



STURT

80 Years
in the **Making**

1941-2021

INTRODUCTION

80 years is a remarkable milestone for Sturt – now Australia's oldest design centre. Looking through Sturt's Archives we are reminded of the incredible history of this place and of the pioneering makers who are part of its very DNA. Sturt grew from one inspiring woman's vision and since then this humble creative enclave in the Southern Highlands of NSW has been a place of pilgrimage for great makers who have lived, worked and taught at Sturt.

Sturt – 80 Years in the Making showcases some of these master makers who have contributed to Sturt's legacy and inspired so many... like ripples in a pond – their joyful creativity encouraging others, some now teaching new generations of craftspeople around Australia and the world. These skilled makers were leaders and pioneers in their chosen crafts, championing creativity, forming new associations advocating for artisans and their practice. Not only did they spend a lifetime experimenting, pioneering and honing their craft, they demonstrated a joy of making and a generosity of spirit in sharing that knowledge with others.

So too the gifted residents who continue to bring their vibrancy, ideas and skill from all over the world to the Highlands, nurturing countless students along the way. Today Sturt sees more students and visitors than ever before, and we continue to invite more talented and inspiring makers to create and collaborate at Sturt.

80 years on Sturt stands proudly as testament to Winifred West's bold creative vision for the future. A cherished creative enclave that offers an antidote to screens and keyboards in an increasingly disconnected world. A special place where we are invited to slow down and pay attention to what's important. To mindfully create in tune with each other and with nature upholding those authentic values that Winifred West championed from the start.

Kristie Phelan
Head of Sturt





1941 The Beginning

In 1941 when Winifred West founded Sturt, World War II was raging and the bushfires had threatened Mittagong burning parts of her beloved Frensham school to the ground. It was here on a blackened hill Winifred rallied friends to help build Sturt – a brave symbol of hope for the future, of appreciation of beauty and fine craftsmanship, of connectedness in tune with nature.

At an age when most would think about retiring, Winifred first set up Sturt to provide further education in crafts for children leaving Mittagong Public School, and for adults in the community seeking useful creative skills. Largely financed by herself, Sturt started with one building, where six girls learned spinning and weaving, a few boys learned woodworking, and adults came during the week. By 1949 150 children were enrolled and under Winifred's nurturing encouragement soon emerged a cluster of workshops for weavers and carpenters, potters and jewellers surrounded by gardens of her own making.

Winifred understood the value of creativity, believing in connecting hand and mind, and developing one's talents by bringing them together with great thinkers, artists, architects, musicians, and master craftspeople. Winifred encouraged creative experimentation, sending Ivan McMeekin to the UK and Les Blakebrough to Japan to research best practice for Sturt Pottery. She also invited experts of all kinds to visit Sturt – pioneering Australian photographer Olive Cotton documented progress while master weavers from Germany brought their expert knowledge of textiles.

In 1945 Winifred wrote that she'd created "...a happy meeting place for people young and old who love beauty and good craftsmanship." Now looking back at the thousands of makers, tutors, residents, and students who have enriched the lives of thousands more, Winifred's vision was more far reaching than that. Countless visitors have come away from Sturt with a renewed appreciation of hand-made, of skills lovingly passing down through generations, of mindfully creating in tune with nature. Sturt has become a cherished home of makers and a beacon of creativity that is now the longest running school for design excellence in the country.



1954

IVAN McMEEKIN

Ivan McMeekin (1919-1993) was invited by Winifred West to set up Sturt Pottery in 1952, the first pottery in NSW to produce stoneware from local materials. In 1954 Ivan constructed the buildings and equipment at Sturt, doing pioneering work researching local clays and glazes including a new porcelain clay from the Nattai River area later called Mittagong Blue. Using a small, round down-draft wood firing kiln, and potters' wheels made at the Sturt wood workshop, Ivan made a huge contribution to the post war pottery movement in Australia. Ivan was one of the founding members of the Potters Society of NSW (later Australia) and his research on Australia's raw materials and clay bodies are still referenced to this day.



c. 1954

GWYN HANSSEN PIGOTT

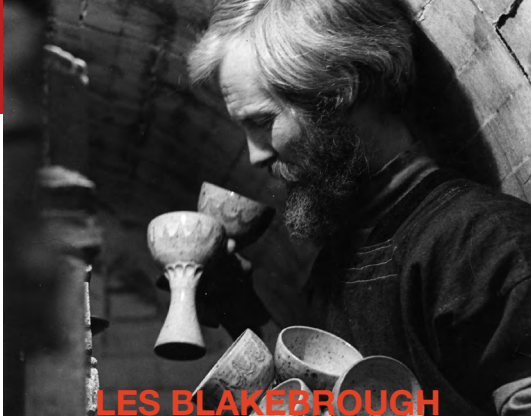
Gwyn Hanssen Pigott OAM (1935-2013) (nee John) was Ivan McMeekin's first studio assistant at Sturt Pottery from 1954-1957. Gwyn John assisted Ivan in his pioneering work with local clay and taught the first Frensham and Sturt pottery classes. Gwyn's early stoneware work at Sturt is now rare as she went on to work with porcelain. By the time of her death at 78 years Gwyn was one of Australia's most distinguished potters. She'd worked with some of pottery's best known figures, and had acclaimed studios in the UK, France and Australia, along with successful exhibitions the world over. Gwyn is best known for creating a new language for ceramics through her famous still-life grouping of porcelain pots and her love of everyday functional objects instilled in her by Ivan.

