ENTERTAINMENT

Acton artist Barbara VanSickle aids CWF with one-of-a-kind pieces

By EMILY YATES
Special to The Independent & Free Press

School teacher gone international renowned potter— Barbara VanSickle— is following her passion and giving back in the process.

VanSickle, the self-proclaimed "peppy" 59-year-old, opened the Escarpment Pottery Studio in Acton in September 2003, shortly after she ended her teaching career as art teacher at McKenzie-Smith Bennett School in June of the same year. All of her creations are works of art, from the plates to her newest series— a polar bear and loon collection.

"I'm very excited about the polar bears and loons," says VanSickle, who has promised 10 per cent of each sale of the animals to the Canadian Wildlife Federation.

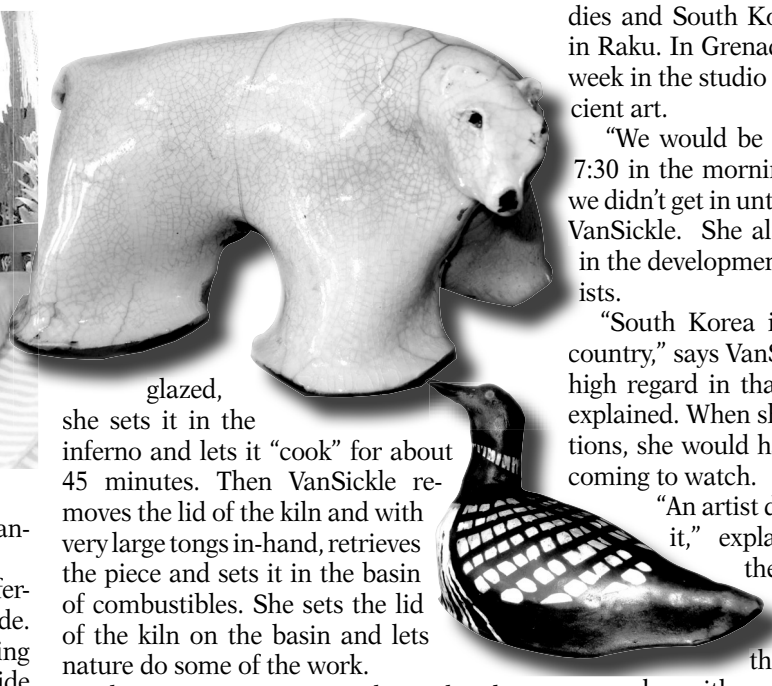
Recently, VanSickle took part in the Spring Cottage Life Show and sold enough of the creatures to donate about $353 to the federation.

"The response has been phenomenal," she says. "The polar bears seem a lot more popular...they cross age-spans."

These polar bears sell for anywhere between $45 to $150, depending on size.

"Every piece is a one-of-a-kind," says VanSickle, who numbers and signs every bear she makes. "There will never be another bear like it."

BARBARA VANSICKLE



One of the main reasons for the differences in each bear is the way they are made. VanSickle uses an ancient method of firing called Raku. She does the "cooking" outside using a kiln that reaches temperatures of 1850 degrees Fahrenheit.

"It's very exciting," says VanSickle, mid-explanation. She does this all outside, donned in welding gear for safety's sake.

To start, she sets up a metal container filled with combustible substances like shredded paper or sawdust. After the art piece is glazed, she sets it in the inferno and lets it "cook" for about 45 minutes. Then VanSickle removes the lid of the kiln and with very large tongs in-hand, retrieves the piece and sets it in the basin of combustibles. She sets the lid of the kiln on the basin and lets nature do some of the work.

This process creates cracks in the glaze that will never replicate, making each VanSickle piece an individual. The combination of heat and smoke also creates colours and a lustrous effect that could not be achieved any other way.

Though she is no longer in an Acton classroom, VanSickle is still teaching. She has traveled to Grenada in the West Indies and South Korea to teach workshops in Raku. In Grenada she spent most of her week in the studio teaching the staff the ancient art.

"We would be up and in the studio by 7:30 in the morning and most of the time we didn't get in until around 10 (p.m.)," says VanSickle. She also took part in assisting in the development of artsy goods for tourists.

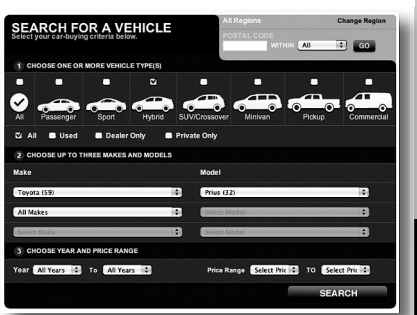
"South Korea is the most magnificent country," says VanSickle. A potter is held in high regard in that part of the world, she explained. When she was doing demonstrations, she would have "busloads" of people coming to watch.

"An artist doesn't create work to sell it," explains VanSickle. Though the business side of things is important, VanSickle explains that it's about the connection someone makes with a piece you've created.

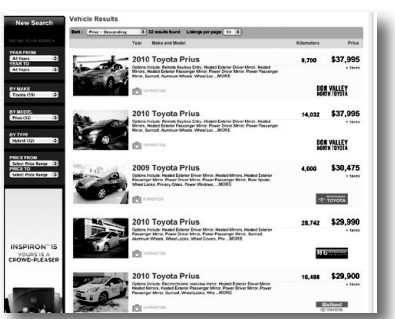
VanSickle will be selling some of her work this year at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in the arts and crafts building. She will also be partaking in the Art on the Rocks show in Georgian Bay. For more information about VanSickle or her work visit www.escarpmentpotterystudio.ca. or call 519-853-1360.

It's easy as 1, 2, 3...

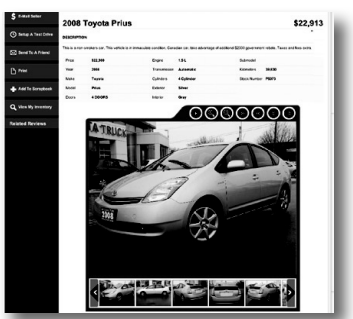
STEP 1
Search tens of thousands of vehicles.



STEP 2
Refine your search by proximity, makes, models, price and more.



STEP 3
Review detailed vehicle descriptions and 360° views of each vehicle.



Find your perfect vehicle at **Wheels.ca**.

Wheels.ca
Find Your Car. Fast.