may well offend those of a squeamish disposition, and those who dislike coarse language won't be disappointed, as there is plenty of that too. I call a spade a shovel, it's what it is, and as I am plain spoken, I certainly do not have any embarrassment in so doing. If you have a problem, then please, for your own peace of mind, do not read these pages, you may however, watch the videos, as these contain no sex, nudity, no pulsating lights etc. Although you may not enjoy me savaging Einstein, tearing his T-Shirts "E=MC²" into tatters, watch in amazement as I reveal the "Emperor's Clothes" for what they are – totally transparent. Does a tree that falls in a deserted forest make a noise? Can you wind up your watch in an anti-clockwise direction? And does anyone really care? This book is a melange of conjuror's tricks gleaned throughout my life as a potter and a love affair with a material that to others is just mud.

Marek 18th March 2004

TIME TRAVEL

Preface

Reasons for writing a book are manifold; the need for public acclaim, back-slapping, general adulation and of course vanity; none of these apply in this case. I must first thank my wife Pauline for convincing me to finally write this book, and the clue is in the word “finally”, as this has been brewing for many years. As with any project, there is “the” right time, and this is it for Time Travel, all parts are in place, the concept, the technology and the willingness to proceed.

The biographical stance is used as a tool to involve the reader as part of the empirical approach of discovery, not as tutor and pupil but as fellow travellers. It is written primarily - and not for any egotistical reasons - as an aid to avoiding the many pitfalls that I have encountered along my clay path. This may be indulgent, but does not detract from its validity.

Time Travel is not written in a linear format. It is intended that the reader choose to read a chapter, or just a section, and dip in and out, as and when. The margins are wider than normal to facilitate note making, as I have started to further elucidate certain sections in the Chapters. Also to further the reader's interaction, the accompanying DVD has many hours of video footage to enhance the written word. If a picture is worth a thousand words, what value thirty seconds of video content? The potters' entrenched approach has damaged the inventiveness in the past, and is eroding lateral thinking at present. As witness to this opinion, view work that has been submitted for show at exhibition by a group of potters, and then walk round the final presentation. Invariably the life and vibrancy has been selected out, and the safe option is presented to the

viewing public and so propagating this direction as the way forward.

The Emperor's clothes are very much in evidence, and self-appointed gurus hold Court. Within these pages Myths and Legends are disrobed to bare the essentials of working with naked clay.



A Brief Biography

Marek Drzazga-Donaldson (1950 –

Both my parents were Polish (my father has gone to the blue yonder to fly all his WW2 missions with his pals all over again); my mother has just stopped pedalling her bike around Marlow like a lunatic, as she has gone partially blind at 88 years old. For a reason only known to him Dad changed the family name by deed poll to a good old Scottish one. I now use the double-barrelled version, when my old dear

pops her clogs I will revert to my Birth Certificate name of Drzazga – which means splinter, so our family were Chippies or woodworkers in the past.

I first came into contact with clay at Maidenhead Art College, under the tutelage of Geoff Eastop, worked at Fawley Bottom Pottery with Geoff and John Piper then set up by myself and have never looked back since.

I met my wife Pauline at the Art College, where I wore three hats, one as her teacher in Part Time Pottery Classes. She married me, she says, to save on the cost of clay and the courses. So in effect working in clay has give me everything I need – a living, which I love, and the perfect partner to share it all with. Now with moving to the West Country we have the perfect location, where we have our delightful house with Studio all on the one site.

I have worn many hats during my 33 years as a potter: - lecturer, teacher and technician at the Art College in Maidenhead, pit man and roof tile maker and factory manager at the local brick and tile works (Berkshire), studio potter and consultant to the Industry.

At Mole Cottage I now major in Architectural Ceramics making chimney pots, finials and ornamentals, replacement roof tiles and ridge, murals, individual sculptural forms, large decorated bowls and platters for my studio work and I enjoy anything to do with clay. We also run courses at the Studios for potters or anyone interested in clay, where I can pass on my 33 + years of working with clay. We have just finished working as consultants to a factory in Turkey producing hand made clay roof tiles for the UK Market.

