

# COASTAL LIFE

Books, gardening, hiking, hobbies,  
recreation, personalities, travel & more

CLOSE TO HOME:

## LET THERE BE BOWLS

By DAVID CAMPICHE  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

**//** *In dwelling, be close to the land. In meditation, go deep to the heart.* —  
Lao Tsu, author of the Tao Te Ching

Up the hill from Tucker Creek in Astoria, a fire blazes inside the anagama kiln, or “cave kiln.” Inside its belly, 300 bowls sit on clay shelves and await the wood ash that gallops up the long tunnel of brick and onto clay pots. Flame and ash dance before rising up the fourteen-foot chimney and into the soft air.

This hillside kiln — known locally as the “dragon kiln” — on the property where Richard and Patti Rowland live, speak to the same age-old principles crafted in ancient Japan where potters — artisans dating back to 12,000 BC — plied their trade and craft.

The Rowlands replanted this wooded landscape 35 years ago after it was clear-cut. There is something Old World about this property. It resonates with community and spirit. Walking up the steep hill during a full moon, listening to the music that murmurs from the burning wood, one feels part of a better time and place.

### Bowl dinners

For more than thirty years, the Rowlands have sunk their teeth into the meat of their community. For thirty years, Richard and this community of potters have thrown thousands of bowls, shaped, trimmed and fired these delicate vessels.

The Rowlands help organize the Soup Bowl dinners that benefit regional women’s resource centers.

This spring, a dinner will be held 5 p.m. May 6 at the Old Mill RV Park & Event Center in Garibaldi (210 S. Third St.) to benefit the Tillamook County Women’s Resource Center. A second dinner, to benefit The Harbor in Astoria, will be held 5:30 p.m. June 10, at the The Loft at The Red Building (20 Basin St.).

For these events, local potters throw seven or eight hundred bowls. After drying, the bowls are fired in the anagama kiln or in the stoneware kiln at Clatsop Community College. On dinner nights, each guest buys a bowls. Locals donate

large quantities of soup, and everyone takes their bowl and helps themselves. There are desserts, breads and coffee. After dinner, there are introductions and speakers, many of the women share their experiences. Guests often make donations to the women’s centers.

The community stands behind the ladies like a wall of river stone, each cemented in place by love and support.

### ‘Not biblical but spiritual’

Pots mature in a kiln for six days and six nights, and then rest and cool from the seventh day for a week. This process is not biblical but spiritual, for magic seems to pass from bowl to bowl, like singing stones tumbling in a winter stream. Color is a gift from the wood ash, a weaving of sorts: maple and fir, pine, flame, a mingling of ocean air — and of course, the dedication of the potters.

The ash ascends from six cords of split, dried and stacked firewood that is gathered months in advance of the firing. Each piece is split, stacked and dried for months under covered sheds built by Richard Rowland and friends.

The compound appears little different than those same structures, hand-built by the Japanese, Koreans and Chinese over eons.



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
Richard Rowland bowl

### The Way

The sun rises. A downy woodpecker gnaws at a decaying alder tree. In a tall hemlock, a raven caws. Potters gather. The fire preens and arcs. Below, on the asphalt highway, log trucks race between loads of 14-inch Douglas Fir. Somewhere they are falling trees in great numbers. Isn’t this all part of the great Tao?

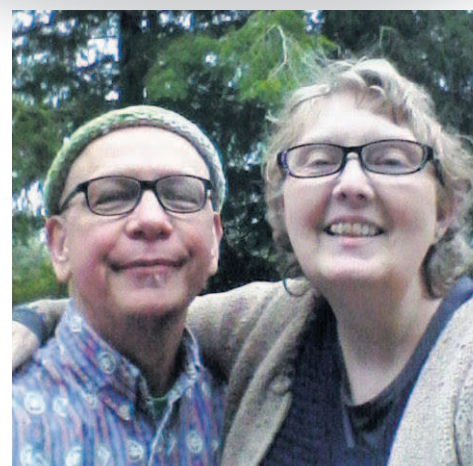
I open the kiln’s iron door and feed the fire. Down-valley, a mallard mother sounds an alarm. “Attention — attention,” she seems to crow. “Choose your path wisely.”

Recently, in a chance meeting, a doctor I know expounded on a theory about kids and cellphones. Neurological damage is occurring, he said, from their obsession with these phones and games. Kids don’t venture into the great outdoors anymore. Instead, they gaze into the tiny windows of technological marvels. In doing so, they are losing their way with nature.

Way: sitting up all night with a Japanese kiln, feeding bundles of firewood until red coals turn white, and ash wraps around the women’s bowl like love. Way: endorsing tradition.

Pottery is meditation. The act of centering clay is an act of centering oneself.

And all paths lead to flame. A new world shaped by fire.



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
Richard and Patti Rowland

The tinder-dry wood spits and crackles as the fire swells into white heat, and after many days, finally reaches temperatures around 2,400 degrees. Ash is chemically changed from wood to glass, in a process known as “glazing.”