Sturt Pottery 1954

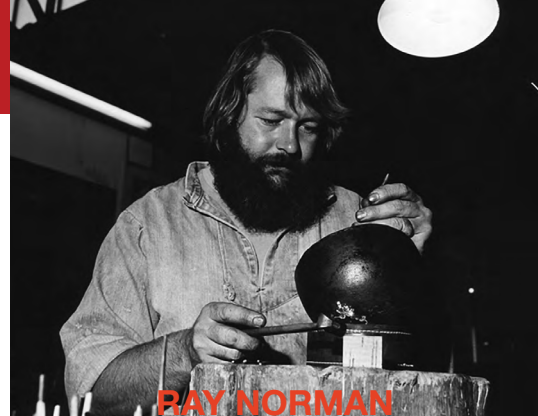


L-R: Ivan McMeekin 1956, Gwyn John 1956, Ivan McMeekin c.1954-56





LES BLAKEBROUGH



RAY NORMAN

Les Blakebrough AM (1930-) trained as Ivan McMeekin's apprentice, then ran Sturt Pottery from 1959-1972 and was Director of the Sturt Workshops from 1964-1972. Les was encouraged by Winifred West to learn about kilns in Japan, later inviting numerous Japanese and international master potters to stay and teach at Sturt. During that time seventeen apprentices were trained in Sturt Pottery. Les continued to develop timesaving clay machinery and furthered his pioneering work with porcelain and glazes which eventually led to his famous Southern Ice Porcelain. Les was founding member of the Crafts Board of the Australia Council, Head of Ceramics at the Tasmanian School of Art, and is now regarded as one of Australia's most acclaimed ceramicists and living treasures with work in major public collections all over the world.

L-R: Les Blakebrough 1956 (teapot), 1965 (lidded bowl), 1956 (vase)



Ray Norman (1945-) Ray Norman managed Sturt Metal from 1969-1985. Ray offered traineeships to a number of aspiring makers, including Roz Renwick, Harold Sobetzko, Sue Anderson (dec.), John Bexon, Kerry Norman, Vicki Dwyer, Jim Bickford, Diana Boynes, Len Hudson, Greg Healey, Nicholas Deeprose, Guy Wilson, Sheila McDonald, Ian Frew, Jonathon Greenwell (dec.), Alice Whish et al. All participated directly in the development of production ranges in support of the workshop. From the earliest days, Jack Southerden, was a collaborating lapidary in the workshop. Ray encouraged the use of Sturt for symposiums, workshops and master classes associated with crafts organisations, including the Jewellers and Metalsmiths Group of Australia (JMGA), whose foundation conference was held at Sturt in 1980.

Ray Norman late 1970s - early 1980s (lapidary by Jack Southerden)



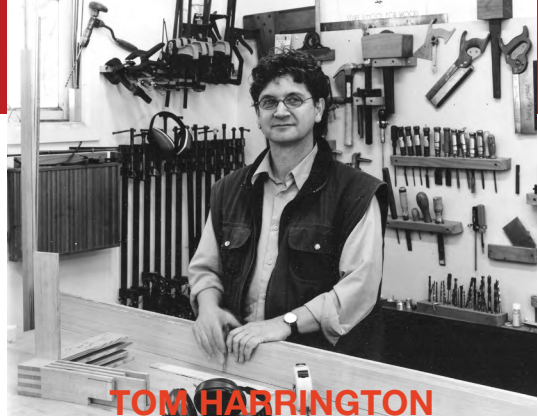


c. 1980s

ELISABETH NAGEL

Elisabeth Nagel (1930-), master weaver, left her studio in Germany in 1959 on invitation from Winifred West and ended up generously teaching weaving at Sturt for 50 years. Elisabeth was one of a number of highly trained German weavers who came to the Highlands to share their skill and expertise. By 1965 along with running regular classes, Elisabeth had important commissions including soft furnishings and furniture for the Hong Kong Hilton Hotel and 100 yards of upholstery fabric for the new National Library in 1967 (spun at Sturt, and dyed in vessels on gas burners in the workshop). Other commissions included fabric and rugs for ANU, the NSW Government and St. Columbus' Church in Sydney. Elisabeth also collaborated with Ernabella Arts in central Australia which continues to this day.

