

STUDIO VISIT

Patricia Griffin

Cambria, California



Just the Facts

Clay

mid-range stoneware

Primary forming method

wheel throwing and handbuilding

Primary firing temperature

cone 5/6 oxidation

Favorite surface treatment

sgraffito and mishima

Favorite tools

wheel for forming, ball stylus
for decorating

Studio Playlist

an eclectic blend of music and pod-
casts from *Tales of a Red Clay Rambler*,
The Potters Cast, and others.

Studio

I work and greet visitors in my studio, a converted one-room schoolhouse on Main Street in Cambria, a scenic village on the central coast of California.

I rent the building from the Lions Club of Cambria and it's truly seen as a community asset. I am very grateful to be working out of this building and love sharing its character and history with visitors.

Before I began leasing the space six years ago, it was a co-op art gallery for the local art association for more than three decades. They had created faux walls in front of the existing walls. These gallery walls enabled them to hang their paintings, continually moving them around without putting nails in the historical building. I have kept those in place—a perfect way to create a studio space where I didn't have to worry about damaging the walls.

The front of the building is now a showroom/gallery area for my own work, and my studio is the other 70% of the space. Before I moved in, the Lions Club re-wired an outbuilding for my kilns. Previously, my kilns were in the same building as my workspace, so this was a big improvement.

The building has a little stage area at the very back (where the teacher's desk would have been when it was a schoolhouse). Today, I use that area for my wheel throwing. I have a stand-up wheel and a traditional sit-down wheel that I use for trimming or combining multiple



pieces. On this same level are my pug mill, an extruder, and a closet with clay and glaze storage. To the side by an exit door is a small bathroom, in which I added a big industrial sink.

The rest of the studio space is divided between a handbuilding table next to my slab roller and a long counter where I do most of my decoration. In reality, though, I'm always moving things around. It's probably not the most efficient system, but I've found that alternating sitting/standing and working at various heights is helpful in protecting my back.

As my studio income has grown, I've tried to invest back into the business by upgrading equipment or processes. Several years ago I purchased a pug mill. And this year I'm installing a new vent system in my kiln room to better exhaust fumes and heat.

The big advantage of having my studio on the main street is the ongoing flow of traffic in through the doors. It's also the main disadvantage when I'm trying to get work finished. On a complicated glaze day, it's not uncommon for me to close the doors to help stay focused on the work at hand.

Paying Dues

When I wandered into my first clay class 17 years ago, I was the busy owner of a regional marketing and design firm in central California. I was seeking a little fun and creative exploration not tied to the needs of clients.

What began as a hobby opened up a whole new world and I've been exploring its various paths ever since. After exhausting the local clay scene, I took workshops at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Sierra Nevada College, and Mendocino Art Center and sought out mentors and teachers. For about seven years, I studied intensely, using my income from the marketing and design business to pay bills while I learned everything I could about clay. I set up a makeshift studio in a backyard shed, and spent every spare minute there.

I was fortunate to have the support and encouragement of my husband. We've always had our own separate businesses and shared household duties and parenting. Our son grew up in that environment, and spent many evenings doing homework in the pottery studio.



It was a real advantage to be able to explore without worrying about selling my work. For the first seven years or so, I just tried whatever interested me, from low-fire majolica to handbuilt sculptural pieces.

When we made our move to the central coast of California ten years ago, I scaled back the marketing and design business and was able to focus on my clay business. Today, I consult with a few marketing clients, but spend the vast majority of my time on my clay work.

Approximately 40% of my pottery income comes from retail sales in my gallery and online, with another 30% from gallery and wholesale accounts, and the remainder from leading quarterly two-day workshops in my studio.

I've found the workshops to be an invigorating part of my studio life, and really enjoy the connections I've made. Each two-day session has 10 participants. I usually have two sessions each quarter, running them on consecutive weekends. I keep the workshops grouped together like this to minimize the set-up and tear-down time. It also reduces the disruption to my regular studio routine. Because the space is so limited, the workshops are usually sold out months ahead of time.

Typical Day

I am an early riser, and spend the first several hours of each day catching up with emails and social media in my home office, where I do most of the business side of things.

