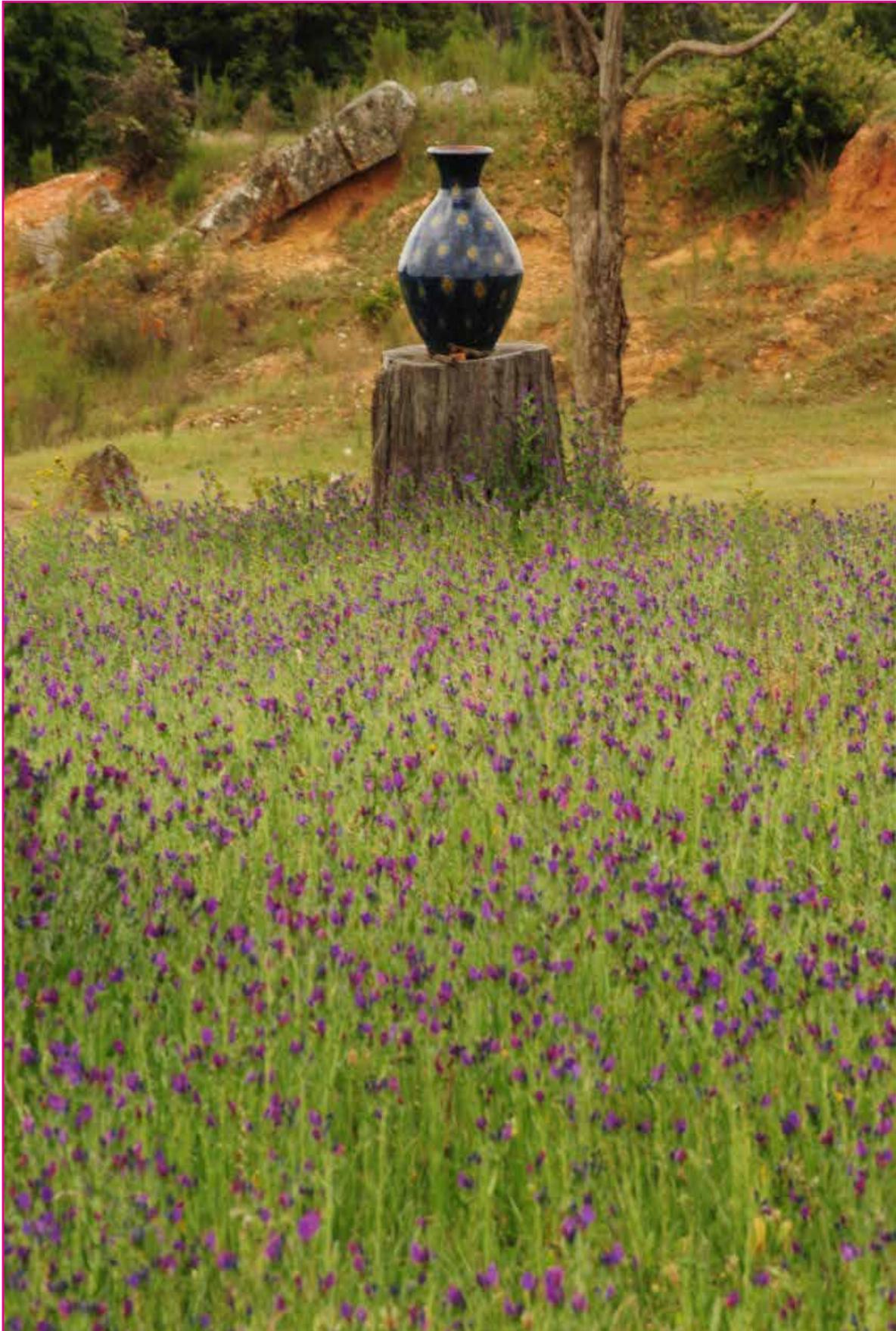


# LINO ALVAREZ & LA PALOMA POTTERY

*... there is a beautiful feel to this work, a sensuality that comes from working in the ancient traditions of clay...*



Right:  
This Beaufoy Merllin  
photograph taken in 1872  
is from the Holtermann  
Collection. Reproduced  
courtesy of State Library  
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Photographs  
© Peter Adams



Some of the most extraordinary pottery being produced today in Australia comes from a pottery in the historic goldmining town of Hill End. La Paloma (the dove, a spirit of hope and freedom) is the home of potter Lino Alvarez and potter and musician Kim Deacon. Looking out over the Turon Valley from Hawkins Hill, an historic 1862 wattle-and-daub cottage and sheds have become home, office and workshops and the nearby Catholic church a gallery and music space. Their renovations were awarded National Trust Heritage Awards in 2002.

