

CALISTOGA

Living



INSPIRE

SAVE THE
FAMILY FARMS:
A NONPROFIT
FOR NAPA'S
SMALLEST WINE
PRODUCERS

INSIDER

CHAT WITH
THE CHIEF

11 TIPS WHEN
SELLING A
HOUSE

WHAT'S ON

Sally and Jeff Manfredi

ON MAKING POTS IN CALISTOGA

Sally and Jeff Manfredi

ON MAKING POTS IN CALISTOGA



Sally and Jeff Manfredi outside of their studio on Foothill Boulevard. All photos courtesy of Tim Carl Photography.

On Foothill Boulevard there is a store behind a house called Calistoga Pottery.

To call it a store, however, isn't exactly accurate: it's really the working studio and showroom of Sally and Jeff Manfredi, the potter and painter who together have made functional ceramic ware for over forty years here in town. While the two have spent many decades throwing pots in Calistoga, they fell in love by way of Greece.

Once upon a time Jeff was a student at Cornell, where his roommate became good friends with a fellow student who happened to know Sally's sister. Jeff and his roommate, who were both on the track team, would use Sally's house as a running destination, since it was close to campus. "He became a family friend," Sally remembers. "My mother took a shine to both of them."

A few years later Jeff was living in California and planning a trip to Europe. "Those were the days you accumulated some money and

went to Europe," says Jeff. "And when the money ran out, you came home." He called Sally's mom to plan a visit before flying out of New York. But Sally's mom had a better idea.

"She said, 'Oh, you're going to Europe? Stop by and see Sally, she is on the island of Samos and doesn't see speak a word of Greek.'"

Sally was attending art school in Greece, studying to be a painter. "We fell madly in love," she says, in her playful and matter-of-fact manner. The two soon returned to the Bay Area where Sally finished her BFA at California College of the Arts and Jeff took a job as a sous chef at Scott's Seafood restaurant.

In the meantime Jeff rented studio space from the established ceramicist Tom Burdett in San Francisco. Sally would come over to paint on his pots, and their creative partnership emerged.

Early on they thought of opening their own restaurant, but with a twist. It would be a pottery restaurant—the two would make what they used in the kitchen and served on the table.

Now, Jeff says, "It's the best thing we never did."

While working as a cook at Scott's Seafood, the restaurant owner asked Jeff to design new cioppino (fish stew) bowls. It was their first formal contract. Thus encouraged, they left San Francisco and moved to Bodega, where they built their first studio. When they got married, they invited the whole town to their reception in the Fire Hall.

How did Jeff first become interested in ceramics? It all started back at Cornell. "I really never thought I had any artistic talent," Jeff reflects. As a sophomore he took a job at the student union, making prints in the print shop for the seemingly endless number of flyers that find their way around the average college campus. "It was a great job because as long as I got it done on time," he remembers, "They didn't care when I got it done. It could be 9pm or 2am."

Across from the printing facility was a small ceramics studio. Anne, the instructor who ran the studio, kept encouraging Jeff to try working in clay. "I never even thought about it [before]," says Jeff. "But I tried it, and that was it, I was hooked."

It's always a bit dizzying to pinpoint the people and moments that shift the course of your life. What if the printing press had been on another floor? What if Anne hadn't struck up a conversation with the bright-eyed student working odd hours? Perhaps Jeff would have found his way to clay regardless. These things are unknowable. All we can do is work with the material in front of us, which is exactly what Jeff set out to do.

"I just loved everything about it," he says. "It's a tactile thing with me. And it's also something you can get very good at." He continues: "The other thing that attracted me to ceramics as possibly some-

thing I could do...the basic materials are relatively inexpensive. If you goof up, it isn't too costly. You wouldn't believe how many pots and plates I've broken. It's heartbreaking sometimes, when I make a few things I really like and I bump them or drop them."

"Or if I break them," Sally interjects. "Sometimes that's hard."

