

The Fantastical Functional Forms

of
Kenny Delio

by Myra Bellin

Shelf with Bottles, 36 in. (91 cm) in width. The shelf is curly cherry wood with tung oil and the shelf base is thrown and altered white stoneware with Brown Slip and White Glaze, fired to Cone 6. The bottles are thrown and altered white stoneware with White and Speckled Glazes, fired to Cone 6.

Now 29 years old, Kenny Delio was born into the tail end of Gen-X, the generation following the baby boomers that roughly spans births from the years 1965–1980. Gen-Xers grew up during the decades of the seventies and the eighties; for better or for worse, they were raised on television. In the case of Kenny Delio, it's for the better, because the fantastic images of children's media made a lasting impression, finding their way into his work.

"As a kid," Delio says, "I was really taken with fairy tales. I used to watch the Disney stuff like *Alice in Wonderland* and fantasies like *The Never Ending Story*. And I would sit in my room for hours just making things. So I guess you could say that they were my influence."

Standing in the middle of Delio's living room, surrounded by his work, the influence of fantasy is palpable. The space is alive with Delio's wheel-thrown and altered forms, adapted to functional use as legs for coffee tables or props for wall shelves.

The legs resemble the tentacles of an octopus. Lined with sucker-like bumps, they curl and writhe under a wooden slab, looking as if they were caught and freeze-framed walking across the deep ocean floor. The props for the wall shelves radiate the same energy and life—a tentacle-like form supports a shelf, a curved wooden slab,

against the wall. The clay support braces the wood just before its tapered, upturned tip arcs away.

Delio fashions these ceramic appendages from wheel-thrown donuts. He uses B-mix clay; half porcelain, half stoneware. When the hollow forms are close to leather hard, he begins to shape them. Delio cuts away part of the donut, then slices darts in the tubular walls, carefully re-attaching them, then gently pulling them into an elongated point. He cuts, twists, shapes and pulls the donut section into a gracefully tapering tentacle.

The table is obviously functional, as is the shelf, for although his influences are rooted in fairy tales, Delio designs all of his pieces for use in the real world. The shelves in the living room are used to display other creations like his teapots, which look as though they are merely resting before moving on. All parts of the teapots, with the exception of the legs that sprout on a few of Delio's designs, are thrown and altered. The teapots lean as they rest on the shelves, postured like tropical fish waiting for the current to shift before swimming off. The spouts echo some feature of the pot and, to fashion handles, Delio once again begins with wheel-thrown hollow donuts, slicing and darting and tapering them, then positioning them to arc



"Buddy Teapot," 10 in. (25 cm) in height, thrown and altered white stoneware with White and Speckled glazes (see page 47), fired to Cone 6 in oxidation.

from the pot like a huge appendage or dorsal fin. But as fantastic as his forms can be, Delio brings to them his customary practical bent, placing great emphasis on the handles of his pots. "Handles," he feels, "are the most important part of the pot, because that is the part that you touch."

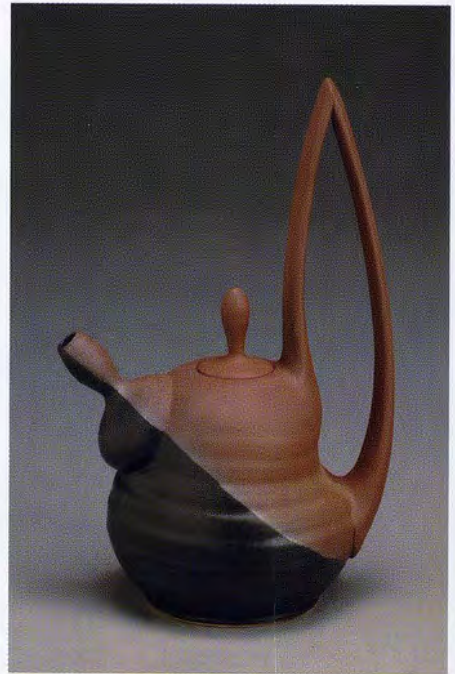
And there are many different designs for his teapots. Starting with pencil sketches, Delio designs and redesigns teapots for every show, learning from the detailed drawings that actualize his visions. Aside from participating in group shows like "Masters in Clay" at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia and "The American Craft Council

Baltimore Show" at the Baltimore Convention Center, Delio manned his own booth at the "Philadelphia Retail Buyers Market" in 2005 and 2006, as well as at the "2006 Philadelphia Furniture Show," both held at the Philadelphia Convention Center. "The challenging part to doing shows," according to Delio, "is in designing something that will satisfy the general public and still be fun to make again and again if people order it."

Delio teaches a class in advanced throwing techniques at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia. His throwing demos are true performance art, honed from years of working as a production potter after receiving



Teapot, 9 in. (23 cm) in height, thrown and altered white stoneware with Brown Slip and Black Glaze, fired to Cone 6 in oxidation.



Above: Teapot, 12 in. (30 cm) in height, thrown and altered white stoneware with pulled handle, Brown Slip and Black Glaze, fired to Cone 6 in oxidation.

his B.F.A. from the University of the Arts. "I once figured out that if I lined up all of the mugs I threw as a production potter, figuring each one is about eight inches high, that they would stretch for about six miles." A little smile appears on Delio's face, as if he himself is startled by his own productivity. But wheel skills are not the only reason for the popularity of Delio's class. He takes a sincere interest in his students and in teaching them. "I enjoy watching people learn and get better at what they're doing."

Delio glazes his work subtly. He thinks of glazes as a skin, choosing matt glazes that are soft and supple or shiny surfaces that appear wet and visceral. Or he may choose to mimic scales and fur with multihued textures, an important consideration when glazing the legs for his tables and props for his shelves. The guiding consideration for his glazing choices is enticement. Delio wants people to interact with his work, to be drawn to touch it and to use it.

Delio says, "One of my dreams is to fill a room with everything I've ever made, like a little village with everything running around, running on the walls." He seems well on his way.

recipes

BROWN SLIP

(Cone 6)

Frit 3124 (Ferro)	10 %
Nepheline Syenite	10
EPK Kaolin	40
OM 4 Ball Clay	30
Silica (Flint)	10
	<u>100 %</u>

Add: Red Iron Oxide

8 %

OLIVE GLAZE

(Cone 6)

Barium Carbonate*	7 %
Gerstley Borate	16
Whiting	7
F-4 Feldspar	30
EPK Kaolin	9
Silica (Flint)	31
	<u>100 %</u>

Add: Stain #6503

2 %

WHITE GLAZE

(Cone 6)

Dolomite	23 %
Nepheline Syenite	72
Ball Clay	5
	<u>100 %</u>

Add: Tin Oxide

8 %

Red Iron Oxide

1 %

Bentonite

2 %

BLACK GLAZE

(Cone 6)

Bone Ash	10 %
Whiting	15
Frit 3124 (Ferro)	20
Nepheline Syenite	20
EPK Kaolin	18
Silica (Flint)	17
	<u>100 %</u>

Add: Stain #6616

12 %

SPECKLED GLAZE

(Cone 6)

Gerstley Borate	59 %
Talc	41
	<u>100 %</u>

Add: Rutile

18 %

*Glazes high in barium carbonate are not suitable for liner glazes on functional ware.



"Tall Teapot," 24 in. (61 cm) in height, thrown and altered white stoneware with White and Speckled glazes, fired to Cone 6 in oxidation, by Kenny Delio, Clouster City, New Jersey.