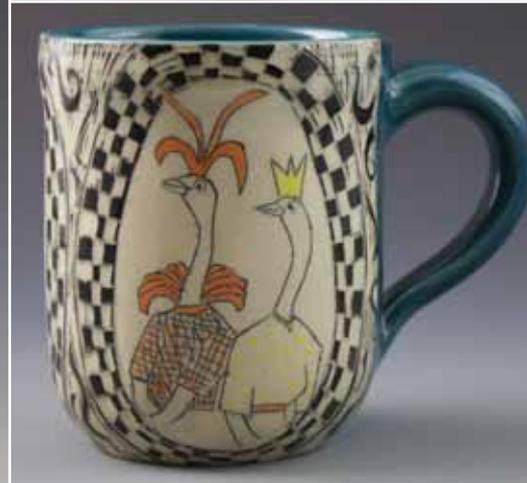
Three days a week I head to the gym, where I alternate a spin cycling class with a NIA dance class, followed by a short strength-training session. I've found it essential to maintain my exercise practice. If I slack off, I pay in back, arm, and neck issues. On days when I'm not doing a gym workout, I take my turn at walking the dogs, two large standard poodles that require almost daily outings. At least once a week, I also try to fit in a longer hike, exploring the amazing coastal trails.

For the rest of the day I'm in the studio, and I usually open my doors to the public from 1:30 to 6:30 PM. However, I don't have published hours and haven't wanted to commit to a strict schedule. (I keep a sign on my door, directing visitors down the street to a fine craft gallery where I also have a collection of my work.)

In the studio, my work cycle includes sessions of wheel throwing and handbuilding, followed by decorating. Most of my decorating happens in the greenware state, when pieces are leather hard. In the last several years, I've focused on highly decorated work with a lot of sgraffito and mishima.

Marketing

I've found the clay community to be generous in sharing marketing ideas, and I've tried to soak it in and try things out. I've learned so much from attending events like the annual National Council



on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) conference, reading *Ceramics Monthly* and other magazines, and listening to podcasts created by and for clay artists. There are so many great resources online, such as the recent *Think Big* class presented by Molly Hatch and Ben Carter. I'm still mulling over so much of what was presented in that program.

I've also found mentors in the larger art community who have been very helpful. For the first eight years, I was a member of Alyson Stanfield's Art Biz Incubator and learned much about working with galleries and other venues, including setting up my own retail space. More recently, I sought the advice of art-marketing consultant Carolyn Edlund who helped me problem solve some aspects of wholesale marketing to better fit the kind of work I make.

Whether it's marketing to visitors in my studio or connecting with galleries and wholesale accounts, I've found marketing my own work to present interesting challenges and opportunities. I'm always learning.

Most of my buyers are first introduced to my work when visiting my studio, where the majority of my sales are made. The access to new potential customers is one of the big advantages to having a presence on the main street of a little tourist town. I'm a member of local business and art associations, and participate in the annual Open Studios Art Tour and the major tourist events (such as Art & Wine Festival). I run an ad in the local tourism magazine and

have brochures at our Chamber of Commerce/Tourism Information Center.

I encourage all visitors to join my Studio Friends list and provide me their name, email, home city, and a comment indicating if they are interested in ordering, attending a workshop, etc. I segment this list into interests (workshops, special events, ordering) and send an email via Constant Contact about once a month.

Rather than maintain an ongoing store on my website, I do online shopping events, which I market to my Studio Friends email list. The list has grown to approximately 2000 people and I'm so grateful for the support and encouragement I've received.

I try to do an online event every three to four months, but only if I have enough fresh inventory. I really want my collectors to anticipate these events and be compelled to check out the offerings each time.

The best marketing tool for me is my own email list, with Facebook being a way to keep in more frequent contact. I also post almost daily to Instagram and I am working on building my presence on Pinterest.

www.PatriciaGriffinCeramics.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/PatriciaGriffinCeramics

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Instagram: [@PatriciaGriffinCeramics](https://www.instagram.com/PatriciaGriffinCeramics)

Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/pgriffinstudio