



Janice Hall noticed that traditional face jugs are usually scary and male, so she decided to make happier and feminine versions in addition to her utilitarian pieces.

New Faces of Folk Pottery

A Danielsville artist puts a different twist on traditional face jugs. By **Cory Bordonaro**

That could almost be music coming from Janice Hall's pottery studio in Danielsville. She's pounding air bubbles out of a cold slab of clay, repeatedly slicing the brown lump in half on a tightly mounted guitar string and slamming the halves back together on a sturdy worktable. The repetitive pluck-slam-pluck-slam action creates a percussive beat at her Georgia Mudcats Pottery.

"It's so rhythmic that I just get caught up in it," says Janice, who adds the electric hum of her potter's wheel and the slurp of wet hands on wet clay to this slippery symphony.

She also gets caught up in a pet project: making face jugs with decidedly feminine features. "People have been making face jugs in the South, including here in North Georgia, for decades," Janice says. "The pots often have jagged teeth, crazy eyes, devil's horns, and such. It is said they were meant to keep evil spirits away from graveyards or scare people away from poison or liquor. I noticed that face jugs nearly always look mean and male, so I set out to make some that look female and, well, nicer."

Janice considers her pinky fingers key assets. She uses them to steady her clay and

define the contours of each piece, adding eyelashes, eyebrows, dimples, ears, hair, and other features to soft clay with deft little movements. Those busy pinkies also enrich each pot with slight imperfections.

"You can go to Wal-Mart and buy perfect," says her husband and fellow potter, Pat Shields. "We don't do perfect. Each pot has minor differences that make it unique. We try to give every piece its own personality."

The couple also produces pitchers, plates, vases, cups, and more, but lately Pat has concentrated on making half-gallon or larger jugs to which he and Janice add facial features. Occasionally she ventures away from strictly human faces, fashioning wolves, fish, bears, cats, and pigs.

Taking Requests The move toward feminine face jugs arose about two years ago. An Athens garden club asked Janice to make a series of face jugs to use as centerpieces for a special event. She hit on the idea of using female features, partly because the club consists of women.

"Lucy Allen, a garden club member and a face jug enthusiast, told me she wanted face jugs she wouldn't have to turn around

when children came to visit," Janice says. "So instead of the traditional grotesques, I went with a more genteel look."

Janice created dozens of trial-and-error attempts before arriving at a style she liked. "For a while I had trouble with the mouths," she admits. "They all looked like they had mustaches." The solution: fuller top lips to suggest a more feminine appearance. Now she builds each face around a smallish nose and embellishes with bigger eyes; cheekbones marked with dimples and laugh lines; and thin, curving eyebrows.

Believing a woman is never fully clad without her accessories, Janice adds clay ribbons, earrings, necklaces, hats, curling locks, and other frills. For face jugs with teeth, she uses broken pieces of white ceramic plates and keeps them a little straighter than their historically crooked counterparts.

Janice adds, "More people are asking about these feminine face jugs and seeking us out at festivals or through word of mouth, so I guess we've found a niche to fill." ●

Georgia Mudcats Pottery: Visit www.georgiamudcatspottery.com, call (706) 795-3977, or e-mail patandjan@alltel.net.