

Throwing course case study: Hannah Bryce

I'd been looking for pottery lessons for some time and had tried out a home 'air dry clay' kit to see whether hand-building pots was for me. I quickly decided it wasn't because my end goal was to create vases for a company I ran in my spare time with friends.

When looking at courses across Scotland, Milndavie Pottery was the nearest place I could find with a course that catered for exactly what I thought I needed: the 6 week wheel throwing class. I persuaded my husband to give it a go with me and we travelled 1.5 hours each way from our home in Dumfriesshire, which although seemed a long way, was so, so worth it.

Throwing: Lesson 1

The first session was a mixture of learning what we were going to do and getting on with it. Lydia and Anne asked what our experience of throwing on a wheel was (for me, this was absolutely zero) and put us at ease about how we didn't need experience, before cracking on with the lesson.

The start of the lesson didn't feel like a lesson, more of a conversation, where it flowed really easily and naturally. I hadn't a clue what a good or bad pot was before, but Lydia and Anne explained what centring was and how you could tell if a finished pot was centred, as well as other signs a pot hadn't been as successful as it could including cracks on the bottom. They explained what caused each of these things, to show us the importance of starting the throwing process off properly. We then watched a dvd with Lydia talking through what was happening, so that we could see what needed to be done for ourselves. Then, before we knew it we got started on the pottery wheel!

My husband went first and I watched, which gave me time to learn from what he was doing before I had a go. I was nervous before I started but with Anne's tuition, soon relaxed and started to really enjoy myself.

With some hands-on assistance from Anne, we were both lucky enough to create pots on the first lesson!



Throwing: Lesson 2

Our second lesson consisted of more throwing. We both created another pot each and learnt new techniques, like cutting away the bottom of the pot and cutting away the top when it went off-centre.



By the end of this lesson I was hooked and confident enough that this was definitely something I wanted to do long-term, so I asked for advice about buying a pottery wheel.

The way Lydia and Anne freely gave as much advice as possible to help me succeed outside of their lessons was a huge bonus for me. They could easily have used my eagerness to learn to make more money from me, with more lessons and guidance, but they were more than happy to advise me on everything from clay to wheels, to YouTube videos and even 'The Great Pottery Throw Down'. I'd have been lost without them and they made the set up of my own home studio a piece of cake.

Throwing: Lesson 3

My first bad lesson. I was growing in confidence but this lesson was on a hot summer's evening and I'd had a really stressful day at work. In a foul mood, I didn't have the patience or headspace for pottery and ended up having 2 pots come off the wheel so that I was left with nothing.

Entirely my fault, I actually felt bad for how frustrated I was, but it was actually a really helpful lesson to not sit down to throwing when you are so preoccupied you almost try to take it out on the clay!

Throwing: Lesson 4

Our final throwing lesson was a delight compared to lesson 3 (for me). I'd woken up on the right side of the bed this time and my husband and I each made a pot and Anne decided there was time for one more, which my husband said I should do considering I hadn't managed to successfully make a pot last lesson.

I think Anne was trying to bolster my spirits and help me to regain my confidence and it really helped - it worked wonders in fact. She helped me to see that I do have the skills I need.

Now that I had my own wheel at home, I began making my own pots and with my primary aim to master vase making, these were a few of my first attempts:



Trimming and Turning: Lesson 5

I was really excited about lesson 5 after watching a load of videos on YouTube. This week we were going to be trimming and turning!

My excitement was well founded and I wasn't disappointed - turning is really cool and really fun. Not only are there new tools to get your head around, but you can completely transform the look of your pot.

I couldn't believe I was adding swirls to the bottom of my pots - they were starting to look so professional.

Here is what our pots looked like now, before they were glazed:



Glazing: Lesson 6

By lesson 6 I'd been using my own wheel a couple of times a week and so I came to the lesson with photos of the pots I'd made at home. Lydia and Anne were really pleased to see what I had created and I felt some pride at how they seemed impressed!

While I was starting to build up a range of pots at home, I hadn't managed to source a kiln yet so asked if I could bring them back to be fired. As always Lydia and Anne were so helpful and accommodating. They explained the cost of doing this and what would happen and before lesson 6 had begun, I'd already organised to come back for another lesson to underglaze my homemade pots!



For lesson 6 though, we were learning how to wedge clay (get rid of the air bubbles so it's less likely to explode in the kiln) and glazing the pots we'd made during our other lessons. This was a lovely, relaxed lesson where we chatted lots before we left, excited to see how our pots would turn out when fired.

Underglaze: Lesson 7 - (additional lesson)

This was the additional lesson I had booked, but we also picked up the pots we'd made during our lessons. We were so pleased with how they turned out and were glad we'd tried a few different colours and techniques with glazing!

Lydia then taught me lots of different underglazing methods. The clay I'd used at home wasn't suitable for high-fire glazes, but Lydia had some underglazes that would work. These were some of the finished items:



All of the pots that I'd underglazed with Lydia were sold in one day (except for 2 which I gave to friends). I now have a large range of unique handmade vases which I sell at [Meadow Made](#). You can see how far I've come and I've definitely got the bug for life, thanks to my wonderful teachers Lydia and Anne.