

Design

See the Impressive Ceramics Collection (and Home) of Fort Street Studio's Founders

Janis Provisor and Brad Davis share their unique wares, which range from beautiful vases to edgy vessels



A grouping of Coppertone Weller Pottery from the 1930s sits next to a glass vessel by the couple's son, Jared Davis. Photo: Jonathan Leijonhufvud

[Janis Provisor and Brad Davis](#) are artists, first and foremost. For a while, in the 1970s and '80s, that meant showing their paintings and sculptures at New York's [Holly Solomon Gallery](#), where they met. Then later, when they began collaborating with a factory in China, it meant translating their ideas into hand-knotted carpets for their next venture, [Fort Street Studio](#). That process is beautifully documented in *[A Tale of Warp and Weft](#)*, their new Rizzoli book, which is officially out this week. But all the while, as evidenced by their eclectic Tribeca loft, they brought discerning eyes to yet a third artistic pursuit: ceramic collecting.

“We weren’t real collectors until we got together,” says Provisor of the pastime that developed several decades back, out of a need for distraction. They had been married just six weeks when Provisor fell ill and was hospitalized in Grand Junction, Colorado. Davis passed the long days by combing through the nearby antique stores, looking for gifts to cheer up his wife. What he found was a wealth of early American art pottery by Cincinnati-based producers like Weller and Roseville. One of the [Weller Silvertone](#) pieces Davis snagged—covered in dreamy, impressionistic imagery, loosely inspired by Monet’s paintings—would soon capture their imagination.



In the kitchen, shelves are filled with 1960s German Fat Lava pottery and bowls handmade by Provisor and Davis. Photo: Jonathan Leijonhufvud



On the top shelf, spot a collection of 1920s pottery by Hungarian-American ceramist Eva Zeisel for Schramberg Pottery. Photo: Jonathan Leijonhufvud

The things they collected, in those early days, were not wildly expensive. Pieces that generally cost a few hundred dollars. “It was more about a sense of play,” Provisor recalls. “We could have collected more valuable stuff, but we liked the hunt and wanted to continue to collect.”

They searched for styles and makers that were under-appreciated or unknown. They continued to collect Silvertone as well as [Coppertone](#), an American art-pottery style that resembled verdigris, both things they could find in Colorado, where they were living. They got into Art Deco ceramics, including the work of Hungarian-American master [Eva Zeisel](#) and, a bit later, a variety of postwar German ceramics from the 1960s called [Fat Lava](#). “They’re not pretty, they’re strong and edgy,” says Davis of what has become their biggest collection. “We love them for the inventiveness of the glazing.” After a recent resurgence of interest, however, they’ve become quite challenging to find.



Two ceramic sculptures by Klara Kristalova and a small bronze bird by Kiki Smith. Photo: Jonathan Leijonhufvud



A blue ceramic artwork by Arlene Shechet and *Ghost* by Anna Sew Hoy. Photo: Jonathan Leijonhufvud

Their strategy is not so complicated: “The first impulse is to follow your eye,” explains Davis. “Then you start learning. You start reading, you start talking to dealers or other collectors. The passion grows the more you learn.” As does the collection. Perhaps they seek out a shape, pattern, or rare variety to round out the group.

Their eyes often point them toward varieties known for unique glazes or painterly qualities. And lately they’ve been getting into art ceramics by the likes of [Klara Kristalova](#), [Kiki Smith](#), and [Paloma Varga Weisz](#)—more of statement pieces in their own rights. These higher-priced works help temper another little problem they’ve run into: They have too many ceramics, which now sprawl across their home, showrooms, and quite a few storage bins.



The couple's collection of Silvertone Weller Pottery from the 1930s is grouped in the bedroom. Photo: Jonathan Leijonhufvud

They've tried to quit. But can one really put such an obsession to bed? Stuck at home during the pandemic, Provisor admits to, in a moment of weakness, getting on [Etsy](#) to research [Bertoncello](#), a type of reddish-brown pottery made in 1960s Italy. "I surprised Brad with a piece for Christmas," she admits. "I just couldn't help it."