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Several strokes of creativity are involved

Paint-your-own pottery is for all to become artisans

By Brad Kane CORRESPONDENT

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When painting pottery, the only limit is one's imagination.

Between colors and techniques, the variety of pieces coming out of the area's two paint-your-own pottery studios is as diverse as the people who make them.

Children's handprints or footprints (or pet's paw prints) can be preserved on a piece to capture the moment in time when the children (and pets) were that size.

Lace designs from a tablecloth can be transferred onto dinnerware with surprising ease, creating a unique matching dining set.

Shaving cream can be mixed with paint for a swirling effect. Bubbles can be blown onto a piece for random circular designs. The guests at a wedding can sign a plate for the happy couple and forever have their special day cherished in a kitchen cabinet.

"A lot of arts and crafts activities, especially for kids, you end up with a lot of junk in your house, but here you can come up with something that is useful or is a great gift," said Kristen Wixted, a Northboro resident who frequently paints pottery with her two daughters.

Wixted recently was painting pottery with daughters Rebecca, 10, and Bridget, 8. Bridget was painting a bowl for the family cat, Scooter, to use. Rebecca, who had her birthday party at a pottery studio, has several pieces at home, including a coffee mug in the shape of a frog, an ice cream scoop and a coin bank in the shape of a lion.

"I like painting, and I like doing arts and crafts. I like getting messy," Rebecca Wixted said.

Adds her mom, "Kids make a huge mess, and then you walk out the door, which is great."

Claytime Studio in Shrewsbury was founded more than 10 years ago as a paint-your-own pottery studio, and PYOP Studio in Northboro opened late last year . Even though an ice storm knocked out the power on her opening day, PYOP owner Vaishali Patel still had customers, a mother and daughter who painted by candlelight.

More than just a way to flex their creative muscles, Patel's guests say paint-your-own pottery is art therapy for them — an hour or more of relaxation and concentration to focus on their pieces and leave their troubles at the door.

Claytime offers the chance to get even more creative with crafts beyond painting pottery. The studio offers glass fusing, mosaics, jewelry making and stuffed animals. Once a month, guests can even make their own pottery, throwing clay on a spinning wheel and shaping their own pieces before coming back to paint them.

"Some of the things people do is just amazing," said Claytime owner Laurel Knox. "Sometimes it surprises me how much people love it."

With the pottery and studio fees, the costs at Claytime and PYOP range from \$12 to \$120, with the average guest spending around \$25.

While more expensive than bowling or going to a movie, the owners of both studios quickly point out that whether painting pottery with family or friends, the experience is far more social than most activities. Everyone sits at the same table and interacts — talking, sharing and painting.

After the painting is complete, the pieces are dipped in a glaze and placed in a kiln, where they are heated for several hours to burn customers' designs onto the pottery. The turnaround time for the firing process ranges from a few days to two weeks.

When the process is complete, customers have their artistic keepsake to remember where they were, what they were doing and who they were with when they painted their own pottery.

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Rebecca Wixted , 10 works on a frog cup
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