

# Vincent Massey

Whistler, British Columbia, Canada



## Just the Facts

### Clay

stoneware clay that is mixed, pugged, and aged for a minimum of 6 months

### Primary forming method

wheel-throwing, altering, handbuilding, and working with slabs on hump molds with extrusions

### Primary firing temperature

cone 9–11 with heavy reduction and heavy salt firing

### Favorite surface treatment

thick Grolleg slip applied with ribs or slip trailers

### Favorite tools

my hands, throwing ribs, liquid wax, and especially my two extruders

## Studio

After graduating from West Surrey College of Art in Farnham, England, in 1982, I set up my first studio, converting an old building on my parents' ocean-front property in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Unfortunately, after two years of producing pots in that studio my parents sold their house. My wife, Cheryl, was pregnant and we decided it was time to build a house for our new family and build a proper studio. Our criteria for choosing the location included: on an island, or rural land on the coast. Ultimately Whistler, a small town in the mountains north of Vancouver, was the final choice. Whistler won out because of its affordability, great tourist/client potential, and (best of all) the mountains could satisfy our ski-bum addiction. While I was attending art school, I built houses in the summer and I put that experience to work building a 2000 square-foot home with a 1600 square-foot studio in the backyard. Designing a studio from scratch was ideal because I could build exactly what I needed and keep the location of the kilns convenient. I have a 500 square-foot heated studio, another 800 square-foot outdoor workshop for my two large reduction and salt kilns, plus an area for clay making/storage and assorted welding and woodworking equipment.

At first, my showroom was part of my outside kiln shed but raccoons, cats chasing squirrels, and the odd massive black bear wandering through forced me to build a gallery that would keep out the wildlife and provide space for my pieces plus Cheryl's growing basket-weaving work.



Although having a studio in my backyard sounds perfect, because we built on a hill on the side of Rainbow Mountain (with great views across the valley to Whistler mountain), the challenge of dealing with 4–6 feet of snow every winter has now become a burden. We have to keep up with the shovelling and clearing paths, so clients with arms full of new purchases do not wipe out getting back down to their cars.

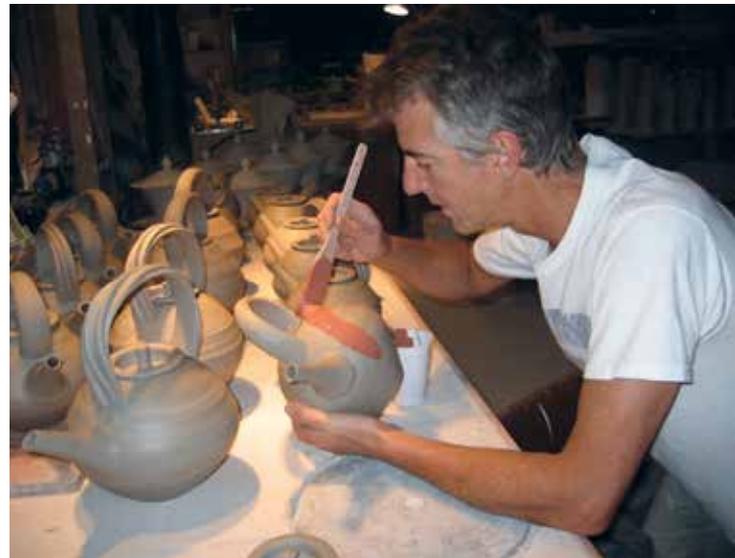
### Paying Dues (and Bills)

My sense of design was influenced by my mother, who was a painter, and my father, who was an architect. They were easily my biggest mentors. Their circle of influence was immeasurable; we were surrounded by poets, painters, musicians, and actors who really nourished and influenced my teenage direction. High school provided me with a ceramics teacher who knew how to discover and direct our creative minds. A family friend and potter, John Reeve, suggested I go to art school in England at the West Surrey College of Art and Design in Farnham where he had once taught. Farnham in 1978 was one of the epicenters of ceramic training in the UK.

