

OUT&ABOUT



Wheel Thrown Pottery

Wedge clay and throw it on the wheel to see the magic of pottery, writes Veathika Jain

Tatty K Studio, Littlehampton
0404 083 109, tattyk.com

LOCATION Tatty K Studio is located in the Adelaide Hills, about 30km southeast of Adelaide's CBD.

DETAILS Learn a combination of pottery techniques and skills including hand building and wheel throwing. The clay is included and participants are charged a nominal fee for glazing and firing to take their finished product home.

AVAILABILITY Various times on Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS Yes.

PRICE \$35 for a 2 hours and 30 minutes class.

RATING 4.5/5



I started learning pottery a decade ago but there have been a few breaks in that time – and that put me in need of a little refresher. As soon as I walked into Tatty K's studio in Littlehampton, I knew I was in the right place.

There were the familiar bags of clay, canvas tables, tool holders and various projects on shelves – and five wheels to work on. The studio was welcoming and homey with tea, coffee and hot chocolate always on tap.

It belongs to Tania Kunze, who set it up in 2011, and she's right when she says it's always an experience to touch clay and make something out of it.

The Saturday morning class had a number of people trying out different pottery techniques. In my case, I needed to reboot my skills on the wheel, after a gap of more than a year. Others were there to turn their pots on the wheel, glaze their bisque-fired creations or try to carve on their projects.

While I have some experience, Tania's lessons are also good for beginners because she simplifies all the techniques, making it easy to throw clay on the wheel.

She demonstrates how to wedge clay, which means making it ready for the wheel or to hand build. Wedging is like kneading dough, where you try to remove any air so it becomes more pliable with a uniform consistency.

We made three big balls from the wedged clay to make three different pots or bowls on the wheel.

Everyone has this romantic notion of the 'wheel', perhaps because they remember the scene in the 1990 film *Ghost* when they come to try, says Tania. "To make the experience simpler I have just broken down how to centre the clay," she says.

In the past, I have spoken to the clay, said thank you in advance and even tried to sing to it in order to centre it and ensure it does not fly off the wheel. But with Tania's method, the whole process was way smoother. "You need to show the clay, who's the boss," she advises.

Centring clay is the most important technique in the wheel as it helps to shape the object you are trying to make in a uniform and symmetrical shape.

It is a physical as well as a sensory experience. It's quite a workout as your foot needs to push a pedal attached to the wheel to adjust the speed, while your hands have to push, pull and put pressure to shape the clay.

It sounds daunting but the touch and feel of clay is a calming tactile experience. It's extremely therapeutic as every movement of the hand on clay provides instant feedback to the brain.

It's good for concentration and at least I manage to keep the mess to a minimum as I work on my first piece and ask regular questions to Tania.

"I have not seen anyone on the wheel so neat as you VJ," she tells me.

My first ball of clay comes out as a decent sized bowl. It's customary to congratulate anyone whose pot hasn't come out deformed. But don't worry, just about everyone struggles at first.

The studio is a busy place with about seven people working and it gets noisy as people chat about the work, plan future projects and sometimes laugh at the results. Each finished product takes at least two or three sessions, as the process is long, requiring creation, bisque firing, glazing and second firing.

Tania is very skilled not only at pottery but also answering questions, storing projects and slotting in classes – all simultaneously. She is flexible when it comes to timings and what and how you want to learn pottery.

She has immense knowledge of different clays, glazes and firing techniques. You can also buy some clay to work at home and bring it to the studio to fire and glaze.

Tania is an excellent teacher, breaking down even the most difficult of techniques into simpler steps with a big smile.

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DEBORAH BOGLE

Garden path

A Rajput palace in the Aravali Hills outside Udaipur, surrounded by formal gardens and honeycombed with hidden courtyards, pools and fountains, was a blessed respite on our recent trip to India.

We'd just spent a week in the teeming, smoggy metropolis of Mumbai. This was to be our one splurge – three days of luxury at the Devigarh, an 18th century fort built by a king and now one of three high-end hotels in Rajasthan owned by the RAAS group.

Thanks to a good word to management by our friend Fiona Caulfield, author of the *Love Travel Guides to India*, we'd been upgraded to a suite. Nothing was too much trouble, including my request for a tour of the kitchen gardens.

In the winter months, herbs, vegetables and flowers are grown in troughs on the first floor terrace that's also home to the pool deck. This area, neatly laid out in formal rows with raked gravel paths, all hand-watered, is accessible to all. Come summer, when temperatures soar, the terrace garden is abandoned.

Sous chef Achman Dhupar led us down one of Devigarh's myriad stone staircases, across a grassy courtyard planted with a single flowering bauhinia, under the great arch where an unseen hand had showered us with red rose petals on arrival, and on over the main lawn, dotted with shade trees and lined on one side with a row of mature frangipani. We were headed for the permanent kitchen garden at ground level, out of view of the public spaces.

Another stone staircase took us past an old step well, still in use, covered with a tarp to deter monkeys and possums, and shaded on one side by a huge neem tree. These ubiquitous trees are routinely planted near wells, because the leaves have antibacterial properties. The Devigarh gardeners use them to make a neem tea, the only insecticide/fungicide used in the garden.

Finally, we reached an enclosed patchwork of neatly planted beds covering about half a hectare. In the centre was a vine-covered pergola that offered a shady space for gardeners to rest. It was a morning glory, as weedy here as at home. We know it as dunny creeper. Here it's called railway creeper for its habit of smothering the railway fences.

There were eggplants, salad greens, herbs, tomatoes, cabbages, and masses of broccoli: magnificent heads nestled in lush, unblemished leaves.

There was also much evidence of companion planting, including marigolds and a red rose, that of the red petals showered on arriving guests, and floated in marble bowls all around the hotel. It's derived from the chaitri gulab (you'll know that world from the popular rose flavoured sweet, gulab jamun).

Chaitri roses are pink, renowned for their delicate scent, and are grown in commercial quantities at Haldighati, not far away. Here at Devigarh, they've crossed it with a red rose especially for their rose petal ice cream, served in the restaurant. We can attest to its deliciousness. Broccoli, alas, was not on the menu.