Kim Deacon describes the original ramshackle sheds: 'When we first arrived, there were no floors, everything leaked and we couldn't start work until Parks had given us a works plan. So for one year we lived with no floors, no bathroom, with buckets and bowls all over the house to catch the drips.' Those times have long since gone.

Lino describes La Paloma as a 'big pot specialist'. Architects, designers and landscape architects go to La Paloma for huge urns, sculptures, wall features, water installations and other unique and custom-made pieces which have then found their way around Australia including to The Lodge in Canberra, Deutsche Bank, The Park Hyatt and Darling Harbour in Sydney.

In recent years the pottery has branched out into a unique range of handmade culinary wares which now feature in homes and restaurants across Australia and overseas. This began when local artist Luke Sciberras brought Lino a commission from John Olsen—Olsen wanted Lino to copy an old ceramic baking vessel which he had bought in Barcelona 50 years earlier. Lino was intrigued and set out to study cookware and the clay bodies and glazes required to withstand the high temperatures of cooking.

Lino has collaborated with many Australian artists, notably in 2005 with John Olsen, and in 2008 in

association with Australian Galleries in Sydney, when a number of artists made their way to Hill End to create works which featured in the Australian Ceramics Triennale in 2009. He says that he sees himself as a cultural worker, encouraging collaborations with artists, people such as Garry Shead, Elisabeth Cummings, John Firth-Smith, Euan MacLeod, Rodney Pople, Adam Rich, Toni Warburton and Greg Weight.

Lino Alvarez was given a retrospective exhibition at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery in 2010.

Following is Peter Adams' profile of Lino Alvarez, first published in his book 'Ore What!', a history of Hill End and its artists. Text and photographs are by Peter Adams.

It has been said that each of us is the sum total of everything we have ever experienced. While this may perhaps be a little simplistic, in the case of Lino Alvarez it is not only accurate, but also deliberate.

Lino was born in 1954 in the Mexican town of Hermosillo, Sonora, situated on the border with Arizona. Hermosillo is the centre of one of the world's largest deserts—stretching from California in the west to Texas in the east and including parts of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada. Sonora has been the subject of many things—from love songs to, more recently, a battle ground for the drug cartels.

Mexico has an extraordinarily rich history of folklore, painting, design, pottery and pre-Christian culture—a culture that became massaged and layered with Catholicism on the arrival of the Spanish soldiers in 1512. Passionate and emotional, Mexico is a nation born of revolution and turmoil—themes often depicted by local artists, particularly in their street art. It was surrounded by this wealth of texture and turmoil that Lino grew up and decided to make art his life.



Once he had left school.

At nineteen, Lino travelled from the family home to California to study visual art for three years at the San Diego College of Art, majoring in ceramic art. He was always determined to make his living as a potter. Finishing art school forced him to make a few decisions. He knew he didn't want to remain in the USA, *I really couldn't identify with the American way of life.* He also knew he couldn't make a decent living in Mexico as a potter and wanted, as he puts it 'to saturate myself with the art of the world'.

His final year at college coincided with the end of Fascism in Spain.

*With the fall of General Franco, Spain went through a renaissance. So that's where I headed to immerse myself in the culture of Spain and Europe. After four years of euphoria, during which time I mostly worked in bars and restaurants and became a bit of an alcoholic, I needed to redefine my life.*

He took off once more, travelling this time through North Africa, and ending up in the alcohol-free environment of a kibbutz in Israel. *The Gvat Kibbutz was one of the largest in Israel with 600 permanent residents and room for 200 volunteers—who came from all over the world, including Australia. Gvat had cornfields, apple*

*orchards and a small factory making electronic irrigation equipment. Another section of the land was leased to the military as an air force base — much of which was concealed underground. We could hear the warplanes, but never saw them. The area was so vast. Many of the volunteers told me that Australia was a beautiful place, but there was not much there. It sounded just the sort of place I needed to be, so I packed my bags once again and in 1982 ended up living with a banking family in Dee Why. The family thought I was cuckoo because I was determined to make my living as a potter. So, while the head of the house was exploring the business section of the Sydney Morning Herald and having his daily breakfast sandwich of tinned sardines and melted cheese, I would be exploring the employment section looking for a job as a potter.*

