

Cup: porcelain, glaze includes milled glass from melted wine bottles that had been saved for a special occasion, milled sandstone from the walls of the house, wood ash, copper separated from the electrical wiring, rust.

## FROM THE ASHES

*Art is a wound turned into light*  
(Georges Braque)

The home and studio of Blue Mountains potter and ceramics teacher **ROBERT LINIGEN** and his family was one of the 197 destroyed in the devastating 2013 Blue Mountains bushfires. His new work is part of his recovery process.

Camera lens, ground up for a glaze



Robert Linigen's home and studio at Yellow Rock after the fire.



My collection of art books and magazines. There is clay added to make glossy paper, so I used some as a glaze material.



Cup: glaze includes ash, salvaged iron.

I spent weeks working on the demolition of the house and studio, sorting through the debris, trying to salvage firebricks from the kilns, separating the metals for recycling. We were hoping to re-use some of the stone and paving in a new home, but there wasn't really much left.



56 Homes in Yellow Rock: One cup for every home lost at Yellow Rock. Glazes include materials salvaged from the bushfire debris, ash, sandstone, glass, rust, copper.

I found the heads of my Dad's old tools, hammers and axes. I tossed them into a plastic crate hoping to put on new wooden handles and save them. After a couple of months they had pretty much dissolved into rust flakes. I realised that I could mill this down and use it as a glaze colourant. You can get blues, greens, even oranges from the iron. I thought it might be a way of holding onto them. Then I realised that there were other materials there I could also use in glazes.

I have taught glaze technology classes for years at Nepean TAFE but as well as the chemistry I've always been interested in the origins, the history and the personal connection to materials.

There was copper from the electrical wiring that can give some bright reds. I milled sandstone from the walls for silica and collected buckets of wood ash from the timbers as a flux.

There was melted glass from windows, wine bottles from the cellar and even glass from camera lenses that was collected, milled and processed as glaze ingredients. They were combined with conventional ceramic materials, like feldspar and kaolin.

Making these pieces was an important part of a difficult recovery process for me. There really was a lot of support after this fire, the mountains is a great community. I would really like to thank everyone involved.

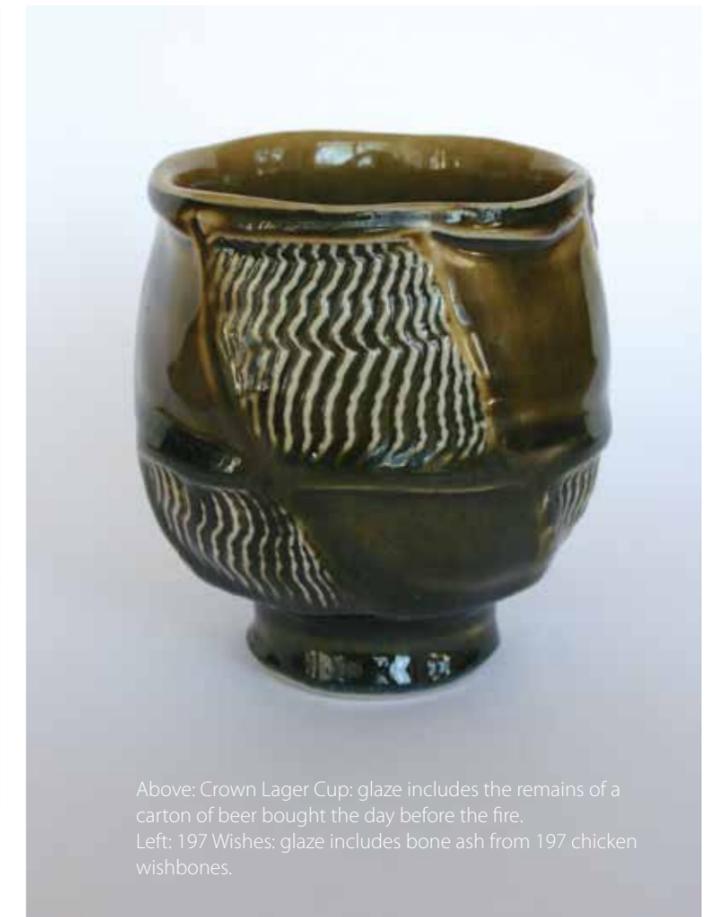
My friends, neighbours and students kept asking how they could help. I was grateful and a little overwhelmed and I would just say send your good wishes.

I had worked with my students before by making bone ash for glazes by firing bones from meat scraps, so they understood the chemistry and process. They collected hundreds of chicken wishbones for me, a traditional symbol of making a wish. So I made a glaze from 197 wishbones, one for every home lost in the fire. There is not much weight to a wishbone but there was enough material to make glaze for a few cups.

Not just anything works as a glaze material. There was lots of processing, testing and failures. Most of the work was fired in a tiny kiln that was small enough to move from one rental home to another. I made many small cups because of the kiln and the space available, but I liked the idea of a cup as a metaphor for the house. Something that holds, is used and gives comfort.

Rebuilding on our land in the end didn't work out for us. We have now sold the land and have bought another place at Leura where I've re-established a pottery workshop.

You can follow the progress at [www.robert.linigen.com](http://www.robert.linigen.com)



Above: Crown Lager Cup: glaze includes the remains of a carton of beer bought the day before the fire.  
Left: 197 Wishes: glaze includes bone ash from 197 chicken wishbones.