

Working Together vs. Working Alone

Is one really better than the other?

By Randy Ashenfelter

One of the things I missed most when I left the ceramics studio at ASU was the dynamic that happens when working in a group studio. When I was the studio tech, I would have my days filled with requests from students and professors for things that needed to be done in the studio to keep it running. I usually got to work on my own projects late at night when the studio was quieter and only the diehards were still working. During those times I would enjoy the camaraderie and energy of working with others while working in clay. We would bounce ideas off of each other, give each other critiques and advice, and brainstorm when the creativity was scarce. I was able to strengthen the others as much as they strengthened me. In doing so, each of us was able to grow as an artist faster than if we were working alone. One of the biggest challenges I had when I left college was getting motivated to work in an empty studio. I didn't have the support, or accountability that comes with working with others. It was far easier to find distractions and reasons why I couldn't get things done. I have adapted, and now I can work alone or in a group, although working together seems to be more fun.

Now, that being said, I did not miss the errors that are inherent with working in a group studio. Pieces get damaged, not fired correctly, or other frustrations that come with working with others. I have had pieces crack while drying, dripped on by careless glazing, and slumped by over firing. I will admit that sometimes I have done these things to my own pots, but it is easier to accept the frustration when it comes from one's self. Still, I will always prefer working together even with the minor frustrations that it entails to working by myself. Like I always say, "You can't be a pessimist and be a potter, there are just too many steps."