

POTTERY PIECES WITH A PURPOSE

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By Stephanie M. Mangino

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Anne Carter's ceramic bowls have several functions, including grating garlic on the rough surface at the bottom of the bowl.

(Photo by Scott Mason/The Winchester Star Scott Mason/The Winchester Star)

MIDDLETOWN- Anne Carter creates porcelain pottery pieces with a purpose.

"It's functional artwork," she said from her Middletown-area studio.

Carter, 38, operates Middletown Ceramics alone, crafting every piece on her own.

One of her signature pieces is a garlic bowl, which can be used in a variety of ways.

One can grate garlic on the rough surface at the bottom of the bowl, then add olive oil, salt, herbs and spices to create a dipping oil for bread, she said. "It's awesome. "

While that use is the bowl's original intent, it works in other ways, too, she said. Ginger, horseradish and even cheese can be grated within.

A person can make a quick salad dressing inside it and "if you're not using it as a grater, you can put fruit in it," she said.

The vessel is also good for roasting garlic, said Carter, who includes roasting and grating instructions with each of the garlic bowls and something with a humorous touch - a couple of breath mints.

She sells her garlic bowls at area arts and crafts shows, including August's Tomato and Garlic TasteFest at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley.

"Her work is wonderful," said Julie Armel, marketing and public relations director for the MSV.

The garlic bowls are also sold for \$20 in the MSV's shop along with the work of other area potters, Armel said.

With pottery hundreds of years old present in the MSV galleries, the 21st-century work available in the shop is a perfect fit for the museum, which supports Valley artisans and chooses pieces to sell that relate to events and exhibitions, Armel said.

And Carter's work is not just Valley-made and attractive, but also "very useful," Armel said.

It's durable, and can go from dishwasher to microwave to oven, Carter said.

Carter, 38, tests the pieces in her home kitchen, which she shares with her three children, all younger than 10. Any piece that doesn't turn out quite right for sale is used in their home.

The garlic bowl, which she sells for \$15 at shows, definitely gets a workout, said the confessed foodie. "I use it a lot."

She makes other pieces that deal with serving food - such as a cheese tray, which includes a cheese spreader, and salsa and chowder bowls.

"I find that my foodie projects always go first," she said.

She also makes small ring bowls, jewelry catchers and kenzan flower vases with a metal frog to hold in flowers welded to the bottom.

She also does what she calls a "fire bowl," named for the flame-like design she created for the top of the bowl.

And she makes yarn bowls, designed to keep yarn from rolling away while being used.

Carter, starting her second year in business, began Middletown Ceramics because she wanted to find a way to work and be a stay-at-home mother. She hadn't done ceramic work in seven years, although her relationship with the art form was love at first sight.

An art major with a photography concentration, Carter took her first ceramics class during her senior year at Wittenberg University in Ohio.

Although she graduated with a photography degree, she never pursued life behind the camera, instead favoring days with clay.

"I loved getting my hands in it," she said.

Carter took classes in the craft, first working with stoneware. When she wanted to pursue porcelain, her teachers advised against it, because it is difficult to work with. "I don't know what I was thinking, but I had to have it."

She works exclusively in porcelain because she loves the colors that glazes create on it.

She admits that it isn't easy to handle. The first drying after a vessel is formed must occur slowly and thoroughly or else it will crack. The medium "humbles me," she said.

Carter buys her clay in 50-pound blocks 1,000 pounds at a time, crafting and firing everything in her home studio. There, she keeps 5-gallon buckets of glaze, in which she dips pieces and creates added designs with squirt bottles filled with glaze.

Her designs and colors are "inspired by the scenic and historic landscape of the Shenandoah Valley and my children," she said from her studio, which on a clear day has a view of Signal Knob.

Durability is a must for her life, and "my stuff is a little bit heavier because I want it to last," she said.

When her seconds go into her kitchen, "I'm not gentle with it at all because I need to know that it works."

Anne Carter works at her potter's wheel in Middletown.



Anne Carter makes a porcelain bowl for her Middletown Ceramics business. Most of her bowls can be used for a variety of functions. One is for roasting and grating garlic. Instructions are included with every one of the garlic bowls.

(Photo by Scott Mason/The Winchester Star)

Craft show

Carter's next show in the Winchester area will be at a 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Nov. 5 Holiday Sale and Craft Show at the Sportsplex in Kernstown. Admission to the show, which will feature crafts, on-site massages, and baked goods, is free. Contact Carter at Middletownceramics@gmail.com.

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