Chapters

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Learning the Empirical Way,
or not. (p 2 - 9)
- Ch.2. Catch a falling Star**
Making pipe dreams come true. (p 10 - 20)
- Ch.3. Heal thyself Physician**
Aches and pains – the cure, correct
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and throwing. (p 21 - 32)
- Ch.4. Plasticine men and Plasticine Cats and Dogs**
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- Ch.5. Now hands that do dishes can feel soft as...**
Stinky water, clay reclamation,
tool and kick-wheel making. (p 44 - 53)
- Ch.6. If Music be the Food of Love**
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your own tempo. (p 54 - 60)
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How I make Chimney Pots and
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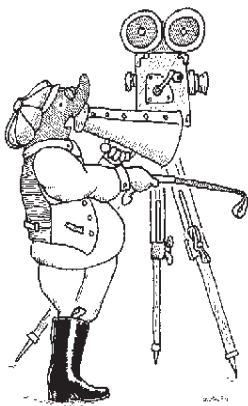
Ch.18. Time Travel

How I beat Einstein and $E=MC^2$. (p 153 - 166)

Apdix. Buy the DVD

Glazes, firings, brochures and DVD. (p 165 - 173)

**Illustrations for Covers are by Amy Potter
Drawings from the pen of Owen Bray**



Photographs and Video footage
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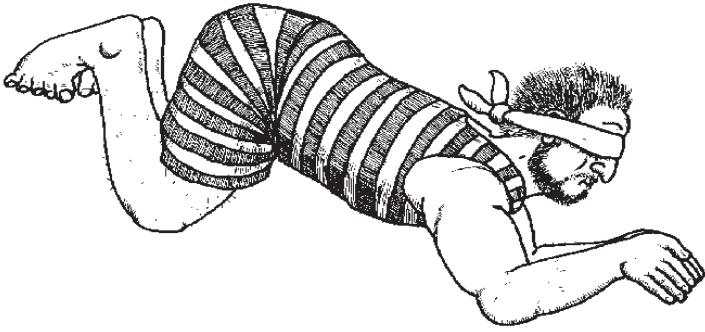
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See Appendix to buy the DVD



**Welcome to Time Travel
From Marek and Pauline**



1.

A Leap of Blind Faith

Dad would always praise me for my strength, and as a little boy I would let him pick me up by my legs and I would stretch out stiff as a plank as he hoisted me up to chest height, but as a potter, in later life, he would continually chide me for not having a real job, and it was only when he died that the beauty and scope of what I did finally dawned on him.

*see end of
Chapter 2*

We are a combination of nature and nurture, a complex of emotions and a tangled bowl of spaghetti crossroads, and owe our direction to choices and circumstance that we make throughout our lives. Both my parents were Polish, Dad from peasant farmer stock and very Catholic, mother from a middle class clerical position and very Jewish, and I know my temperament and bi-polarity comes from that admixture, and gives me a fabulously diverse way of looking

at my way of life. My Catholicism has given me a foundation, and my faith the strength to continue undaunted in the direction I have chosen, but if I am not Jewish I want my money back.

I've always been fond of water, and all our homes have been close to it, the River Thames (Abingdon, Cookham and Marlow) and now the River Mole in Devon, and even our apartment in Hardelot, France, was by the sea. My love of swimming brought me into contact with empirical learning and concrete, empiricism would have to wait, whereas my destiny with concrete could not. One of my early recollections of my childhood was being at a friends' house and getting up early in the morning to take a dive into their swimming pool. I went running up to the pool, pulling on my trunks as I went racing towards the edge, dived in, and upon fulfilling the arc realised, in mid-flight, that the water had been drained away overnight, ready for cleaning the pool. This was my introductory lesson to Newton's Law of Gravity and the hardness and immutability of concrete.

Mum's
quick
reactions
saved my
adolescence
from being
a gawky
looking child
with buck-
teeth

This impact with water, or lack of it, did not alter my love of the stuff. I learned to swim in the sea at sunny Bournemouth, splashing up and down the beach totally unaware of the buoyancy being supplied by the salt in the seawater and the

waves, having a whale of a time making Mum and Dad proud that their son could swim. At my first opportunity I tried out my newly acquired aquatic skills in a by-water to the Thames at Odney in Cookham, only to become a floundering drowning brick-like object. I did not panic – this quality of being able to react to near fatal situations without recourse to the normal human emotion of panic has stayed with me ever since – and I sunk to the muddy bottom and walked towards the shore, finally scampering up the grassy slope to safety. I learned two profound lessons that day, one was to relax, and the other was that I learned through experience – empirically that is, although I did not know the existence of the word then – and that was going to be my way for better or for worse.

