

# THE CURVES OF CREATIVITY

## Happy accidents in clay

Life isn't predictable. There's no telling where our years will take us — no matter how resolute our dreams or plans. But when we stand still and look back, we can see exactly how and why our journeys twisted and turned the way they did.

Such is the case for Michelle Grimm, a Vancouver creative and artist.

Today, Michelle works with clay, shaping Rubenesque vases and other vessels from her rural studio in Langley, BC. With deer grazing along the banks of a nearby stream, the peaceful scene is a far cry from the design worlds she travelled through to arrive here.

Growing up in Baltimore, Maryland, Michelle's teenage imagination was watered with a subscription to W Magazine, which exposed her to theatrical wardrobes, visual narratives, and powerful female figures. She saw that life was much larger than her little world of figure drawing and painting. And she made her way to New York City as soon as possible.

Michelle spent a decade working as a Ready-to-Wear Specialist for Marc Jacobs and Balenciaga, while styling hair for photoshoots and fashion shows on the side. In the latter, she used her hands like a sculptor, playing with textures, lines, shapes, and volumes — a precursor for what would come later.

When she met Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, an artist who has worked in landscaping, design, and writing, Michelle realized how fluid creativity could be — how one could transition through different mediums. It was time for a shift.

Inspired by architectural fashion silhouettes and experiential retail spaces, her creative focus leapt from fashion to architecture. She moved to Vancouver, where she studied interior design; then spent five years in Sydney, Australia, designing spatial narratives for restaurants.

But something was missing... she wasn't working with her hands.

*Small soda fired vase. Photo Credit: Jeremy Wong*



*Michelle works with the clay through every step of the process. Photo Credit: Jarusha Brown*







*Firing up the homemade Raku kiln — a repurposed oil drum. Photo Credit: Jarusha Brown*



*Unglazed soda fired vase showcases the flame path. Photo Credit: Jeremy Wong*

By happenstance, Michelle took a pottery workshop, and knew the moment she touched the clay that she was home.

The earthy substance has shaped cultures around the world for thousands of years. While it's in our DNA, it's a challenging alchemical artform to master as so many elements conspire in its creation: touch, water, glazes, and heat.

Now back in Vancouver, working solely on her ceramics, Michelle has experimented with various firing techniques but finds herself particularly attracted to the Western style of Japan's Raku, where pieces are fired at temperatures of 1,850°F before being placed in a container with combustible materials. They are then plunged into water to create a thermal shock and crackling effect.

Michelle strives for perfection in form — minimal and feminine, reminiscent of her figure drawings — since surface results are unpredictable once the clay meets fire.

“Clay is a teacher,” Michelle says. “It puts my ego in check and shows me humility and patience.” She throws her own feeling into the clay as she works it intuitively on the wheel — sometimes tears are baked into the pieces.

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Raku translates to “happiness in the accident” — a phrase that fittingly applies to Michelle's serendipitous creative journey.

Find Michelle Grimm's work on Instagram at @the\_mgrimm, or @provide\_home.

#### WORDS

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Sandra's curiosity for people, places, and stories led to her decade-long career as a writer. Based in Vancouver, she stays busy as a freelance copywriter, and penning screenplays and a novella. She spends all her money in used bookshops.