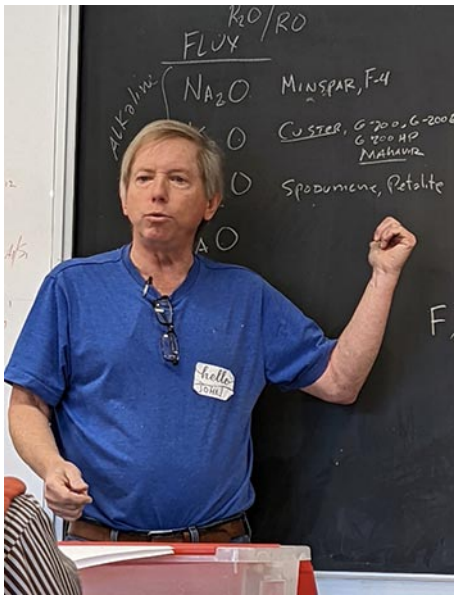
By Amy Bell

Laughter and Glazes with John Britt

Renowned glaze expert John Britt gave a hands-on workshop in Ottawa this past October at the Nepean Visual Art Centre. FUSION's Creative Directions program and the Ottawa Guild of Potters worked together to offer this in-person opportunity to learn about making and testing glazes. Potters with a wide variety of glaze making experience attended from across the province, sharing laughter and a wealth of learning.

John's focus is on helping potters learn to get the glaze results that they want, using simple systems to track the work and the results. He began by teaching about the three basic components of glazes: fluxes, glass formers and refractories. John followed with explanations about how different glaze ingredients relate to those components and work together on the clay body, to produce a wide range of glaze outcomes. Questions were welcomed throughout the workshop which helped everyone get a good understanding of John's approach. "He has a great sense of humour. He wanted to help everyone in the room understand glazes better, see the fun in the possibilities and not get bogged down in a complex process," said one workshop participant.



By late morning of the first day, participants started making glazes. Each person chose a base glaze from the list of recipes John provided. Each recipe was measured carefully and mixed, then divided into 10 portions. In a workshop setting, the glazes are mixed in plastic cups using hand blenders. Each portion was coloured with ten different colour variations to test such as 4% rutile or 0.5% red iron oxide. Each potter glazed up to 40 test tiles and they were loaded into a kiln and fired. For this workshop, Tucker's provided four of their popular clay bodies: CCSS, Mid Smooth Stone, MCS and Dark Mid Cal 5 cl Ottawa Guild members extruded and bisqued over 1000 test tiles.

The following day, there were 25 additional participants for a day of glaze instruction, discussion and question and answers. John's easygoing style and mastery of the topic allowed for great conversations as he de-mystified glaze chemistry, engaging beginner glaze makers and experienced ones alike. John included a demonstration about deflocculating slip.

On the final day of the three-day workshop, the smaller group reassembled. The glazed tiles were finishing their cooling time in the kilns at the Nepean Visual Art Centre, under the watchful eye of Doug Moir, longtime technician, teacher, and potter. Participants happily peeked at the incredible assortment of tiles when the kiln lids were opened. Everyone participated in arranging all of the tiles in rows, by base glaze recipe, to show how the colourants affected each glaze. Having four clay bodies to test showed the fit between the glazes and clay bodies, which is

such an important part of the testing process. The room was filled with conversation, note-taking and photography to capture as much information as possible from the array of over 1000 test tiles. After a good discussion about the glaze test results, John gave an introduction to www.glazy.org, an online, free database of glaze recipes.

When asked what she has taken away from the workshop, Ottawa potter Barbara Minish said, "You can create an extensive colour palette using a couple of base glazes and a handful of colourants. John makes it clear that you can do this, it isn't rocket science." "I finally understand what flocculating and deflocculating are, and how I can adjust a glaze," another workshop participant noted.

John encourages potters to do their own glaze testing often. The best way, he explained, is to reach out to another potter, or find a group, or start an informal glaze club, even just for a month. John suggested choosing a base glaze, or one base glaze per potter, and get started with a base glaze and a few variations. Make a plan and meet once a week to encourage each other, help take notes together and enjoy the process.

About John Britt

John Britt is a studio potter in Bakersville, North Carolina with over 30 years' experience as a potter, educator and author. John is primarily self-taught and has worked and taught extensively around the world including at the Penland School of Crafts where he served as the Clay Coordinator and as the Studio's Manager.