My garnering of knowledge has always been painful, and because of my stupidity, taken quite a number of attempts for the penny to drop. Notwithstanding (Captain Crapper to the rescue) I have found that during my morning ablutions if I write down the various projects I have to attend to that day, the likelihood of memory retention is vastly increased. In my wakening hours - I always switch the TV on and doze through the news and views – I work out my routine and how I will accomplish it. I have found that I am at my zenith in the late morning or early pm, through to the

early evening, and so I use the morning for phoning and paperwork and often shopping. I can work early mornings only if it is really early – about 4 o'clock – or I just work through the night till 2 or 3 o'clock, and wake at 6.30 and get up at around 9 as usual. My working hours vary depending on what is required and when, but if I force myself to work hours that are not suited to me, then mistakes occur. I would always stress that you work the times that suit you, and bugger anyone who suggests you are lazy if you don't get up and start work at 8 o'clock prompt. My body clock is set to my time and nobody else's, so I regulate the times and hours as I see fit, and my working day can be from as little as one hour to the twenty four hour limit, it all depends on how I feel.

*I do not
concur With
Benjamin
Franklin's
adage of
making
you
healthy
& wise*

I have always been flexible in my working hours, and in my latter years only need four hours of sleep, this allied with my physical strength led me into my many excursions of marathon throwing. I built my own European momentum kick wheel based on the Cardew type; I have had it for thirty odd years and love it. This wheel is the one used for my three main marathons over the years, the first (in the late seventies) successful attempt was a 72- hour monster, I had a willing helper in Steve Murtagh (a student from the Art College) to wedge and carry away and etc., and I would most certainly not

*Alas poor
Alan
is dead.
In life he
was boring,
but a real
stalwart,
the sort every
association
needs*

recommend doing it again. I had many visitors throughout the nights where I consumed beer and wine and inhaled (unlike dear old Clinton) the odd weed, another set up not to be recommended. By my second attempt I had given up smoking and then alcohol – being an alcoholic was not, at the end, conducive to work – and I decided on a more sedate 36 - hour session, but dear old Alan (my helper) imbibed too much whiskey and had to retire, as did my darling Pauline – suffering from an over-exuberant supply of wine – and so I was left to my own devices. The following year I decided to give everyone an easy time and went for the simpler 24 - hour dawdle. This worked best, and actually I raised the most money that time. I will do it again as it gets the locals to come and see what I really do, and a fair amount of work is done, some local charities benefit, so all in all a win win situation.

Throughout my potting career I have had to find ways and means to remind myself of all tips, tricks and short-cuts I have learned, this entailed endless lists, notes written on kiln doors, scraps of paper pinned to notice boards, and all manner of diverse ways to instill this knowledge. Nevertheless I still managed to forget vital information, and with the usual dire consequences, until I discovered that writing my potters' tips for local groups and for Clayart drummed them into my

thick skull. I am hoping that the writing of this book will embed my knowledge even deeper, and that by reading it you will also be transported into the land of remembrance.

Empirical learning is my way of doing, thank you - none of that boring scientific approach for me, as I tend to be very tangential in my thinking. Actually I lie, as I do use some scientific methods, but only as a tool and not as a way of life. I am not advocating a free for all attitude for everyone, it's just that a non-scientific approach suits me down to the ground.

I also must admit to learning some things extremely slowly, but I am not so much stupid (some might disagree here), as not convinced as to the veracity of this particular method, and it can take some pounding on the head with a blunt object to finally convince me. Unfortunately I can be forgetful, as stated above, and can end up repeating my mistakes, which is excruciatingly annoying. As a youth, and young man, I used to react impulsively, and to an extent I still do, but age has finally mellowed me and my knee-jerk reactions of yesteryear are tempered with years of Empiricism, and a happy middle ground is now opening up for me. I have not discarded my impulsiveness, merely moved on to having my brain ticking away in the background and on autopilot, leaving my conscious self to make those

decisions already formulated to do the things they are supposed to.

This, to me is the crux of my work; try anything, any method, and if it gets the result you desire at the right tempo, then this is right for you. Whether you are scientifically minded, or use the Empirical approach should not matter a jot, as long as what you do is true to yourself. Your own truth is what takes time to discover, not the methodology, or any of the other multifarious skills that we need to pursue our work. It is this understanding that strips you naked and then re-clothes you, ready to start your real journey in time.

My impulsive reaction to situations has been my strength and my weakness, and will always be. I think if we are honest with ourselves, then that is true for each and every one of us, that our strength can also turn out to be our Achilles heel. I trust people impulsively – I am not so naïve, it is my gut instinct approach – and this trust invariably is rewarded, and the reciprocal is also true.