Elisabeth Nagel c.1970s (wall hanging, wool)



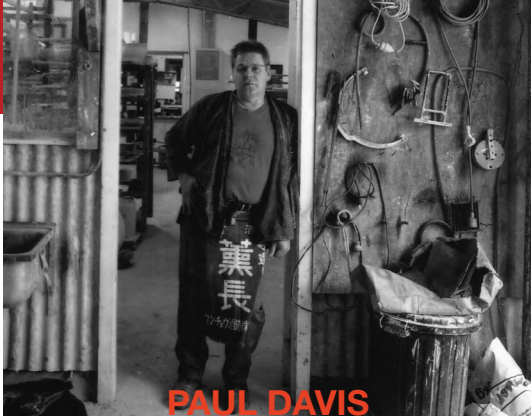
2000

TOM HARRINGTON

Tom Harrington (1951-2009) was much admired Director for Sturt School for Wood from 1992 until 2009 where he continued to champion and build its reputation as a pre-eminent fine furniture school in the country. Tom had the course accredited as a Cert IV in Fine Furniture Design and Technology and selflessly passed on his passion and skill to some of the most successful graduates in Australia. Tom originally studied economics/law at ANU, spent several years as a yacht skipper and cabinet maker before becoming a highly skilled furniture designer/maker and tutor. It was his ability to nurture budding makers that earned him so much respect. Darren Oates, a Sturt graduate, said of Tom that "...it cannot be underestimated the value of what I learnt. There is no way I would be doing this full time for ten years if it was not for what I learned from him."

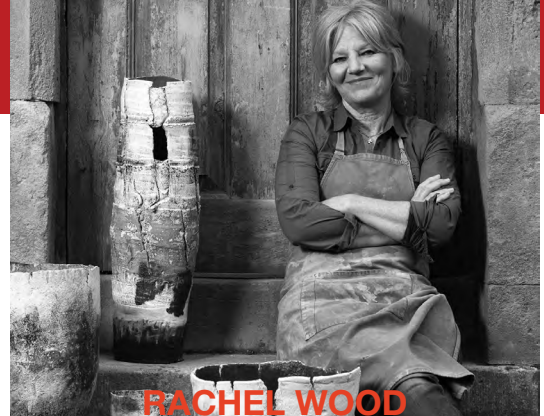
Tom Harrington c. late 1990s (chair, blue gum)





2000

PAUL DAVIS



2019

RACHEL WOOD

Paul Davis (1955-) was Head of Sturt Pottery 2001-2009 where he brought his ceramics expertise from his studies of master potters in the Hagi area of Japan. Paul invited a stream of renowned international potters to teach at Sturt and synthesised his Australian and Japanese experiences to produce his acclaimed ceramics. Paul originally trained at the Caulfield Institute of Technology (now Monash) in the 70s and completed a Diploma of Art at RMIT, Melbourne in 1973. Paul and his partner Jacqueline Clayton also collaborate as StudioJam and produce tableware for some of Australia's best restaurants such as Quay, Bennelong, Subo & Noma Australia. Paul and Jacqui are currently setting up a new studio in a factory in Rutherglen, Victoria and Paul's 50 year retrospective show, *Paul Davis – Under the Influence* will launch at Sturt in April 2022.

Paul Davis 2007 (Hagi platter)



Rachel Wood (1962-), UK ceramic artist, visited Sturt for a professional residency twice in 2013 and 2019 falling in love with Sturt and the Australian bush. Rachel's work is known for her expressive, visceral, calm and considered qualities. While in the Highlands Rachel created prolifically, preparing her exhibitions for Sturt and delivering ceramics workshops amidst bushwalking for inspiration. Rachel originally completed BA Honours Degree in Ceramics in the UK, serving as Robin Welch's apprentice in 2007. Rachel's international reputation grew after winning the coveted Neue Keramik Award in Germany in 2016 and 2017 and the Diessen Ceramic Prize in Germany. Rachel is one of the hundreds of international residents who continue to bring their vibrancy and talent to live, teach and work at Sturt.

L-R: Rachel Wood 2019, Prue Venables, Paul Wynn



2021 Sturt Now

Now 80 years on, after more bushfires and amidst a global pandemic, Sturt's role is more vital than ever. Contemporary craft is becoming a symbol of sustainability and authenticity, and we're increasingly looking inward, treasuring handmade, along with our materials, our connection to nature and to each other.

Sturt's unique model of educating in an inspired studio setting amidst nature has never been more relevant or in demand. Sturt offers term classes in ceramics, jewellery, woodworking and weaving, and the Sturt School for Wood is the finest in the southern hemisphere. Skilled makers and their students converge on Sturt from all over Australia to be part of Summer and Winter School, a week-long immersive creative experience in the Highlands, and our Short Course Weekends deliver workshops for all skill levels. Sturt also offers professional, self-directed and graduate residencies continuing the tradition of bringing inspiring makers to live, create and teach at Sturt.

Sturt Gallery presents outstanding exhibitions celebrating contemporary craft year round and the gallery shop has championed hand made for 80 years, supporting over 300 Australian makers in their practice. The Sturt Café is in a beautiful garden setting and the peonies and magnolia Winifred planted are blossoming still.

Sturt has become a cultural destination in its own right thanks to the many visitors and supporters who continue to cherish and take care of it. Thanks also to lovers of hand made and like-minded appreciators of beauty and nature who are our regular visitors to café, exhibitions, workshops and events. And much gratitude to our hard working Sturt team who work long hours behind the scenes, to our generous Friends of Sturt who volunteer their time for exhibitions and residencies, and for the support of the entire Frensham Schools community who continue to help see Sturt flourish 80 years on.



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GALLERY & STUDIOS

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