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INSIDE:

Norm Knopp digs fossils, page 9

Mary Fox with her new book, 'Developing Glazes: Low-Fire Reduction and Oxidation', open to her favourite chapter, Never Say Die. (Morgan Brayton/Ladysmith Chronicle)

Potter Mary Fox grows her legacy

Morgan Brayton

Some artists thrive in chaos; others in order. Mary Fox embodies both. Her studio is immaculate with everything in its place, but inside that precision lives an irrepressible curiosity that's redefining the dance between fire, air and clay.

It also fuels her generosity. All royalties from her latest book, *Developing Glazes: Low-Fire Reduction and Oxidation*, support the Mary Fox Legacy Project, which helps emerging potters build sustainable careers through apprenticeships and future residencies.

In this full-colour hardcover from Harbour Publishing Fox distills decades of experimentation into a guide that's equal parts how-to, why, and why not? It demystifies one of pottery's most intimidating stages, showing how to mix and test glazes using affordable materials and low-temperature firings that save energy and money.

Most pottery is fired in oxidation, an electric-kiln environment with a steady oxygen

Continued on A7

New Ladysmith homes will need to cut emissions

Morgan Brayton

The Town of Ladysmith will adopt higher environmental standards for new homes built in 2026.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2026, all building permit applications for single-detached dwellings, with or without secondary suites, will need to comply with Emission Level 4 (EL-4) of B.C.'s Zero Carbon Step Code.

Introduced by the province in 2024, the code is designed to cut greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) from buildings, primarily through electrification of space heating, water heating and cooking appliances.

Secondary heat sources such as wood-burning stoves and decorative gas fireplaces will still be permitted.

According to the publication BC Energy Step Code and Zero Carbon Step Code: A Best Practices Guide for Local Governments, about 12 per cent of British Columbia's overall GHGs come from building emissions. Nearly all of those emissions (98 per cent) come from fossil-fuel-powered space and water heating systems.

Ladysmith builders must currently meet Emission Level 1 (EL-1). Applications submitted before the 2026 deadline will continue to be reviewed under EL-1.

The provincial step code guidebook estimates that moving from EL-1 to EL-4 (for a medium-sized single-family dwelling) can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 90 per cent compared to conventional new homes.

Council adopted the updated requirements on Oct. 1 under Part 15 of the Building and Plumbing Bylaw 2024, No. 2174. The move brings Ladysmith in line with neighbouring jurisdictions including Nanaimo and the Cowichan Valley Regional District, both of which already require EL-4 for single-detached dwellings.

Continued on A4

Mary Fox sparks low-fire pottery glaze revolution

Continued from A1

supply that keeps colours predictable. Fox pushes further, experimenting with reduction firing, which limits oxygen in a gas kiln and changes how minerals such as iron and copper behave, producing unexpected shades from pale celadon to smoky black.

Her breakthrough is proving that this can be done at low temperatures, between cone 06 and 04 (about 1,830-1,940 F), rather than the traditional high-fire range above 2,200 F. The approach saves energy, reduces kiln wear and opens new creative possibilities.

Firing at lower temperatures echoes where Fox finds herself artistically and ethically: slowing down and using less to create more.

"Climate change is forcing our hand, leading the way toward new approaches to energy use," she wrote.

Fox developed the book's recipes using her Blaauw gas kiln, which uses less energy and costs less to fire. The results are striking. Surfaces glow like landscapes seen from the air: burnt sienna beside emerald haze, moonlit greys cracking to reveal veins of turquoise, ,Äă,Äăsmoky and iridescent, reminiscent of raku but created through her own low-fire process.

"Imagine if I influence five per cent of North American potters to start firing low," she said. "That's actually a huge difference in our carbon footprint."

Mary Fox with her second apprentice, Sabrina Sachiko Campbell, and her dogs Amy and Sasha in the pottery. (Morgan Brayton/Ladysmith Chronicle)

For Fox, innovation and joy are inseparable.

Her joy is delightfully evident in chapter titles like Sprinkle, sprinkle! which evokes the gleeful spontaneity she brings to every glaze test — and the way she giggles whenever she says it.

The chapter called Never Say Die tells the story of a piece that began as a failure and ended as a breakthrough. It demonstrates how firing low can allow for refiring, layering and fixing what doesn't quite "sing," as Fox puts it.

"My favourite chapter is Never Say Die because, if you're experimenting, you get pieces that just look awful when they come out of the kiln, and your first reaction is you just want to throw it away," Fox said. "But what if you started to approach those pieces differently? What if you started just approaching them as a challenge?"

Fox explained the process, excitedly pointing out photos in the book of a piece that began as a disaster.

"Now, does that look ugly as sin or what?" she asked. "Then I think, OK, I'm going to have one more kick at the can here. And I take this ugly dish, and I spray an orange terra sigillata over it, and I fire it again. This was fired in reduction so it was actually going between oxidation and reduction for this particular piece, and look what I got."

The bowl, originally coated in black terra sigillata (a fine liquid clay that creates a smooth, satin finish) and several layers of failed glaze tests, emerged from its final firing almost unrecognizable: warm ochres and sandy oranges flecked with shimmer, a rugged surface that looks both ancient and otherworldly. She named it Arid Planet.

"So that's how I'm trying to show the young people, look, you have an ugly pot. If it's fired low, you don't have to throw it away. You can try again. You can put something else on it and fire it again."

That same philosophy guides how Fox is shaping her legacy.

She didn't set out to become a mentor.

"You know, when I was younger, if I envisioned what I would be doing at 65? Well, I'd be exhibiting, I'd be lecturing," she said. "I didn't think that I would actually be stepping back from doing the work just so that I can help the young. But that is exactly what I've done."

In 2021, she created the Mary Fox Legacy Project. It funds apprenticeships and will eventually establish an artist-in-residence program and housing. Her first apprentice, Sarah Wilson, has since opened a gallery on First Avenue in Ladysmith. Sabrina Campbell recently wrapped up her apprenticeship. The newest apprentice, Cherry Macintosh, has just arrived to begin her training.

Fox says the goal is simple: to help young artists build sustainable careers in a field that's rarely lucrative.

"I didn't have that support when I was starting out," she said. "Now I can give it."

Fox's order makes room for chaos; her discipline invites play. In that balance, she's built not only glazes that sing but a legacy that will keep firing long after her own hands leave the wheel.

Developing Glazes: Low-Fire Reduction and Oxidation book launch: Nov. 15, 2 p.m., Wilson & Co., 411a 1st Ave in Ladysmith. RSVP to mary@maryfoxpottery.ca.

Studio sale: Nov. 1–2, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 321 3rd Ave., Ladysmith. All work 15 per cent off, except books, cards and shirts.