

FEATURED POTTERS

Winton and Rosa Eugene
POTTERY BY EUGENE,
COWPENS,
SOUTH CAROLINA

For 20 years, Winton and Rosa Eugene have been satisfying collectors across the country with pottery that is as functional as it is uniquely beautiful.

The self-taught artists, whose work has been featured in Southern Living Magazine, make beautiful stoneware jars, pitchers, vases and more in their studio gallery in Cowpens, SC. Their work has been exhibited in museums and galleries across the country. The Eugenes stumbled upon their pottery vocation by accident.

Rosa, a Spartanburg native, met the Louisiana-born Winton through her brother. Actually, she says, "My brother brought him home to meet his girlfriend's sister." Later, when Winton moved to Chicago, he invited Rosa and her sister to visit. Rosa went alone and after only 3 weeks, Rosa and Winton made a leap of faith and were married.

When they became parents, they preferred rural Cowpens to urban Chicago for their son and daughter. This was a perfect setting for Winton's new hog-farming trade, a business that was not making any money. Rosa and the kids decided that Winton needed a hobby to focus much of his energy away from farming. The three of them bought a potter's wheel, a kiln and books on the subject and sent Winton off to the garage to find more productive use of his time. "That's why they got me a potter's wheel," Winton smiles, "so I would leave them alone."

Within 6 months, "Winton had a whole garage full of pottery." Rosa recalls while Winton laughs, "We really didn't know what pottery was supposed to look like," he says. "We had all these sick little pieces of pottery. I had never seen it made before." Such a lack of interaction with other potters was deliberate and eventually paid off. "Once you get your own style and your own shapes," Rosa said, "then you can see a potter."

Winton's style of hand painting and carving faces, houses, and other images into his pots eventually made his work stand out from the others. In fact, two of Winton's signature details came about accidentally. "My pots were heavy," he explains, "So I had to carve away the clay to lighten them." Removing clay through carving became a detail that delighted collectors.

A woman with arthritis asked for a cup that would accommodate all her fingers. "When I pulled the handle straight," Winton says, "there were all these little bitty clay pieces on the floor. I didn't want to throw them away." Instead, his hog farmer's experience kicked in and he fashioned pig tail handles. Winton used expensive commercial glazes at first, wanting to use a "pinch of this, and a pinch of that." Rosa used her chemistry background to assemble precise mixing procedures that allowed them to make their own glazes and Winton eventually agreed to let Rosa make all the glazes. Winton's glaze cost-cutting plan was not working out – "I'd put it in the fire, and it would just run off because the consistency was wrong." Eventually, Winton gave in to the scientific method of mixing. "I got down on my knees and begged her to do it for me," Winton recalls. Eventually, the couple gathered three kilns – electric, gas, and wood-fired. But, as hard as Winton worked, he could not fill all those kilns and Rosa began sculpting clay as well. Their work often goes against what experts and academicians say about art – that artistry and function don't always go hand in hand. Winton and Rosa Eugene are not always surprised to discover that enthusiastic pottery lovers and collectors from around the globe would beg to differ.

As always, the work – and lives – of Winton and Rosa Eugene remain a close collaboration.



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