

"ON CENTRE"

Specialist course amid the Tuscan Hills

Evelyne Schoenmann

How does this sound to you: doing pottery for three months up to eight hours a day in a restored 16th century farmhouse in the midst of the Tuscan hills? The La Meridiana school in Certaldo, which is well known in the ceramics world, is halfway between Florence and

an instructive, comprehensive and well-structured answer! One of the school's main concerns is to promote an exchange of ideas, technical knowledge and artistic philosophy, which is intended to give participants the basis of an effective and creative stay. Claudia Bruhin, principal of

the school, answered my question as to why On Centre was set up: "On Centre was developed because all over the world ceramics training programmes are becoming narrower and narrower. For instance the wonderful English ceramics tradition has suffered heavy losses because most universities are closing down their expensive ceramics studios – or they have already done so. Worldwide, there are fewer and fewer good, broadly based training courses. But there is still a need for them because interest in ceramics is still very much alive. To fill this gap, On Centre was created: a very intensive three-month training programme with a limited number of participants.

This makes thorough, personal teaching possible. Incidentally, participants come from all over the world. For the 2016 edition, which was soon fully booked, we had seven students from three continents and seven different countries."

One of the participants in the first On Centre course was David Trueb from Switzerland. I spoke to him about how he had liked the course:

David, what made you join the On Centre programme?

I have been infected with the ceramic virus for a long time. But it only really

broke out when I was travelling in Italy and I started an internet search for nearby ceramics schools and I came across La Meridiana. Other schools could only offer long-term training courses, which I could not manage timewise with a business and family. On the way back to Switzerland I made a detour via Certaldo to take a closer look at the ceramics school. The principal, Claudia Bruhin, was happy to show me around and showed me the workshop, the various kilns, the gallery and the vicinity. I realised at once that I could find answers to all my burning questions about ceramics here. So spontaneously, I signed up for the first 12-week On Centre course.

Can you tell us what an On Centre day is like?

As I had not only signed up for the On Centre course but also for the Throwing Marathon (intensive course in throwing), I had already been able to familiarise myself with the surroundings and how things worked here before the 12-week course began. The daily routine in On Centre was clearly structured, work officially started at 9 a.m. and went on to around 6 p.m. The studio was open from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. every day, which was good if you wanted to finish something off. We were given targets every week, which we tirelessly tried to achieve. The routine was interrupted by regular demonstrations by Pietro and John. The amount of work and practice was very intense, so we sometimes kept working long into the night. For the first three weeks, we had lunch at the school and I would like to pay a huge compliment to Lucia for her outstanding cooking! And Roman spoiled us at coffee time too. After that the students cooked at midday in the houses we were living in.

Ah yes, where did you live and what were the living arrangements during this time?

Firstly, above the studio on the first floor, there are two apartments with bedrooms and their own bathrooms and kitchens as well as a large sun patio. Then five minutes' walk from the school there



Time for a break!

photos - La Meridiana

Siena and now offers a 12-week specialist course, "On Centre". Expert skills are taught at a professional level, about throwing, studies of and experiments with various types of clay, making and using glazes and trying out various firing techniques including firing a wood kiln.

The two ceramists Pietro Maddalena (founder and proprietor of the La Meridiana ceramics school) and John Colbeck generously pass on their specialist knowledge and skills, acquired in decades of professional and teaching experience. There is hardly anything you can ask them to which they don't have

is a large house where everyone has their own well-furnished room. There is a recently equipped communal kitchen and a generous living room with an inviting open fireplace. I lived in this house with a few other students. I have to say we were a really good group and we got on well with the cooking and eating as well. Our motto was, "If you like making pots, you like eating too..."

That sounds really good. Who can you recommend On Centre to?

On Centre is suitable for people who have enough experience with ceramics to make a conscious decision to do this course. After all, it is a strenuous, intense and costly affair. The handouts and worksheets are all in English. Tuition is in English too. So you should have some knowledge of that too. On top of that, you need to be curious, to enjoy pottery and be willing to learn. There is so much material so you should take as many notes as possible. You can bring tools from home but that is not really necessary because everything you need is already here. Personally speaking, the twelve weeks were over in a flash. I would have liked to stay longer. "Keep On Centre!"

The next On Centre course is next year, from 9 January to 1 April 2017. Send enquiries for further details or your application (from 1 May 2016) direct to the school on: info@lameridiana.fi.it | www.lameridiana.fi.it

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The photos show work in the studio and discussions with Pietro Maddalena (above right and bottom right) and with John Colbeck (centre right).

