



RAKU workshop on Casa da Geada

Course by: Emília Viana

Overview

Over a long weekend you can expect to make simple shaped pieces including tea bowls and cups using RAKU techniques. Take this opportunity to learn an artistic technique by a renowned artist. Four days in the Douro, which include a trip to the mountains and the river and a picnic.

Dates:

Workshop 1 - 29-30-31/March and 1/April

Workshop 2 - 5-6-7-8/April

Booking Info:

Cost for the weekend includes tuition, materials, tools, equipment and accommodation all inclusive

Access details:

Please call to discuss any access needs.

Special requirements:

None

The Technique

Raku pottery is a technique originated in Japan, which emerged in the sixteenth century, and was immediately associated with the tea ceremony. It has then traditionally been used mainly to produce glasses (or cups) and other objects related to this tradition. Chojiro Tanaka was the Japanese potter who developed it. In 1920 the potter Bernard Leach introduced this technique in the West, and, since then, it has become common, taking also new features.



The truth is that many pieces of raku, especially the oldest ones, have a simplicity and a number of imperfections that distinguish themselves from contemporary artefacts. That made it difficult for the first Westerners who entered Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to understand the high value those pieces struck - or simply understand how the Japanese were able to distinguish them from other pieces made with different techniques. Raku pieces may seem rough and dark, but these characteristics relate to the Zen philosophy and the tasks the pieces were playing.

To make raku is an experience that involves the four elements - Earth, Air, Fire and Water - all contribute to the final result.



We begin by modelling a piece of porous clay and baking it at a not very high temperature. Then, we apply the glaze in the piece, and take it back to the oven at a temperature between 800 and 1000°C.

When this temperature is reached, the pieces are removed from the oven still incandescent and placed in a reducing atmosphere - that is, an environment with little oxygen. In practice, this is done by plunging them into an organic substance such as sawdust (although you can use other materials). At this moment, if a flame appears, the sawdust container must be immediately closed and the piece left there for a few minutes. The smoke that escapes in this process is thick, almost viscous, yellow and very toxic. Hence it is necessary to wear a mask, in addition to other heat protection equipment.

In the third phase, the piece is removed from the sawdust and quickly immersed in water. Many times it is still hot enough to release steam. The feeling is that we are playing with a witch's cauldron.

After the piece is sufficiently cooled, it is removed from the water and rubbed in order to remove the attached burnt sawdust.



All these actions allow you to create unique effects: cracks, highlights and special textures, and that - therein lies the magic - are only partly controllable. You can not make two identical raku pieces, since you can not replicate exactly the same circumstances. The porosity of the clay, the amount of glass and how it is applied, the oven temperature, the timber which the sawdust is made of, the temperature of the piece, the contact of the surface of the piece with the sawdust, the immersion time in water - a moment more or less, and another crack opens, green is more blue, the brightness is more or less intense. The areas where glass was not applied are totally black, which allows you to create very interesting contrasts with the white glaze, especially when there is crackled.



More than other ceramic techniques, Raku is a mixture of cooking and alchemy, and a pleasure for those who like surprises. Only after patiently rubbing the piece we know how it will become.