

# Moon Shadow Ceramics

*Heather McDonald Turns Childhood Hobby  
Into Full-Time Career*

BY LAURA LIEFF



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**A** Vail Valley resident for 26 years, ceramicist Heather McDonald has been working with clay since she was 4 years old. Her interest began when, after funding for art in public schools was cut, her mother took her to a community art center in their hometown of Strafford, Pennsylvania. McDonald was immediately captivated. “I worked with the art instructor, Mrs. Grosick, every Saturday morning from age 4 to 16,” McDonald remembers. “Her compassion is one of the reasons I became a teacher. She changed my life.”

After high school, McDonald earned a dual degree in art education and pouring bronze from Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado — a school she chose because the education program offered small classes and the art department had a bronze foundry. “Because I had worked in clay for so long, I wanted to understand

a different medium,” McDonald explains. “Depending on what you’re doing in bronze, there are similarities to clay on the sculpting side that drew me to expand on what I was interested in already.”

Following college, McDonald became a substitute art teacher for the Sierra Grande School District in Colorado Springs where she taught a variety of mediums. When she moved to Eagle County, she worked for a homeschool program in Edwards where she fostered students’ learning by teaching the skills needed for a more well-rounded education. She adds, “Teaching is a passion because I love helping children learn and seeing through their eyes alongside them.”

## A New Era

Although she never stopped making art or sharing her craft with others, in 2024, McDonald decided to follow her bliss by leaving her corporate job and making

ceramics her full-time career. She secured Moon Shadow Ceramics' studio that April. "My space is special because I can open the back door and hear the river eight months out of the year," she says. "Also, because I love communities within small towns, Minturn is a great fit as it has a different vibe than anywhere else in the Valley." She adds that her brick and mortar space is the first step of her journey as a full-time clay artist. "There are so many great clay artists here, but we all work individually. It would be fun to have a place for all of us to come together and collaborate."

Always learning and experimenting with new techniques, McDonald loves immersing herself in the thoughtful balance of craftsmanship, creativity and the slow, meaningful process of making. Her work is art-forward, mountain-rooted and made to be used every day. With Moon Shadow Ceramics, she has created a space that values curiosity, patience and play — both in her own practice and in private classes where she guides students at their own pace and shares the joy of forming something tangible.

#### Clay Creativity

In addition to being a working studio, Moon Shadow Ceramics functions as a teaching space for private adult and kid classes. The studio welcomes small groups for special occasions including bachelorette parties, workshops and birthday parties, among other celebrations. Each class is customizable based on the age group and/or what the group wants to make. "My goal is to bring joy to these experiences, celebrate mistakes and provide a welcoming environment," McDonald says. "You're not going to get it the first time, and that's fine. Sometimes people aren't sure what to expect but I'm there to help."

The combination of spending her childhood learning from Mrs. Grosick and her time as a teacher have come to fruition in the form of Moon Shadow Ceramics. "People learning and laughing through the process is great — they are making new pathways in the brain while they experience how their bodies are supposed to be situated at the wheel and what they should do with their hands while working with clay," she says. "I love teaching and then watching them absorb everything in real time."

#### What's Next

McDonald's work can be found at ARTSPaCE workshop+gallery and at FOODsmith — both located in downtown Eagle. Going forward, McDonald is hoping to collaborate with FOODsmith owners Allana and Shawn Smith for a cooking/ceramics class that would be open to tourists and locals. "People want community and time with family so we are looking forward to giving them a unique experience," McDonald explains. "Visitors can ski during the day and then learn to throw on the wheel in the evening."

For those thinking about taking a Moon Shadow Ceramics class, McDonald's expertise extends beyond the studio time. In addition to teaching her craft, she also provides the clay, fires the pieces and glazes all the creations. When she's not in the studio, depending on the season, McDonald can be found skiing, hiking and rafting. +

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