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BYRON BAY & BEYOND

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'POTTERING' AROUND IS A FAMILY AFFAIR



The new owners of the Lismore Northern Rivers Pottery Supplies are riding a wave of ceramic resurgence, writes Candida Baker.

Madeleine Smith and her husband Ove Altmann had been living in the Lismore region for ten years when the chance came up to buy the Northern Rivers Pottery Supplies.

"I'd been working at St. John's College as the creative arts and performing assistant," says Altmann, "and we bought all our clay and supplies from Paula, but I was really keen to get into this wave that seems to be happening around the handmade slow movement, and it seemed a good fit for us to take the step of buying the business."

Somewhat to their surprise their beginners' workshops sold out almost immediately, and with a new website, and the couple pooling their time and resources the supply shop is experiencing a whole new period of growth. They have been lucky to attract many talented ceramicists, both local and international, to conduct their workshops and courses.



Learning the wheel with Master Potter Brooke Clunie, from Red Door Studio.

"I really do believe that ceramics are hot at the moment," says Smith, and Altmann agrees. "I think it's partly that it used to be considered more of a craft than an art," he says, "but now it's ceramic art, and much of it is breaking the boundaries of conventional practice. For me there's a sense of alchemy when the materials all come together in the firing process – it's a science and an art form as well. It requires a systematic approach, a mindfulness of the material and what it does, and the creative ideas."

Together the couple brought their various skills to the table. Smith has an extensive background in administration, is also a qualified naturopath and has worked for TAFE in Lismore in the admin department for the past three years. Altmann completed a Fine Arts Degree at the National Art School in East Sydney. For Smith, owning the centre has meant she too has been able to satisfy an urge to create, learning how to make ceramic bangles and necklaces through her label Audrey Alice, and the results of her creative endeavours are now for sale in the premises, a much-loved Lismore institution, hiding down a tiny lane which gives away nothing of the light, airy barn sitting at the end, full of – to a non-potter at least – fascinatingly curious materials and tools.



Tools of the trade at the Northern Rivers Pottery Supplies.

The couple originally met when they were both living in Brisbane in 1993. After moving and living in inner city Sydney for many years they spent six years in Thirroul on the south coast before moving to the Northern Rivers in 2004. Altmann, who was originally an actor, musician, documentary film-maker and artist, was content to put aside his creative pursuits in order to take on the job at St. John's, which, with Smith's work has allowed the two to bring up their two children, Sonny, 12, and Floyd, 4, living in the country town of Dunoon, north-east of Lismore.

As the couple have built up the business, all aspects of it have grown. "We run a regular Wednesday pottery group for intermediate to experienced potters," says Altmann, "and that is going really well. The group meets for the day for a small fee of \$5 which covers their insurance, tea and coffee, and then they pay for their firings as they go."



Ceramic beads and bangles give pottery a whole new meaning...

They also provide a wheel service, and a clay delivery service across the Northern Rivers and into the Gold Coast, and their plan to create a potters' 'hub' is quickly becoming a reality. "We want to be a point of contact for all the 3D artists in the area," says Altmann. "As well as stocking the materials, we would like to exhibit work from potters' groups – and we really want to encourage people to physically recycle their materials as well."

Both Altmann and Smith have found that owning the business has enhanced their own creativity. "It's hard not to be around all the people we meet here and not be inspired," she says. "I've done a pottery course, and Ove makes a wide variety of objects."



The NRPS offers a firing service with the cost calculated on the fired weight of each piece.

On the day I visit it's the school holidays, and Sonny is on the computer, while Floyd is testing his four-year-old muscles climbing up banks of clay bags, and their little Jack Russell, eight-year-old Betty Biscuit, is much more of a meet-and-greeter than a guard dog. This new incarnation of the Northern Rivers Pottery Supplies is very much a family affair, and is set to stay that way for a long time to come.