Sally wasn't so attracted to clay herself. "I was always more interested in the surface," she explains. After all, she had studied painting in Greece and the Bay Area. But even after finishing art school, she still didn't feel she had enough experience to be a painter. "I thought to myself, why was I doing this anyway?" When Jeff invited her to visit his studio, she started decorating the pots. "I really loved that," she remembers. "That's how I found my groove."

Sally doesn't call what she does art, per se. Which is either quite surprising or completely understandable, depending on your perspective.

"I don't consider this being an artist. I really don't!"

Jeff adds: "I always enjoyed the act of making things."

"Me too," she concludes. "That's it."

As a little girl Sally admits she was constantly making things. She and her six sisters spent many hours playing and imagining together at their bucolic farmhouse in Etna, New York. "I was always the store that made the doll clothes, or I had an elaborate cooking set up going on."

Sally came from a family of writers and painters. "Almost everybody made images or wrote," she explains with simplicity. Her father was a ten-

The Feature Story is sponsored by NEXTHOME IN THE VALLEY

NextHome
IN THE VALLEY

Wolleson Vineyards on the corner of Larkmead Lane and Highway 29 is being put on the market for the first time in over a century.

The prestigious 18-acre property on the Napa Valley floor features the historic Tucker Schoolhouse - Calistoga's school from the late 1800's to the 1920's, now transformed into a three bedroom, one bathroom house. The house stands alongside a spacious workshop and rows of pristine Cabernet Zinfandel, and Merlot grape vines that have been sold to wineries such as Chateau Montelena, La Sirena, and Orin Swift. This is a rare opportunity to own a piece of Calistoga's history.

Anyone out there have family or friends that may have attended this school? This post is located in what was the woodshed for the school and we are hoping someone will be able to help us figure out who some of these initials belong to before it is sold and we no longer have access to it.

Call us at (707)942-LUKE if you know any of these students



Sandy Tucker

Realtor®

DRE# 01948020 | NextHome In The Valley

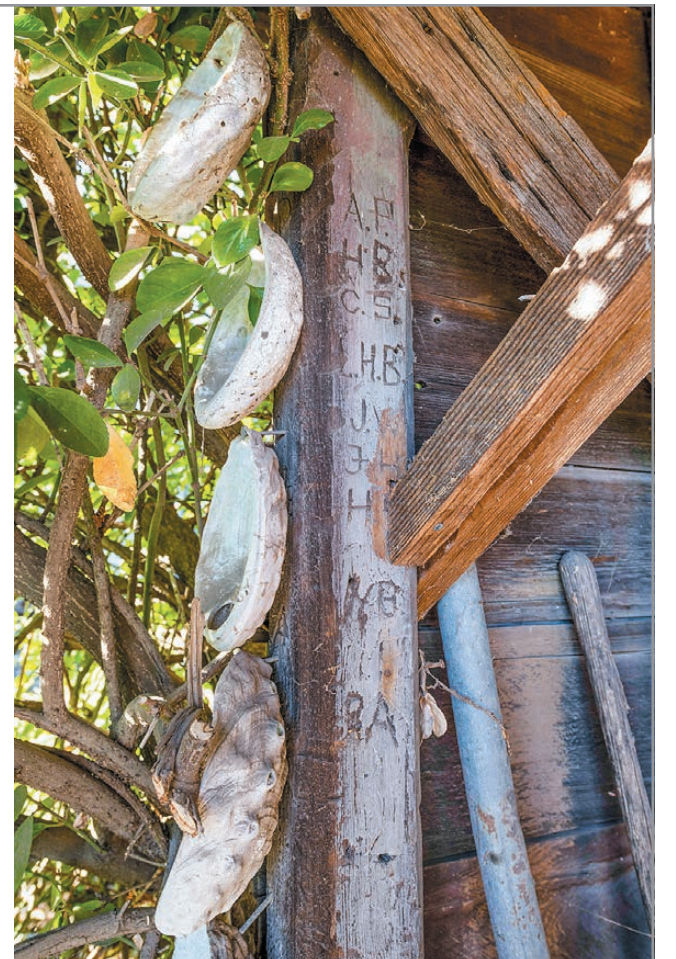
Each office is independently owned and operated

📞 707-942-5853 | 707-328-7749

✉️ sandy.nexthome@gmail.com

🌐 www.nexthomeinthevalley.com

📍 1437 Lincoln Ave, Calistoga, CA 94515





Sally studied painting in art school, and discovered ceramics when she began painting Jeff's pots in his San Francisco studio.



