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MARCH 2005  
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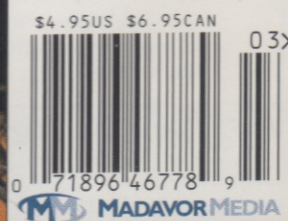
World of Miniatures in a Nutshell

**Rainbow  
Hand's  
exotic  
departure**

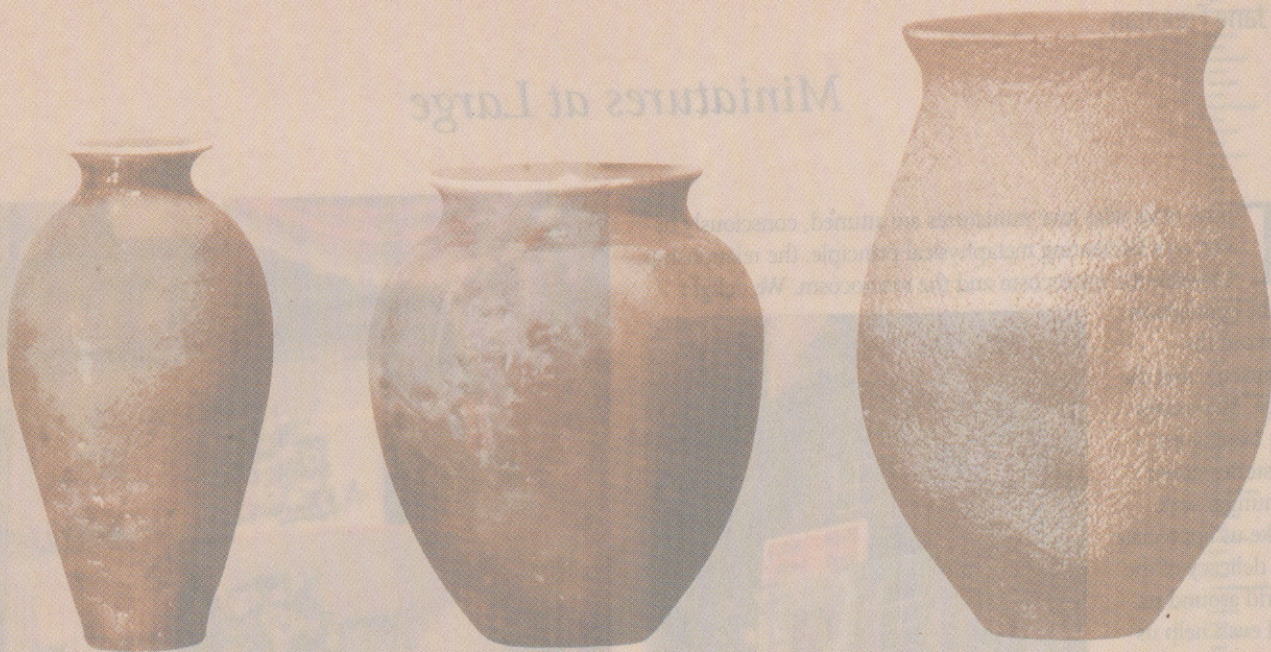
**Raku artist Jon Almeda**  
**Ongoing traditions at**  
**The Lawbre Company**

**Projects:**

***Orient Express room box***  
**Joann Swanson's Japanese**  
**goldfish pond**  
**Kabuki theater from Alice Zinn**  
**Grangedale, Part 2**





