

## Full Circle

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In the early seventies we were unsure of the future, we couldn't see how things could continue the way they were going. Others described us as 'hippies'. This was a handy catchall that people used to avoid confronting the real issues we were raising. We took out a mortgage and bought a house. Interest rates were very high, and then there was a slump. Artists and crafts people hung in. We chose to describe ourselves as practising self-reliance. We were under no illusions as to the likely possibility of achieving self-sufficiency.

In the greedy eighties we sought to practice minimum consumption, and I coined the phrase 'just enough' to describe our philosophy at that time. We had no faith in the way modern life was heading. We confirmed our life goals, and adjusted our attitudes a little [mostly to do with getting older]. We borrowed some money to rebuild our pottery workshop. Interest rates were very high, and then there was a slump. The arts community survived. During the age of 'greed is good', we remained committed to our work as we saw it. Although we did become a little more business like in the way we ran our affairs. Interest rates were very high, and then there was a slump, but artists struggled on. We were another decade older and still trying to negotiate a passive nonconsumerist existence for the nineties.

Now we are in the naughties and there is a boom, interest rates are rising. I predict that there will be a slump. We have continued our passive existence. We have converted our house and workshop over to solar power and we export the excess to the grid. We are trying to avoid the coal economy and create a sustainable lifestyle, or as close to it as is possible in this first world, post-industrial middle-class society.

My approach to sustainability for my ceramic work has involved the collection and processing of all my own clay and glazes from local rocks and minerals. It also initially revolved around the use of recycled timber off cuts, from saw mills and truss factories. As these were being burnt any way, they might as well be burnt creatively and productively. The out come was unchanged and it saved us burning other fossil fuel and adding to the carbon load. Now the saw mill is gone and the truss factory with it.

Other timber is now gained from peoples gardens and from around the fire trails of the village. If I don't collect any wood that is available from the fire trails, every few years the bushfire brigade comes along and burns the lot, in what is called hazard reduction. This produces clouds of smoke, is polluting and largely unproductive. If the wood is burnt in the kiln, it is burnt creatively, productively and reasonably efficiently. It also allows me to make work that is very closely related to the local area, as I burn the wood in amongst the pots so that the resulting work is partially 'created' in the fire by the process itself.

There is much to be said for this process in reducing global warming and its sustainability in the local environment, Timber left to rot will release just as much carbon into the environment as timber burnt in the kiln, because composting is just a slow form of combustion. Ceramics can be made without adding to the total carbon debt.

The more I examined these issues, the more I came to the conclusion that they made very little difference in the greater scheme of things. It wouldn't matter if I gave up my art activities altogether, it wouldn't alter my energy usage significantly. We needed to do more in our every day life as a family, to reduce our consumption in general. We've made a start. We now have a small 3 cylinder car, solar hot water and our electricity usage which was always low is now positive, as we sell to the grid just about the same amount that we consume ourselves and this includes the energy used in the pottery studio and the kiln factory.

We have achieved more than a 50% reduction in our carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas emissions over the past few years. We still believe in 'lifestyle' and 'quality of life'. Growing vegetables and keeping an orchard are equally important as the work done in the pottery. We have found that we can live just as well with less. We have increased our self-esteem, and living actively within the process has been challenging. We have renewed our start, but the journey is of greatest importance, as there is no identifiable destination.

Twenty years ago we set out together with common objectives, and now we are continuing to set out together; the catch phrases have changed, but the shared goals are loosely the same. We have come full circle, but the times haven't really changed that much. Or have they? I see a time when we might be forced to accept the changes that are so obviously necessary. I'd like to think that the governments of the western industrialised nations will voluntarily choose to limit the unfettered free market practices which are currently in vogue, in favour of Green practices and the environment. I still find it hard to believe that people just can't see what's happening. However, I can foretell the future. There will be a boom; interest rates will be high, followed by a slump. Artists will be there.

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