Jeff handling some recently completed ceramic ware. While all pieces are designed for function, Jeff admits, "Every now and then, a piece of art leaves here disguised as a pot."

ured professor in Cornell's fine art department, where he taught painting, graphic arts, and calligraphy, among other subjects. Her mother, who is now 97, is the author of the Newberry Honor Award book *My Father's Dragon*. The book is illustrated by Sally's grandmother.

"Growing up with people who were so seriously involved in art, I was more interested in being a parent." She says thoughtfully before adding, "It's hard to give your whole self to both things. So I wanted to do something practical, and that's what I love about pots."

Usability and durability are of prime importance to Sally and Jeff. Their cups and plates are lead-free, can be microwave and dishwasher-safe, and passed down to the next generation—a group they are starting to meet at their store.

"We've been here long enough to become friends with many of our customers," Jeff says. "And now their kids will show up and say, 'You don't know me, but I grew up with your plates. And now I want my own.'"

Sally laughs. "This first happened maybe ten years ago, and we thought, 'Whoa, we're old.'"

"Every now and then," Jeff confesses, "A piece of art leaves here disguised as a pot. When I have time, one of my favorite things to do is to mix different colored clays together—some of the pots turn out to be fantastic."

Perhaps the most rewarding work of their lives was raising their two daughters. They moved from Bodega to Calistoga in 1978, following a friend who had just bought the Calistoga Inn. Sally and Jeff set up their shop in a spare room, and Jeff tended the bar two nights a week.

"They called him Dr. Heineken," Sally adds.

While working at the bar, Jeff struck up a friendship with one of the Sunday regulars. When the man inherited property on Foothill and wanted to sell it, Jeff and Sally decided it was time to build a studio here.

"The property was one of the two homes of a family compound," Jeff says. "And the little house here [now the studio and showroom] was the cookhouse. It was 500 square feet and painted bright pink."

"There was also a fallen down barn. We were very young and naive. We thought, 'Oh wow, it's perfect!'"

Luckily Jeff's brother came to help them transform the property into the beautiful place that it is today. "We bought it, got the use permits, and my brother and I built this place," Jeff says. "He knew what he was doing."

The house on Foothill has been their home for the past 40 years. And it's the place where Hannah and Livia grew up. When the girls played little league softball, Sally became the parade float designer and team calligrapher. "And we won District 54!" she adds. She also learned how to be the scorekeeper, and finally developed an understanding of the game.

Jeff and Sally are lucky for many reasons, but one of them is that both daughters moved back to the Bay Area after spending a few years having adventures back east. Livia attended UC San Diego and then worked in the wine industry in New York. Their younger daughter Hannah went to the Chicago Art Institute before working briefly at the Museum of Modern Art.

While their parents had to fly halfway around the world to reconnect, both Hannah and Livia found love a bit closer to home. Livia met her future husband Stephen when they worked at Palisades Market as young adults. "Vicky Gott taught both of them to cook," says Sally. When they met again, there was a definite spark. Now they live in Napa with two little girls of their own, Paloma and Louisa.

Hannah, a software engineer, had met Phillip when she was eighteen. But the two of them didn't start dating until after the Tubbs Fire brought them closer together. Phillip, who had grown up in Occidental and worked at Wildflour Bakery all through high school, was living in San Francisco and using his techie skills to connect North Bay kids to data that showed how extensive the fire damage had been in their neighborhoods—as a way to keep everyone informed. Now they are engaged and have started a small business in the city: Rabbit Rabbit Plant Nursery, which empowers people in their neighborhood to grow their own food sustainably.

