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right: Married for 37 years, Winton and Rosa Eugène act as a well-oiled machine. Collectors and the art world alike highly regard the couple's functional pottery. **above:** Carved images in Pottery by Eugène set the work apart from others.

Pottery Partners

Collectors love the creative vision of these artists, a husband and wife in Cowpens.

Winton Eugène poetically describes the art of fashioning pottery. "You have to have a great sense of feel and balance in your hands when you work on the wheel," says the Cowpens resident. "The right hand always has to know what the left hand is doing." His large hands demonstrate the movement in the air, shaping an imaginary vessel. "They have to work together. When you're pressing out, you can feel the thickness and the weakness. As soon as your pot gets weak, you have to stop."

The description could just as well apply to his longtime marriage to Rosa. Together, the couple makes functional pottery so elegant, appreciative collectors revel in its fineness. Winton and Rosa also practice

the fine art of living with each other's strengths and weaknesses. Like the pottery they create, their relationship resembles a thing of rare beauty—and it too functions well.

The Family That Plays Together

Easy banter and gentle jibes come naturally as the Eugènes explain their curious odyssey into pottery.

Rosa, a Spartanburg native, met the Louisiana-born Winton through her brother. Actually, she says, "My brother brought him home to meet his girlfriend's sister." Later, when Winton moved to Chicago, he invited Rosa and her sister to visit. Rosa went alone. After only three weeks, Rosa and Winton made a startling leap of faith. "I actually married



left: Angelique Ruff sells Pottery by Eugenie at the Carolina Foothills Artisan Center in Chesnee where she serves as director.

really is no "his" and "hers." She still produces his glazes. He draw and carves images for her sculpted pottery. As always, the work—and lives—of Winton and Rosa remain a collaboration.

NANCY DORMAN-HECKSON

To Err Is To Inspire

Two of Winton Eugenie's signature details came about accidentally.

"The pots were heavy," he explains. "So I had to carve away the clay to lighten them." Carving designs and figures to remove some of the clay turned into an inspired happenstance. The detail delights collectors.

And those curlicue handles? A woman with arthritis asked for a cup that accommodated all her fingers. "When I pulled the handle straight," Winton says, "there were all these little bitty pieces on the floor. I was so cheap, I didn't want to throw the clay away." Instead, the hog farmer fashioned a pig tail handle.



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above: At the Pottery by Eugene gallery, Rosa and Bob Ward of Rock Hill discuss a piece. "He has immense taste," says Rosa about the physician, a long-time collector.

Turns out, Rosa shares the same visionary talent as Winton, but with her own voice. "He has his own style that's different from the way kids are taught in college," Rosa says, "and I have my own style that's different from the way kids are taught in college."

Their work often goes against what "people with degrees" say. "According to the 'law of art,'" Rosa says, "you're not supposed to be an artist and a functional potter." The Eugènes defy that notion, and collectors as far away as China have purchased their work.

A proud Winton adds, "She gets more attention for her stuff than I do." He's tickled—and a bit jealous, he admits—because her large pieces now command more money than his pots.

But with this couple, there



above: Rosa and Winton draw designs on paper before starting a pottery carving.

to make the glaze at home. Winton attempted to follow the cost-cutting plan. He says ruefully, "I'd put it in the fire, and it would just run off because the consistency was wrong."

The problem, Rosa discovered, lay in the mixing. Winton wanted to try a pinch of this, a pinch of that. "We had a scale..." Winton begins. "But he did it with a spoon," Rosa adds, almost rolling her eyes at her husband's disdain for scientific method.

He grins. "I got down on my knees and begged her to do it for me," Winton says. His partner in life agreed to make the glazes—on her own terms.

"I eliminated brown," Rosa says. "If I'm mixing, I'm choosing." So blues, greens, and black-and-white glazes brightened Winton's work.

"I lost again," he says, shaking his head. "All the brown went out the window."

Rosa Becomes a Potter

The couple acquired three kilns—electric, gas, and wood-burning. Even as hard as Winton worked, "he couldn't fill all those kilns," Rosa says. So she

"According to the 'law of art,' you're not supposed to be an artist and a functional potter."

Rosa Egan

added potter to her day's work as mother, nurse, and farm assistant. "I love him so much," she says, gazing across the room at her husband. They smile at each other, then she adds a zinger: "...that I didn't mind having to work to death." Winton

gives her a mock frown; she grins, unapologetic.

Rosa tried working with the wheel but found it distasteful. "I don't like clay going through my fingers," she says, shuddering. But she enjoyed sculpting the clay.

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above: Fans of Winton's work recognize the curlicue handles, which the former hog farmer calls "pig tails." right: Pottery remnants become face masks.

of pottery," Rosa recalls.

Winton laughs. "We really didn't know what pottery was supposed to look like," he says. "We had all these sick little pieces of pottery. I had never seen it made before."

The lack of interaction with other potters was deliberate. "Once you get your own style and your own shapes," Rosa said to Winton, "then you can see a potter." The strategy worked. Winton's style of hand painting and carving faces, houses, and other images into his pots eventually made his work stand out from that of others.

From Hobby to Profession

Winton used expensive commercial glaze at first. Drawing on her chemistry background, Rosa came up with a list of ingredients and a precise procedure



Visit the Eugènes In Cowpens

Prices for Pottery by Eugène items range from \$15 to \$10,000; most of the works fall in the \$100 to \$300 range. The gallery, work studio, and the Eugènes' home are at 176 Wilkins Road in Cowpens. The gallery opens 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 2-5 p.m. Sunday during the months of May and December; it opens only by appointment during other months. Check general art listings on the Internet for shows in which the Eugènes are participating. For more information call (864) 463-4217.

him before we even dated," she says.

Winton nods and then makes another revelation: "The reason we never dated is because I couldn't stand her. We argued all the time about everything." But surely now, after 37 years of marriage, their relationship has changed? Nope, they both reply, we still argue.

"I don't win," Winton shakes his head, mimicking sadness and then laughs. Rosa, the serious one, feels the need to clarify. "We don't ever get mad at one another," she says. "It's more like a discussion. He gets his point over, and I get my point over." She leans back and crosses her arms. "Then we're both satisfied."

Family and Work

When the couple became parents, they preferred rural Cowpens to urban Chicago for their son and daughter.



"You have to have a great sense of feel and balance in your hands when you work on the wheel."

Winton Eugene

Winton exchanged the carpeting trade for hog farming. Rosa continued her nursing education and obtained her South Carolina license.

"I worked in the surgery unit while he was playing with the hogs—and not making any money," she says. She softens this jab with a compliment.

"My husband is a workaholic," she adds. He supplemented the struggling hog business with carpet work.

"I've worked since I was 12 years old," Winton says. "I know what work is, and I don't mind doing it. The problem is, if I'm doing something"—cutting grass, carpentry, whatever, he explains—"everybody has to do it with me. That's the part the family didn't like."

Rosa and the kids decided Winton needed a hobby to focus all that prodigious energy away from them. "That's why they got me a potter's wheel," Winton says, "so I would leave them alone."

Introduction to Pottery

The trio of conspirators bought a wheel, a kiln, and books on the subject and relegated Dad to the garage. "In six months, he had a whole garage full



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