*At night I would explore the streets of Dee Why looking for a wine bar or café. There wasn't one. They were right. In those days there was nothing.' Sadly, in Dee Why today, not much has changed.*

*My first job was throwing pots for a ceramic gallery under the Harbour Bridge—200 dollars a week, cash-in-hand—a lot of money in those days. It was a bizarre job. There was no kiln and each evening I had to destroy all my pots, so that the clay could be reused the following morning. I was nothing more than window dressing.*





*Literally! I sat at a wheel in the window demonstrating to Mr. and Mrs. Tourist how to throw pots—which were never fired or glazed. Needless to say, I didn't stay long! After two weeks I was looking for a job again.*

In the mid-eighties Sydney was still a fair way off earning its current reputation for fine food and wine. The

most Bohemian community at that time was Balmain—with its Turkish and Lebanese coffee bars, artists, poets and social misfits—all muddled up with a splattering of decent food. The community had a natural attraction for Lino—who moved there.

One day he walked past a bloke who was renovating his house. *He was pulling out some bougainvillea that had taken over the house and I asked if he needed a hand.* He turned out to be a conservative GP with a convertible MG and one thing led to another and a friendship developed. The Balmain renovator introduced Lino to Derek Smith, who owned Blackfriars pottery in Chippendale.

*This was my first real job in Australia as a potter. When Derek closed down his business a few years later, I borrowed some cash and bought some of his equipment and started La Paloma Pottery in an old two-storey box factory in Newtown. I am still using his pug mill today (A pug mill is used to mix and take the air bubbles out of clay.)*

*Then I got married to Kim. We lived upstairs and ran the pottery downstairs. After sixteen years in Newtown I was ready to move away from the city and we rented a*



*small weekend tin shack in Ilford near Sofala. The landlord apologetically asked if we could afford two pounds a week. I paid two years rent in advance. We loved that shack, but I was still working in Sydney and living there at weekends, which didn't make sense. So we started looking for a permanent home and workshop down here.*

About this time the first Conservation Leases became available in Hill End and Kim and Lino secured one. The leases were, in principle, a sound idea and not dissimilar to a system that had been operating successfully in Holland since the early sixties.

In the Dutch system, for a peppercorn rent, tenants would gain a longterm lease to live in the nation's windmills in return for their restoration. In Hill End, properties bought forty years previously by the Department of Lands and Environment were then offered to the public in a similar way.

A five-year restoration plan was established in conjunction with archaeologists and historical architects and administered by the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service. Lino and Kim completed their responsibilities within two years and the property, now Hill End's La Paloma Pottery, was lauded as a successful case-history by the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service.

*Things have not always been easy between us and Parks who would prefer the town to be a museum —unchanged from how it was in 1872. But we have different needs to those who lived here in the 1870s. We need fridges, washing machines, three-phase power, insulation and so forth. But we did everything by the book. If we dug a hole we had it checked out by an archaeologist. Parks talk about leases but ten years later we still didn't have an official lease.*

Since Lino and Kim, several other artists and sculptors have joined the Hill End community. Some came slowly at first, fearful of being accepted by the town. And indeed some were not. Others were afraid of the isolation and being separated from their favourite corner bar or meeting place. In many ways, Lino and Kim started a modern migration. Then, as artists realised they could make a living and still retain a connection with the mainstream art scene of Sydney and Melbourne, they followed and have become the new generation of Hill End residents.

La Paloma Pottery has now been an established and respected business in Hill End employing local tradesmen for the past eighteen years.

Lino is a straight-shooter and painfully honest. *Being an artist, he says, is more than producing something and hanging it on a wall in the hope that a red sticker will get attached. To many artists, getting a red sticker is their only visible sign of success, but a true artist is greater than that.*

*A true artist contributes to society by creating new thought, new values, new visions, new techniques. A true artist doesn't copy or produce a painting just to fill a space on a wall. True artists create works to enrich their own lives and lives of other people. Perhaps this is*

*misunderstood by some in Hill End—who sometimes take themselves too literally, or try to be different simply for the sake of being different.*

In many ways the older residents of Hill End and artists are similar. Both are living on the edge in a harsh, isolated environment, worrying where the next dollar will come from. And both are chasing their dreams—searching for their Eldorado. Some will make it. Sadly, others may not.

Opposite page top, John Olsen vase  
Below, Lino Alvarez at La Paloma Pottery  
Below, Garry Shead Vase