"Both of these men are great," Jeff says. "They both cook. They both use hammers. They're well-rounded people."

One of the hardest aspects of the pandemic for Sally was not being able to hug her granddaughter Paloma. But now that life is slowly returning to normal, Sally and Jeff are both so grateful to be seeing more of their kids.

"It was terrifying having my daughter be pregnant during COVID," Sally says. "But this morning I got to hold the baby in person. And hug Paloma." She continues. "I'm going to go eat noodles in San Francisco with the other daughter this week."

They both agree there are many volunteer opportunities in town for those who are so inclined. "I was on the planning commission for fourteen years," Jeff says. "And in particular I encourage people to volunteer at the library."

Sally agrees. "There a good group of people there right now."

Sally has been involved in the Calistoga community garden, where she has developed her communication skills volunteering as secretary and learning sustainable agriculture techniques. "My friend Arturo shook his head at my tomatoes," she says. "How could I plant all of these tomatoes without adding chili plants?"

One of the joys of Sally and Jeff's work is their ability to connect with so many people, both longtime residents in the community and visitors from all over the world. Finally, they are able to open their studio again.

Last week when she was painting the side of the house, two old friends she has known since they were young mothers dropped by for a surprise visit. "I didn't know how much I missed them during the pandemic. These are deep relationships. It was just magical. Some of those things are beginning to happen again."

As for fun, Sally and Jeff love seeing what other people make. Their website has links to a dozen other local artisan businesses—even chocolatiers. When they're on a trip, they're stopping in other people's shops. And whenever someone new moves into town, they welcome them with open arms. "A man is moving here from Martha's Vineyard with his wife," Sally says with enthusiasm. "They're opening a glass studio."

Without getting too cheesy about it, Sally and Jeff have let the landscape inspire their work.

"People would try to give us the bright idea putting grapes on things because it's wine country," Sally explains. "So we decided to just do that—literally." But don't expect little purple clusters on the bowls—the grapes are actually in the glaze, in the form of ash.

Sally and Jeff use the ash from a number of different vineyards to make a custom glazes for their stoneware. It was Jeff's idea to incorporate the ash wineries produce when burning their vines at the end of harvest season. "It takes about three or four months to make," Jeff says. "The ash has to be cured and sifted. But the results in the glaze are beautiful."

"I love that phrase taking home a bit of the old sod," Sally adds. "And that's sort of what this is."

Just like with wine itself, different soil qualities produce different results in the glaze, so each piece is labeled according to the vineyard ash used to make it. Sally points to a group on the shelf. "This particular batch was from Larkmead Vineyards. Sometimes we just do a small batch, as a special thing for somebody."

Another project Sally is working on these days is a series inspired by her grandmother's illustrations. "I'm playing more and more with that kind of fun stuff," she says. "And these are the baby plates I've been doing forever."

After over four decades of working in clay, Sally and Jeff have yet to run out of ideas. New pieces emerge from their studio every week. Perhaps it has something to do with the setting where they work—it's a place that's hard to get sick of, with a community that constantly renews itself. "Newcomers that we get to know are always so impressed by how friendly everyone is here," Jeff says. "They tell us, 'Wow. We thought we came from a pretty friendly place.'"

"I think there are a lot of happy, content people living here," Sally concludes. "At least that's my impression."

Business is picking up again at the store. But again, Calistoga Pottery is more than a store. It's the gathering spot Sally and Jeff have nurtured for years, a place where everyone in town can feel the warmth of a kiln and friendly conversation. The functional and utilitarian pieces displayed inside are also found in our restaurants and homes. Sally and Jeff will be the first to tell you a plate is just a plate. The same cannot be said, however, about the hands that made it.



ARK

ARCHITECTURE

RALF KONIETZKO, AIA

Custom Residential + Renovations
+ Accessory Dwelling Units

www.architecture-rk.com | [707-548-5209](tel:707-548-5209)