John was the juror for the book, 500 Bowls, and was Technical Editor for The Art and Craft of Ceramics, and the Ceramic Glaze: The Complete Handbook by Brian Taylor and Kate Doody. He has written numerous articles for ceramics publications including: Ceramic Review, Studio Potter, Clay Times, Ceramic Technical, New Ceramics, The Log Book and is a frequent contributor to Ceramics Monthly.

To learn more about John and his work, visit www.johnbrittpottery.com, or his YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/c/johnbrittpottery.

Watch the FACES of FUSION interview with John Britt and Catharina Goldnau Link

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Amy Bell is a potter, pottery teacher and writer/editor based in Ottawa, ON. She is the Program Director for the Ottawa Guild of Potters and led the team that put the workshop together. You can find her on Instagram @shorebird_pottery.

Working Together to Make it Happen

A complex, hands-on workshop needs many components to succeed. Amy Bell, (Program Director, Ottawa Guild of Potters), Lucie Grys and Danielle Skentzos from FUSION began planning a workshop in Ottawa in April 2022, seven months in advance of the workshop date. The Ottawa Guild of Potters is a strong organization with over 100 members, and sought out a partnership with FUSION to make this workshop a success. The Ottawa Guild worked with John and organized the site, glaze materials, test tiles and food. FUSION, under its Creative Directions program, contributed its great administrative system, sponsorships, registration system and publicity.

Many thanks to Tucker's Pottery for their generous support.

Amaranth Stoneware generously gave gifts to each participant.

Thanks to Ottawa Guild of Potters members Liz Fournier, Barbara Minish, Natalie Gosselin, Fiona Jarvis and Rachelle O'Keefe for their hard work and support.

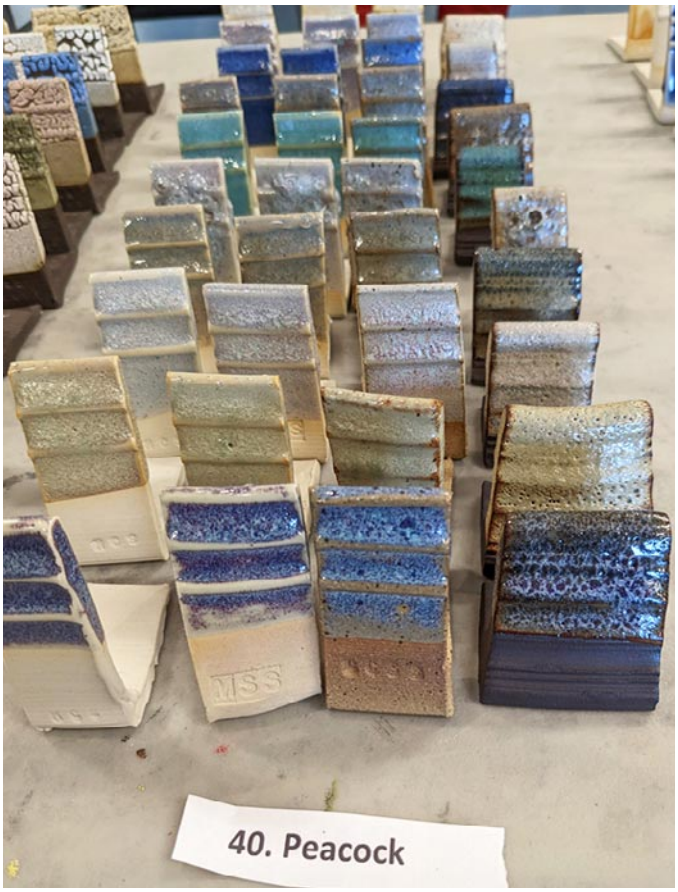
Thanks to the Nepean Visual Art Centre for hosting the event.

SELSOR BASE RECIPE
(high sodium, cone 6)

56.25	Minspar
12.50	Gerstley Borate
10.41	Whiting
20.83	Silica

V.C. MATTE RECIPE

24.00	Nepheline Syenite
40.00	Silica
4.00	Whiting
7.00	EPK Kaolin
11.00	Dolomite
12.00	Gerstley Borate
2.00	Zinc Oxide

BARIUM BLUE BASE

57.52	Nepheline Syenite
6.19	Ball Clay
7.08	Silica
26.55	Barium Carbonate
2.65	Lithium Carbonate