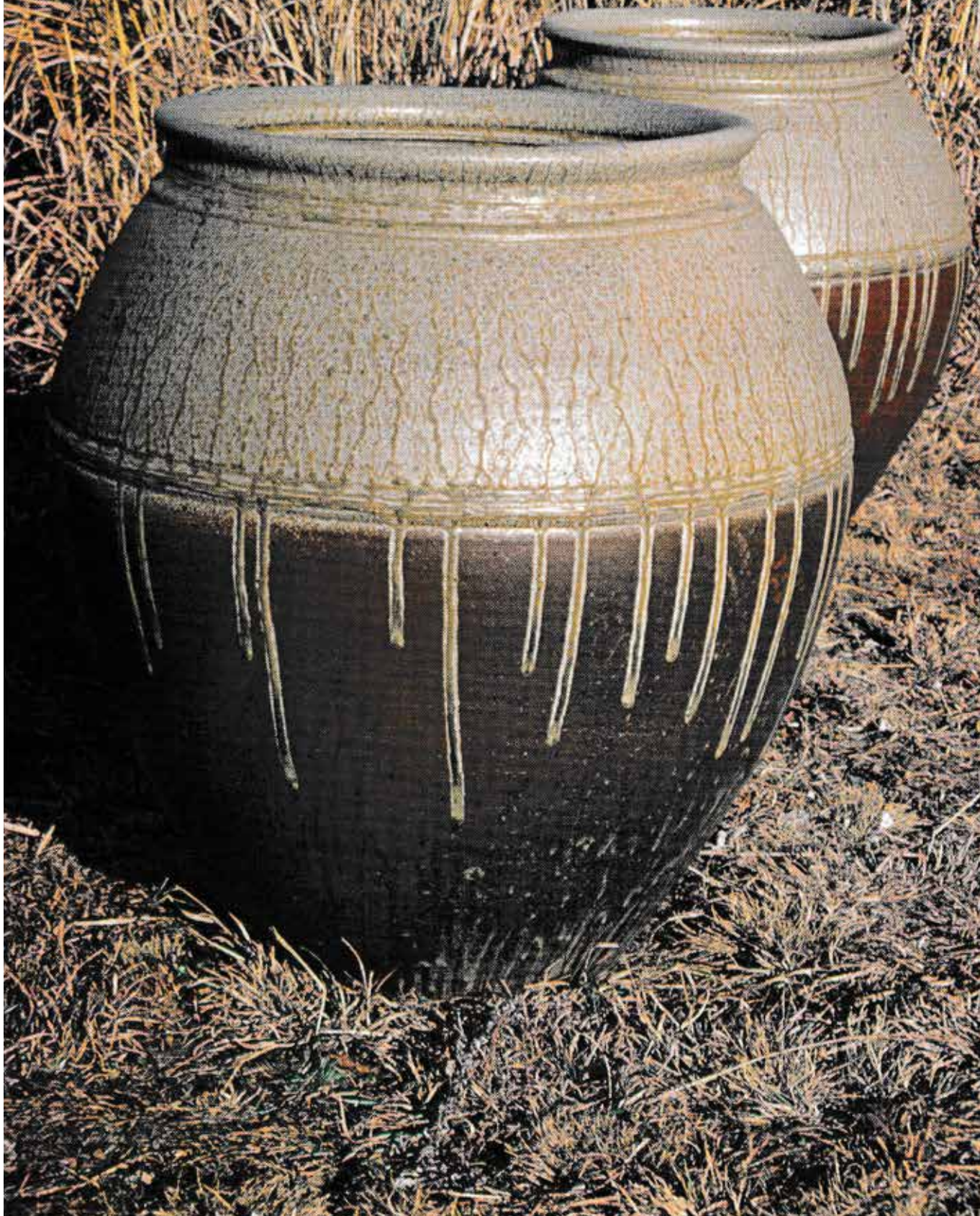


DIGBY HOETS

Larger than Life



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by Gail de Klerk

They are large, generous and expansive. They are handsome. They have a great sensitivity of form. They have an architectural presence. They reflect the man and his environment. These are all phrases used by different people in their response to the pots made by Digby Hoets. It is therefore not surprising that he was the Premier Award Winner at the 2001 APSA National Exhibition held in Cape Town in October.

Digby has consistently received awards since receiving the Brikor Award in 1972. He followed this with the Oude Libertas Award in 1978 that he won jointly with Sonja Gerlings, the Corobrik Award in 1987 and the Norma Guassardo Award for the Best Thrown Piece at the 1998 APSA Ceramics Biennale. There have also been numerous awards at regional exhibitions.

Digby was first introduced to clay in his mother, Dilys' studio. Encouraged by his Brickor Award, he, together with his sister Leslie-Ann, bought the studio of Val and John Edwards in Johannesburg and started to teach pottery. In between teaching Digby was making his own pots that he transported to Halfway House to be fired in an oil kiln that he shared with two other potters. In 1976 he and his wife Penny built a home and studio in Halfway House and in 1977 built his first trolley kiln, a 120 cubic foot oil fired trolley kiln.

In 1996 their home was expropriated for a major road building project. Penny and Digby moved out to Carlswood between Johannesburg and Pretoria and built a new home and studio using a lot of materials rescued from the demolishers of their first home. Digby did all the building himself and rebuilt his kiln that had been moved brick by brick. The studio has been designed to function in a way that the pots move from stage to stage with the minimum of lifting and handling, an important detail when making large pots!

