

WORKING ARTIST | POTTER CYNTHIA CURTIS

Want something perfect? ‘Go to Target,’ says potter Cynthia Curtis.

But if you want something beautifully imperfect, make it with your hands

By Cate McQuaid Globe Correspondent, Updated November 4, 2024, 7:00 a.m.



Potter Cynthia Curtis poses for a portrait at the shop outside her studio in Rockport. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

ROCKPORT — Throwing pots is not easy. Just ask potter and pottery teacher Cynthia Curtis, who has taught nearly 1,500 students, most in the studio off the back of her house in the past 25 years.

“We call it the agony and the ecstasy. The learning curve doesn’t just go up nicely. It’s all over the map,” she said. “But it’s so gratifying. People come in all stressed out from their day, and by the time they leave, they’re laughing and breathing, and they’ve made stuff.”



Potter Cynthia Curtis makes a vase during a demonstration at her studio. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

Where to find her: cynthiacurtispottery.com

Age: 65

Originally from: Marblehead

Lives in: Rockport

Making a living: “Don’t ever let anybody tell you you can’t make a living from your art,” said Curtis, who earns her keep selling her own work and teaching.

Studio: The potter has eight wheels, two kilns, and storage, and offers eight-week classes year round. Benjamin, Curtis’s part-Maine Coon cat, is “the studio kitty,” she said.

“I’m really proud of the community that I’ve built,” she said. “I know this has helped people.”



Benjamin, whom Cynthia Curtis calls her "studio kitty," and the potter in her studio. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

How she started: In high school and college, Curtis took ceramics classes, but she put potting aside for a career in retail and marketing. Still, clay tugged at her, and in her 30s she began taking, then teaching, classes. At 40, divorced with two small children, she said, a “cosmic window opened for me.”

She found the Rockport house, bought it, and built her studio.

“I was like, ‘If I build it, will they come?’ It was a huge leap of faith,” she said. “I started with three people in a class. I just said ‘yes’ to everything. I sold my things all over the place at wholesale. And it worked. I was able to put two kids through college and pay off the house.”



Potter Cynthia Curtis pulls pieces from her Beach Glass Pottery collection from the kiln at her studio in Rockport. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

What she makes: A little shop sits at the end of Curtis’s driveway filled with her stoneware bowls, platters, and mugs. She melts glass into blue-green glaze on white stoneware to echo the colors of the ocean. She impresses brown clay with spiraling shell patterns, applies blue glaze, and then wipes it off in places to create mandala-like surfaces that also resemble maps of the world.

Prices range from \$20 to \$1,200.

How she works: “On Tuesdays and Thursdays the studio is mine,” she said. “I don’t want to lose my time to make pots. I need that balance.”



A collection of pottery tools at Cynthia Curtis Pottery Studio. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

What she tells her students: Perfection isn't all it's cracked up to be. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, Curtis broke all the rules of throwing pots. "I've been teaching people how to center clay for years," she said. "I threw the clay on the wheel, jammed my hands in there to open it up, and whipped up the walls."

Her creations "were all twisted and ripped and torn and completely warped," she said. "It was so freeing."

Now she shares that experience with her students. "I say, 'Don't worry if it's not perfect. It's not going to be what you want it to be. It's handmade.'"

"You want something perfect," she added, "go to Target."



Potter Cynthia Curtis makes a vase during a demonstration at her Rockport studio. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

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A community treasure! Thank you Cynthia!!

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Target is awesome! Thanks

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jm97

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I love her work.

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Love those plates! There is a lady in Randolph that is super talented as well. I'm sure there are lots more.

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smalarick

11/04/24 - 11:11AM

I first got my hands in clay after retirement and it was the best decision I could have made. Sitting at a potters wheel can be a form of meditation to be sure. And sometimes a piece comes of the wheel just as you hoped and many times not. There's little in this world that can teach humility quite as well, nor as often, but what it gives is joy.

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That cat looks pretty furry. She could pioneer a New England equivalent of Navajo horsehair pottery: Maine Cooncat hair pottery!

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Vaccinate!

11/04/24 - 11:34PM

Fabulous Boston-area, sole proprietor, small business, local landscape, Boston Globe story. Thank you, Boston Globe!

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