Trust in your parents is instinctive, not apparently to my scientifically minded brother Andrew, or so it seemed. Father standing waist deep in the Thames at Henley calls Andrew to come and jump towards him. Andrew, big stick in hand, sidles up to the bank and prods gauging

the depth, then dips his hand into the water to judge the temperature, only then does he slip gingerly in to join our father. Not so with me, he had not even finished his sentence and whoosh I was on my way running full pelt, head under water with not a care, as I knew that Dad was there ready to pull me up. Both methods work, you end up in the water!



If others have a problem with you, it is their problem not yours. Enjoy working the way that brings out the real you and prepare for extremely hard work. **DO NOT THINK OF THE MONEY!** That will follow as it always has. Make pottery part of your life and you will never have to “work” another day in your life. Take whatever advice you want from this, make it your own, but remember to take your time.

**THIS IS JUST THE START
OF YOUR OWN PATHWAY,
JUST DON'T FOLLOW MINE**



Thanks to Pauline, for suffering my sleepness nights with me, giving me the truth, whether I want to hear it or not, and your undying support in all ways.

I love you

Amy Potter. Thanks for your great understanding and translation of my thoughts into the fabulous illustrations for the cover, also your insightful editing of my scrawl.

Alice Potter. Cheers for your proof reading.

Eddie Kent. Your advice for the layout of the paper format of this book is greatly appreciated. The margins for making it an interactive, as opposed to just a passive read. Thanks for our web site www.no9uk.com

Owen Bray. What can I say dude? Your adherence to the old Cornish adage of trying to think of a word that explains “maniana” was exasperating, but every drawing was well worth waiting for, as they always are. Thanks.

The Reader. Thanks for your courage for getting this far.

APPENDIX



The following pages are for those extras that do not belong inside the book itself, but are still an important part of it, whether directly or just tangentially. There are a few glazes and my firing logs that could be of interest, but as this book is not a Potter's Instruction Manual, these are intentionally sparse, as it is up to you to determine your direction and armoury of glazes etc, I have just laid out some tips, but mainly a work ethic and a positive attitude that has carried me forward at all times.

Materials	K6 Chun	Shiny Black	Phil. Red C6	Phil. Red C8
China Clay	9.3	36.5	10	7
Whiting	14.4	18.3		
Flint	27.8	11.4	20	14
Feldspar (P)	31.5	22.5	40	48
Ash (Elm)	10			
Iron Ox.		7.3	10	10
Bone Ash			10	14
Talc				
Titanium Ox.	4			
Zinc Ox.	3			
Cobalt Carb.		1.2		
Mang. Ox.		4.5		

K6 Chun

Typical Opalescent Blue Chun when applied thickly and given a higher firing than C6, milky white background. Developed by myself from Geoff's A2C as a start point.

Shiny Black

Based on the 4 3 2 1 Stable. Dense Black when thick and given a good firing, brown/black with mattish tendencies where thinner. Developed from Geoff Eastop's Black.

Substitute Materials	Materials	HGC	Tenmoku 3
Low fire Red Clay for China Clay	Red Clay	31.5	32
	Whiting	22	13
Substitute Elm Ash for Flint	Ash (washed)	38.5	48
	Iron Oxide		7

Philimore Red

Brought to the Art College in Maidenhead source unknown. I have transposed the glaze from the original C8 to C6, both are given side by side for comparison. Applied normally gives an Indian Red with slightly speckled background.

HGC

Developed from a variety of sources and simplified substituting clean with naturally found materials. I used the Reading Clay (matures at 1000 C), great for adding clay and iron to a glaze mix. This glaze is shiny and straw coloured with breaks of blue, red and oatmeal. Could use the addition of Bentonite for ease of suspension. Apply thickly, can run.

Tenmoku 3

From the same stable as HGC. Should be experimented with and adjusted for best results. The type of clay and ash are of course critical. Gives good broken surfaces.

All Glazes have their own Character, which is often derived from the person formulating the glaze, which materials are used, how they are used, thickness and firing variations all go towards making this part of Ceramics totally mind-blowing. Enjoy it and have fun.

Time	Rate C/Hr	Temp C	Cone	Time	Rate C/Hr	Temp C	Cone
7hrs 20m	20 C /hr	144 C	3	7hrs 20m	30 C /hr	225 C	06
6hrs 30m	33 C /hr	360 C		4hrs 50m	37 C /hr	405 C	
6hrs 03m	40 C /hr	603 C		4hrs 05m	50 C /hr	603 C	
5hrs 04m	60 C /hr	900 C		4hrs 05m	75 C /hr	900 C	
6hrs 30m	42 C /hr	1170 C		2hrs 25m	50 C /hr	1026 C	
0hrs 27m	soak			0hrs 27m	soak		

This programme is used for firing Chimney pots and bricks, anything large and thick. Used for both red and buff Terra Cotta's and is fired and cooled over a three day period. Cooling is slowed by covering the flue after the kiln is turned off. Slow cooling is critical.