Madeleine Smith and Ove Altmann

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Find them on Facebook [facebook.com/NorthernRiversPotterySupplies](https://www.facebook.com/NorthernRiversPotterySupplies)

OPENING HOURS: TUES & THUR: 9AM – 4PM, WED & FRI: 8:30AM – 4PM

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Brooke Clunie · Boss at Red Door Studio

Wonderful space and wonderful shop - so happy to have this great ceramic supply business in the Northern Rivers! Thanks Mad and Ove for all the workshops!

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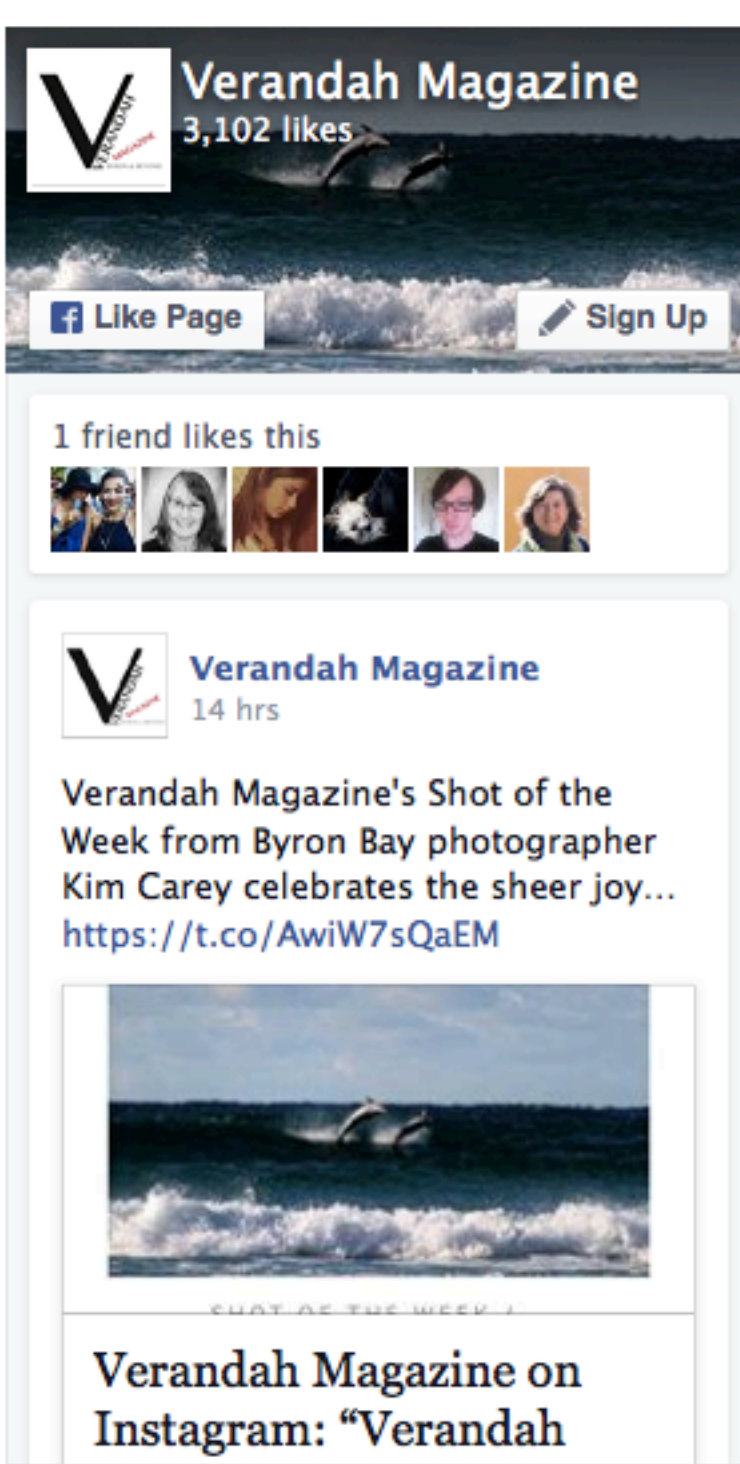
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