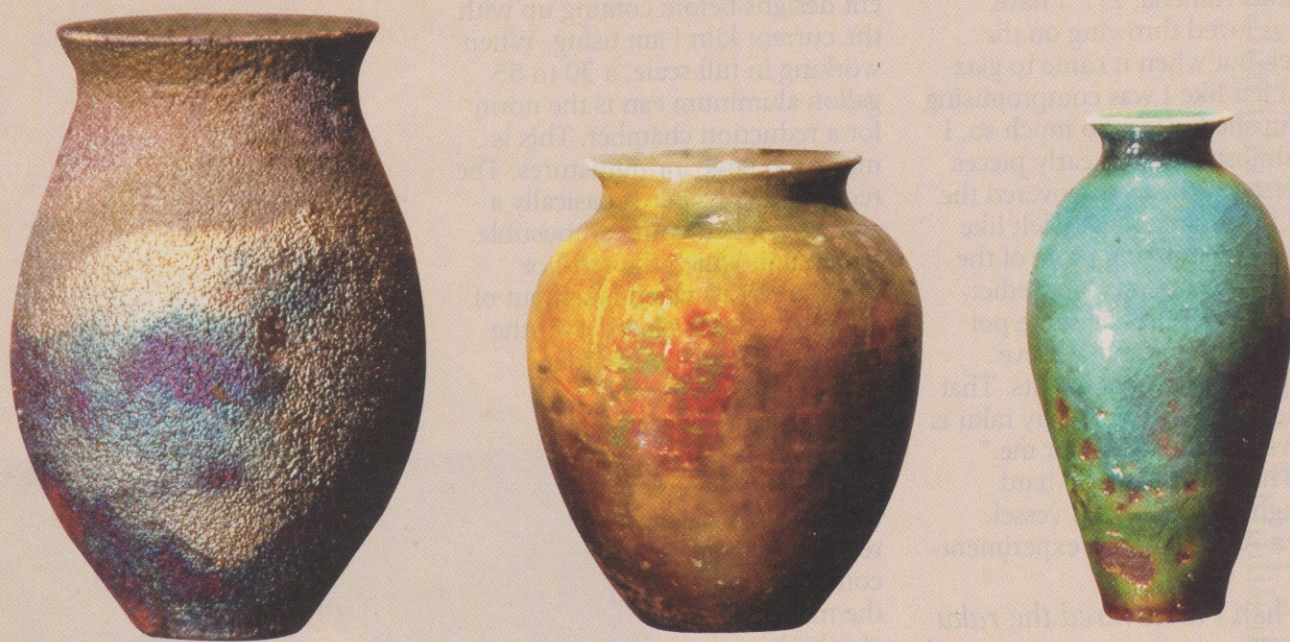


# EARTH AIR FIRE WATER

By Lauren M. Walker







One of the recurring delights in miniatures is finding artworks that would be beautiful in any size reduced to perfect scale. Ceramics artist Jon Almeda's raku vases and bowls — hand-thrown on a full-sized wheel and subjected to the stresses of raku glazing — are startlingly beautiful gems of ceramic art.

Raku is a glazing technique developed in Kyoto, Japan, in the 16th century by the Chojiro family and first used to make tea bowls for the tea ceremony, where every object must combine beauty with function. The method uses combustion and the resulting gases to crackle and oxidize the surface of the glaze, and the pot may then be quenched in a water bath to fix the colors. Each result is unique.



"I have never been very interested in the colors and predictability of traditional glazes," explains Almeda, 27. "I have always loved throwing on the wheel, but when it came to glazing, I felt like I was compromising the finished piece. So much so, I left almost all of my early pieces unglazed. When I discovered the raku technique it really felt like I found the missing piece of the puzzle. Raku is very unpredictable, you can fire the same pot five or six times and achieve completely different results. That element of surprise is why raku is still very exhilarating for me."

The process can be hard enough on a full-sized vessel. When Almeda began experiment-

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ing with applying raku to the miniatures he had been making, he had to adapt the method to suit the very different mechanics of 1:12 scale.

"One of the first problems I had was finding the right clay body," he says. "Clay has so many different qualities and characteristics. I literally tried just about every clay that my local ceramic shop carried. I had about thirty bags of clay in my studio, each missing a chunk about the size of a golf ball. None of these clays worked, so I went about blending clays together. I was finally able to come up with a clay that I really enjoy working with."

"There were a number of other challenges I had to address when it came to raku. The gas kiln I

was using at the time was much too large to fire these little guys. I designed and tested several different designs before coming up with the current kiln I am using. When working in full scale, a 30 to 55 gallon aluminum can is the norm for a reduction chamber. This is much too large for miniatures. The reduction chamber is basically a container filled with combustible material in which the red-hot piece is placed when taken out of the kiln. A lid is placed over the top of the chamber in order to create this reduction environment. This atmosphere is starved of oxygen and creates unstable gases. The remaining oxygen combines with the metals of the clay body and glazes, reducing them to a lower oxide and altering their color. I have experimented with different sized cans to create the proper environment."

Almeda, who lives and works in Tacoma, WA, began taking pottery classes in high school. "When I no longer had access to the studio, I realized how much I missed throwing. So I bought my first pottery wheel about a year out of school and have been throwing ever since." He was able to become a full-time potter about three years ago, which is also when he began making miniatures.

"Initially I was drawn to making miniature pots by a book I found called *Creating Ceramic Miniatures*, by Carla Kenny," he recalls. "It caught my attention be-





cause it was so different from what I was doing at the time. Each piece I worked on created more concepts and ideas. From the moment I made my first successful miniature pot I thought endlessly of possible ways to do raku in miniature." It took about a year before he began producing raku minis. The quality of his work has led him to be recognized by the International Guild of Miniature Artisans.

"I would so like to promote miniatures as a legitimate art form and bring awareness to the general public. I see so much talent within our little population and feel like it should be for all to see." His miniatures are available at shows and on eBay, and Almeda is preparing for a possible gallery showing that would include both miniature and full-sized work. So far, several of the buyers for his full-sized pieces are miniaturists who also collect full-size pottery. The full-size pieces tend to be more abstract than his miniatures, but he is also beginning to introduce the more abstract styles into his small-scale work.

He also credits his miniature work with improving his attention to detail in the larger pieces. "The biggest difference for me when throwing in miniature as opposed to full-sized is the amount of attention involved. When I make miniatures it is a very meditative process.

The only thing that I think about is the piece spinning in front of me. This is a huge driving factor in why I am still making miniatures. It really keeps my mind fresh." ■

