



Crafts Council / Education

Craft Journey

Sam Andrew / Ceramicist



Sam Andrew. All images courtesy of the artist.

What I do

I'm a ceramicist. I make ceramic tableware by throwing on the wheel, and using moulds I've made.

I spend time marketing and selling my work direct and through a few stores.

I teach workshops and also work as a technician, taking care of filling and firing kilns, making up glazes and slips, recycling clay by hand, and lots of cleaning among other tasks.

Jobs in textiles

Independent makers like myself create anything from functional tableware and objects for interiors, to sculptural ceramics and art installations.

This encompasses all stages of the making process from designing and making pieces, to photographing work and displaying it at exhibitions, to packaging and posting work to customers.

There are jobs in designing tableware for companies, making for galleries and design stores, selling direct through craft fairs, markets and exhibitions, and commissions for interiors and restaurants.

There's also teaching and technician work at schools, universities and in small, independent businesses.



Plates, Sam Andrew.

Why craft?

I love working with my hands making something out of clay. It's an absorbing craft that takes a high level of concentration to learn and develop the skills needed. That kind of stimulation is almost meditative, allowing a great sense of calm in the moment, and satisfaction at the end of a day of making. Time can fly by easily. It's this experience of making that's inspired me to work in ceramics. I'd recommend everyone try their hand at it at some point.

What I studied at school

My choices were based on my strengths and what I enjoyed. My strengths were in Science and Maths, whereas my interests and enjoyment lay in Art and Music. Pottery was an after-school class that my mum taught to me, my friends and other kids and adults in the area.

I took 13 GCSEs focusing on Science, Maths, Art & Design, and Music. I took A Levels in Psychology, Physics, Maths and Art & Design.

I went on to gain 2 degrees in Psychology and Clinical Neuropsychology.



Ceramics, Sam Andrew.



Cups, Sam Andrew.

What I studied after school

I didn't formally study my craft. I've been learning ceramics since an early age.

My mum taught me. She studied formally for 5 years and worked as a maker when she graduated, and then a pottery teacher for many more years, spanning 40 odd years of experience.

I was able to throw myself some bowls and plates before I went to university aged 18. As an adult I spent many days practicing my skills at my mum's studio, attending a few workshops, and reading about the craft independently.

I learnt ceramics casually from a young age. I think it would take at least 2 years of full-time dedicated learning to begin selling ceramic craft if that's your aim.

My career path

I started by selling a few pieces online and at local markets. At the same time I began teaching some workshops in my mother's studio. I also did outreach pottery work with homeless people in Manchester, part of a social enterprise my mum was running at the time. Having taught English in Japan for a year, I obtained an online teaching qualification and studied educational psychology at university, I was well positioned to structure classes and ceramic workshops.

I was later selected by the Crafts Council for their prestigious talent development program, Hothouse.

I learnt a lot about creative businesses and met many other makers for which I'm very grateful. Over time there's been a steady increase in enquiries for projects for me to work on, such as a couple of restaurant commissions and making some large historic pots to be used as props for a TV show.

Important decisions

This is my second career— I trained in Clinical Neuropsychology and worked in research and with people with brain injuries. I'd learnt ceramics since I was a child but I had never considered it as a career. I really enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of Neuropsychology, but my skills were quite research-based and I wanted to work more with people. I was pushed more into research as that's what I was good at. It became more apparent that office-based work wasn't something I wanted to spend my time doing.

At the same time, I was spending much of my spare time throwing on the wheel and the days would fly by. Once my skill had developed it occurred to me to try and incorporate ceramics as a part-time living. It quickly became a full-time occupation.



Ceramics, Sam Andrew.

My advice to you

It's important to be proactive, sociable and make contact with others—you never know who will suggest a collaboration or need your skills on a project. I was partly taught to throw on the wheel by Kevin Millward, the pottery consultant for the TV program *The Great Pottery Throw Down*, who invited me to interview as the 'kiln man' for the program. I've also been offered other technician roles too.

I volunteered at the British Ceramics Biennial helping Manchester Metropolitan University professor Steve Dixon to make a giant head. I was able to meet other professionals who to my surprise were all based in the North, as well as scoring a couple of customers from people I met there. Other commissions I've received have come through mutual friends.



Ceramics, Sam Andrew.

I'd recommend taking pottery up as a hobby, if only for the enjoyment of it, the manual dexterity and motor skills it develops, and the therapeutic feeling it leaves you with. It takes many years of practice to be good at the craft so starting young, as a hobbyist, can keep your options open for the future. You can still study an academic subject like I did at university and break into the industry later on.

Although it is an excellent route into the industry, it's not necessary to study craft at university. If you're not as lucky as I was to have a mum who teaches ceramics, then you can gain the skills and direction at Clay College in Stoke, currently managed by Kevin Millward, or apprentice with a professional maker through their associated 'Adopt a Potter' program. There are a growing number of potters across the country who offer lessons in their studios too, where you can learn the skills direct from those who earn a living from making.

Craft Careers

Craft generates £3.4 billion for the UK economy each year, with the contribution of the wider creative industries now growing at twice the rate of the UK economy. British craft has never been so sought-after and craft skills are revolutionising industries from aerospace to architecture.

To learn more about craft careers visit:
www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/craft-careers



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