A three to four week cycle is usually planned for a kiln load of pots. Digby throws the bases of about six large planters on a wheel that he specially designed and built himself. The wheel responds very sensitively and can rotate very slowly which allows him to pay attention to the subtleties of form that are a hallmark of his work. When leather dry large coils are added and carefully thrown, using an extension to the foot pedal that allows him to stand on top of the wheel. The rims are often thrown hollow so that they compliment the large forms. Once the throwing is completed, handles, texturing and slips are applied. With his attention to detail a record of each and every pot is kept. Measurements as the piece progresses are taken, the weight of the coils, the angle of the curves as well as the type of decoration used is all noted.

The move to the new studio also involved the rebuilding of the 120 cu. ft oil fired kiln, which was moved and rebuilt brick by brick. According to his log books the kiln has done 250 firings and 55 of these have been done in the new studio. Since 1981 Digby has raw glazed his pots using traditional reduction glazes, like Tenmouku, saturated iron glazes, celadons, ash and shino glazes. Once the pot is bone dry, the glaze is applied on a rotating wheel and then transferred using a pulley and gantry onto the trolley of the kiln. In between the large planters he usually fills the smaller spaces with wash basins that he makes for some of the luxury game lodges around the country. The kiln is fired to cone 13 in a reduction atmosphere..

With the advent of digital photography he now takes before and after photographs recording the position of every pot in each firing. With all the information that he keeps he is always able to reproduce a specific pot if required. These records also enable him to study the pieces and decide if any changes are needed.

Digby still runs a teaching studio and his students are able to work in the studio on three days of the week. Many of his students have become regular exhibitors on APSA exhibitions and in many cases been award winners. Digby has always maintained that by participating in the exhibitions organised by APSA is one of the best ways to have one's work exposed and to become known to the public.

Digby's pots have been commissioned for many prestigious buildings around the country and he was also commissioned by HRH Prince Charles to make a pot for his garden in Highgrove. His work is also in the following collections:

Corobrik Collection
The Pretoria Art Museum
Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg
William Humphreys Art Gallery, Kimberley
King George VI Art Gallery, Port Elizabeth

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more on page 12



Facing page, Award winning pot, woodash urn with runs, 74cm high. Above, Digby and unfired kiln.

Technical Notes

All pots are raw glazed and reduction fired to cone 13 for approximately 18 hours in a 120 cubic foot trolley kiln fired with furnace fuel. The kiln is pre-heated using a gas poker for 24 hours before firing.

Stoneware body

Firelay	73%
Ball clay	15%
Grog (60 mesh)	10%
Paper	2%

Dry Woodash Glaze (parts)

Ash (Lowveld hardwoods, mainly <i>Combretum imberbe</i> from camp fires)	25
Kaolin	70
Ball clay	15

Depending on the thickness of application this glaze ranges from a dry grey green (when thick) through to a sleek rich brown, reminiscent of polished wood or leather when applied thinly. This glaze runs when pure woodash is applied over the glaze.

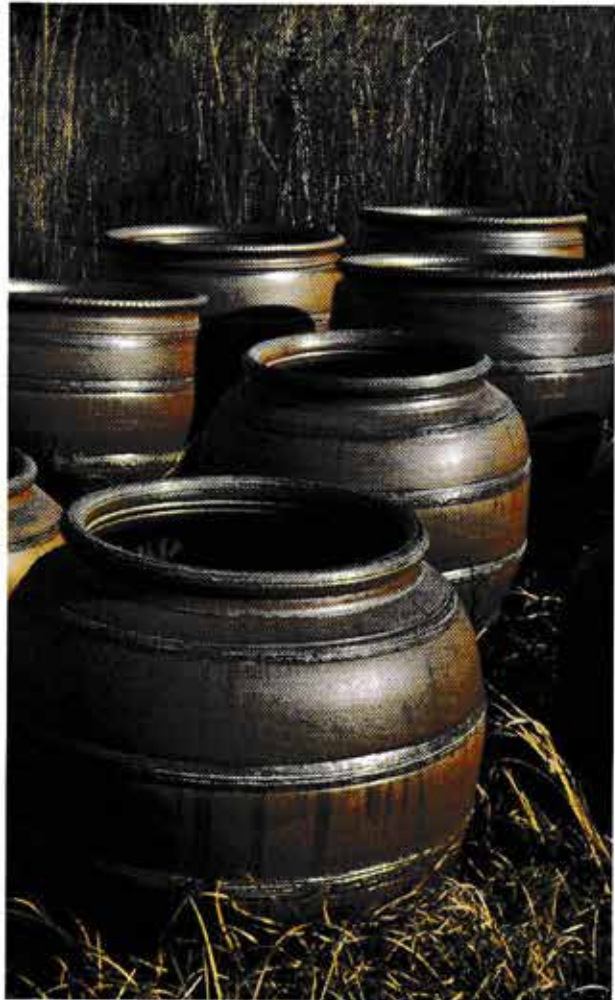
Woodash Glaze (parts)

Feldspar	35
Silica	10
Kaolin	10
Ball clay	12
Ash (Lowveld hardwoods, mainly <i>Combretum imberbe</i> from camp fires)	35
Yellow ochre	2.5

Applied thickly, this glaze is a rich, liquid pale green.

Tenmoku (parts)

Feldspar	60
Silica	20
Whiting	12.5
Kaolin	15
Ball clay	10
Iron oxide	6.8



Group of dry ash jars.



Dry ash urn with handles, 62cm high.