Located in the English countryside an hour from London, we had Michael Cardew, Mick Casson, Harry Davis, Walter Keeler, David Leach, and numerous other global pottery icons as visiting lecturers. One teacher I had for a time was Takeshi Yasuda who turned some of my very traditional Leach-influenced training upside down with his Mashiko style of throwing, glaze making, and firing. We had a kiln building site outside in the back of the college on the edge of farmland where we were encouraged to design and build wood-fired kilns: low-and high-fired salt, anagama, and traditional bottle kilns. The latter were used for firing local earthenware decorated with delicious slips under honey galena glazes. A door factory down the road provided us with an endless supply of pine strips and a supply of oak beams from a builder's yard for fuel. I enjoyed the creamy English stoneware clays and tasty British ales as well as spending many long, soot-filled nights wood firing.

### Studio Time

After over 30 years of producing pots for a living, I have found a comfortable work schedule that involves four months of creating



work for a fall show in a pop-up gallery in Vancouver, British Columbia, where the majority of my client base is located. This is followed by a winter break to recharge my creative juices. After the break, I schedule a spring work session. Summers are spent traveling, giving lectures, and teaching my Styrofoam hump-mold and extruder-die making workshops. These breaks, although an interruption of my creative flow, make my production time a more valuable commodity. My time in the mountains or on the ocean away from my studio cleanses my mind, which is motion sensitive. I feel that exercise in nature produces enlightenment. You cannot create freely until you create from a free space.

I have always been a very active athlete with a strong pull toward mountain culture and a life that also involves being on and around the ocean. My life in the mountains and on the ocean reflects who I am and what I stand for. My philosophy and belief is one of contentment and satisfaction of being able to be creative. After an ugly but successful battle with cancer in 2001, I stepped up my knowledge of true optimal health. My diet, stress levels, and exercise routines have become a priority. We are very fortunate to

have national healthcare in Canada that covers most of my health requirements but a nutritionally balanced diet plus a generous dose of regular exercise is vital.

Most of my reading is of incredible survival stories and epic historical journals, which always leaves me feeling that any of my life's challenges seem trivial. Really, if you want to achieve your goals, you are the only thing standing in your own way.

## Recharge

Back when I took a year off to heal, I wrote out a realistic bucket list that was half mind/body and half travel/art. I now teach, lecture, and mentor apprentices and find inspiration in nurturing and unleashing students' capabilities and their enthusiasm for their craft.

I have evolved my practice, and now I no longer produce as many pots. I spend half my studio time on my wheel and the rest of my time handbuilding with slabs draped over foam molds with abundant extruded defining features. Spending more time and thought on each piece and working out ideas without ruining the simplicity of the piece is always a challenge.



## Marketing

My clients have become more local than from abroad. Galleries here do not buy wholesale, so 50% of the sales are through my gallery, 20% are from commercial clients, (i.e. hotels and restaurants) and 30% come from the other galleries that represent my work.

I am very conscious of my commercial and corporate clients' need for good value and strong durable work that can be reproduced. New commercial clients have been hard to find in this new economy for craft.

I market my work using Facebook, Instagram, and an email newsletter sent to our clients two to three times per year. Many of my customers find me through my website, although at this time I do not have an online store. Whistler is a globally significant ski resort that makes my website and pottery easy to search, which means that my website gains more visibility. I have had to reinvent my method of marketing by refraining from being complacent when it comes to promoting my work. Clients need to know that my work is not becoming stagnant and that I have new forms and colors that they may want to purchase.

I also use my personal brand and the story of who I am as a way to stand out and engage with my audience. We hired a business and social media coach to help us navigate through the ever changing digital landscape of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest. It's an ongoing process of nurturing my relationships with interior designers, gallery owners, and local realtors who purchase gifts for clients, as well as sending cookbook publishers invitations to use my work.

The strategy for finding new commercial clients in this new economy is constantly changing. I am now having to educate potential clients on the value of locally handmade one-of-a-kind craft. Corporate clients demand durable, consistent production and, most important, price-point value. Corporate gift giving has been another avenue for sales. Whistler has a hot convention market that I am pursuing to access that group of potential clients.

All of my marketing would not be successful without an up-to-date and easy to view website.

[www.vincentmasseypottery.com](http://www.vincentmasseypottery.com); Facebook: [Vincent Massey Pottery](#); Instagram: [@vincentmasseypottery](#)