A general Bisque Ware programme, used for thrown bowls and large plates. I try to fire one bisque followed by the glazing firings to reduce dust contamination.

Kiln Specifications:

2 Propane Burners in Door.
Hearth height 30cm
Volume 1 cubic metre.
Downdraft with bagwall set 30cm above base shelving and 10cm from back wall.
Flue set to the front.

Time	Rate C/Hr	Temp C	Cone	Time	Rate C/Hr	Temp C	Cone
3hrs 06m	42 C /hr	126 C	6	6hrs 30m	35 C /hr	225 C	3
5hrs 04m	95 C /hr	603 C		4hrs 50m	30 C /hr	360 C	
7hrs 20m	78 C /hr	1152 C		4hrs 50m	66 C /hr	603 C	
2hrs 25m	27 C /hr	1215 C		3hrs 42m	83 C /hr	900 C	
0hrs 27m	soak			4hrs 50m	55 C /hr	1170 C	
				0hrs 27m			

Glaze firing programme.

Flue is covered to slow cooling. I adjust the positioning of the ware depending on the glaze. The Chun glaze needs the hottest part, whereas the Black can go almost anywhere. As with anything in Ceramics, the key is to experiment

This programme used for thinner and smaller pieces of Terra Cotta, rarely used as I always try and pack the kiln as tight as possible so the Chimney Pot programme tends to be the most used.

These specifications are just a guide to assist in making more positive and accurate trials for your own kilns and glazes. How you pack the kiln, the density and type of clay, and all variables have a bearing on firing ramps.

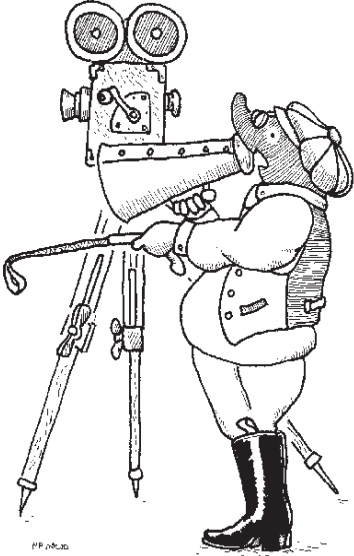
To Purchase the Accompanying DVD

I have spent many hours shooting myself, and not in the foot, working on various projects, accumulating a massive Library of informative footage over the past years. I do not pretend that it is of any real Cinematic importance, far from it, as a great deal of the footage contains the sounds of a working Studio – the kiln and drier making the noises that they do, cars speeding past, telephones ringing, you get the gist – and as such it cannot therefore be accredited any gold stars for merit. However, I do think that as this is part of the book and not to be viewed in isolation, the sounds add a dimension that a sound man might not want, but a potter might well derive some insights from.

I am not making excuses for my apparent ineptitude in the sound department, but I truly believe it is for the best. I have, in some instances cut out the sound track and speeded up the movie sequences to show how an object evolves, without all the boring bits in-between. I sometimes add a commentary, so if you fail to hear it the first time, just replay it. I have spent more hours in the editing room, which I must admit I rather enjoyed, but I am first and foremost a Potter, not a Cinematographer, although I hope the enjoyment does shine through.

Like the book, I would suggest you select what and when you watch, as I would imagine it would become rather tedious. Dipping in and out of Chapters is the way I would recommend, watching a Dragon come to life or a Chimney Pot begin as a “Big Lump”, only to transform with majestic flourish into an object of beauty, soon to be someone’s pride and joy.

Much is covered in the DVD, from simple height of working surface for clay preparation, making slabs, throwing on the potter's wheel, assembling Dragon Chimey Pots, many other innovative methods of manufacture etc. Also on the DVD I add the book (in PDF) itself, along with albums of work and life around Mole Cottage also in PDF format, which can be viewed on your own computer. If you do copy the DVD, please do honour the source material. Also I would appreciate it if you, or the recipient make a good donation to your favourite Children's Charity or Agency.



£ \$ £ \$ £ \$ £ \$ £ \$ £ \$ £ \$ £ \$

However I would prefer if you bought the DVD from me by emailing me at marek@no9uk.com or from our web sites: www.no9uk.com and www.moley.uk.com

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