

## *Dawn Fessenden*

---

Claydance Studio sits high up in the hills of Ashfield, a place where chickens, dogs, and clay vessels pop up here, there and everywhere on the spacious grounds. Dawn Fessenden's ground floor studio opens upon a sun splashed garden of perennials encircled by decorative clay collars and various stoneware pieces. More surprising and inventive forms await inside the studio, the shelves are lined with pieces ranging from traditional bowls and mugs to bird houses, knitting bowls, gnome hat-shaped plant markers and ocarinas.



Dawn first tried her hand at clay by taking a class in 1987. At the time she was a legal secretary in her home state of California, wondering where to channel the creative energy she couldn't utilize in her job. For a while she was a quilter, then she explored stained glass, but after working with clay for ten weeks she went out and bought a wheel, mostly teaching herself the process by trial and error, and fell in love with clay and its potential. A few years later she joined an arts coop with ten other women and submitted herself to the rigors of selling and restocking functional ware. Naturally, production work is not as dear to her heart as more novel forms, but actually selling her work strengthened her commitment to the craft.

Dawn admits she is "easily bored", especially after the mass production of wholesale work, preferring to keep exploring new ideas. She enjoys creating items that have various steps or stages to their making, employing handmade stamps, printed decals, and latex molds taken from natural objects such as leaves and tree bark to create unique and varied surfaces. Her printed decals are fired onto finished, glazed stoneware and allow original drawings, photos, and other designs to be permanently applied to any of her creations.

Dawn is working on fine tuning several ocarinas, a hollow, kidney shaped form with finger holes that turn it into a wind instrument. A beautiful piece of sculpture in its own right, the process of creation is a complex one requiring adjustments of the form to create the right notes and scales when played. Her diminutive watering vessels, narrow-necked vases with holes in the bottom, allows an easy portable way to wash and water plants. On a nearby shelf sit several birdhouses, slab structures made to look like a section of a branch (here she uses a mold to impart the bark texture), with a conical roof and wooden perches by each entrance. Also in the R&D department are bird whistles, little hollow birds sculptures fashioned into whistles with water inside that gives a realistic warbling effect. Blow through the tail, sound comes out the open beak. Cute!

Dawn was invited to join the Shelburne coop by Sarah Holbrook, who discovered her work at Elmer's in Ashfield. She doesn't think she would have approached the group on her own, admitting that the marketing aspect of her pottery

business can be difficult to do if you are an introvert and just want to make things. Since Dawn is always extending her abilities with clay and discovering novel ideas to try, her work adds pizzazz to the offerings of the coop and we are lucky to have her as one of the featured artists this month!

