



The
**CERAMICS
CONGRESS
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**TRANSCENDING HERITAGE
- PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE -**



WHAT I LOVE.....ABOUT KOREA
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Korea was a place I knew little about until my mother, a captain in the nursing corps in the US Army, was called up to serve in the war in 1950. I was 8 years old.

Twenty years later, I mentored a doctoral student from Korea who wedged clay with his feet, turned the potter's wheel in the opposite direction, and introduced me to new and exotic taste sensations when we had the opportunity to cook together.

Through the years, as Korean students matriculated through NYU, my interactions with them became more concentrated and my fascination with the spirit of Korea, its culture and people, grew more profound.

Thus, when I made my first trip to Korea in '98, I hit the ground running. Chung Dung Hun, the doctoral student, was now a dean and he took time to tour me to regions in Korea famous for their crafts - in particular *hanji*, the paper used for covering doors, floors and windows and *onggi* pots, or storage jars, which are used for fermented foods such as the popular dish Kimchi.



Onggi pots outside a restaurant in Icheon

As the years have passed - now over 30, I have returned often, lecturing at Kookmin, Seoul National, and Ewa universities and consulting and jurying for the ceramic biennale in Gyeonggi province. On one occasion I was hosted by a dear IAC colleague, Kim Ik Young, an accomplished ceramic professor, designer and manufacturer.

I slept on an *ondol* heated floor, atop an *ibu* quilt and used a pillow filled with wheat husks. I thought how clever it was that these items were stored in the closet in the morning and the bedroom was transformed back into a day room. Most importantly, Ik Young introduced me to the white porcelain Moon jars, *pojagi* - an art form of patchwork quilting - and the Korean sauna, a tradition of soaking tubs, steam rooms and lots of body scrubs.

While I savor all these bits that are ingrained in Korean culture, when I speak about the Korea I love...I have to start with the Moon jar...an incredibly complex form - consisting of two

voluminous halves that arduously meet in the middle and are wood-fired so that the glow of the pure white luminescent glaze conjures the mystical lure of a full moon. A good moon jar is filled with soul, mystery, simplicity, and elegance. It is revered by the Koreans and is rooted in the austerity of Confucian philosophy- purity, goodness and humility.

[Kwon Dae Sup](#) is a master of the moon jar that I so admire . His commitment to tradition while allowing himself the artistic freedom to explore the serendipities of working wet clay is a gift of an enlightened artist. He epitomizes the Korean potter - one foot in the past and the other creatively reinventing and discovering, putting his special mark on this art form.

Another ceramic symbol of Korean culture that I love, and just as steeped in the past, is the earthenware thrown vessel known as *onggi*, a crock pot used for food storage. Its tradition is more than 1000 years old. Its low fire allows porosity, or breathability, making it an ideal container for fermentation. These jars are usually buried below ground, just outside the kitchen door, so just the top rims are accessible. Before refrigeration, fermented vegetables stored over the winter would not freeze in these buried jars and so the *onggi* jar provided nutrition and a source of Vitamin C throughout the winter.

I have to admit, however, that each time I return to Korea, a new window, another treasured experience, an added layer of aesthetic complexity, is added to my growing love affair with Korean culture. I try to connect with [Shin Sang Ho](#), a prolific artist who I've known for years. His studio is a treasure-trove of dynamic activity.



Shin Sang Ho with Judith Schwartz at his studio

I love the [Leeum Museum](#) for its prized celadons and intimate spaces, the [Amore Pacific Museum](#) for its innovative exhibitions and exciting architecture, and the [Gallery Hyundai](#) that goes beyond commercial aspects of selling, to make the visitor aware of the rich historical basis for Korean modern art and the cultural life of Korea. I also love their tea garden that transports you out of the city tussle of Seoul.

During my last journey to Korea in September 2019, I had an extraordinary experience with another former student, the remarkably talented artist [Jinnie Seo](#). Her sensitivity to materials and to Korean culture inspired her to reserve dinner at the [Onjium Culture Lab](#) - an institute dedicated to maintaining Korean traditions, namely in food, clothing, and residential architecture while still remaining relevant to modern society. My experience here demonstrated how powerfully successful their goals were achieved in honoring the past while embracing contemporary inspirations.

First of all, the food. Jinnie and I were counter seated with a view of the busy kitchen staff and the head chef, Sung Bae Park's magical culinary offerings. His inspiration, inventiveness and presentations reminded me of the clean, pure and simple spirit of the moon jar. He spoke of recipe origins, traditions from various regions of Korea and changing tastes, while discussing the nature of rice varieties and how fermentation was integral to Korean eating styles. His narratives were steeped with an understanding of the past but brought to the 21st Century table with impeccable tastings that were familiar yet refreshingly enlightened. While the meal was memorable, the educational conversation as each dish was presented made it unforgettable.



Chef Sung Bae Park



Onjium Kitchen

Within the same building, there is a research lab that preserves the traditions of Korean clothing so that historical styles can be tailor made using sourced fabrics and traditional methods of construction. On site researchers study construction methods, shape and styles as depicted in antique paintings and prints where they reconstruct garments directly sourced from these ancient records.



Onjium Clothing Research Lab

The architecture in the galleries also inspired from the past using the *honak* or Korean style of home construction. The paper floors, ceramic roof lines, wooden railings, framed windows and walls provided a perfectly restful environment to view the current haute couture show of contemporary clothing. The exhibition offered Avant-Garde forms of various designers ...one of whom was Kyung Sun Lee and her interpretation of Baji (pants). There were also new interpretations of the hanbok (dress), jeogori (jacket), and Chima (skirt) that could match any French runway chambre de couture.

One of the most endearing opportunities that has enriched my understanding of ceramics has been a love affair with Icheon in the Gyeonggi-do province. It is here that the [Ceramic Biennale](#) was born 20 years ago and where the region hosts one of the most professional experiences in ceramics in the world, attracting millions of visitors.



KICB 2019 - Jurors, International Ceramic Biennale

There is something for everyone. In fact, the biennale is a world's fair for clay as the organizers are in the business of promoting the ceramic arts as no other institution has ever attempted. The region dates back to the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910). The land provided an abundance of easily obtainable clays which resulted in the development of numerous pottery factories. Due to its rich history, it has become a region that attracts artists. Artists attract galleries, museums, restaurants and now the region has a lively cultural mix. It was therefore not surprising that this is where I have met so many talented artists working in clay from all over the world.



Ye Village - Artist Studios and Galleries

On a recent visit I went to the [Ye ceramic village](#) a ceramic cornucopia with artist studios, showrooms with over 300 kilns where one can walk from one studio to another. A pottery village for sure!

These are things that I love about Korea and I have integrated many of these experiences into my personal lifestyle with clothes, food and most certainly into my home - with many works of ceramic art that remind me of the Korean spirit and the many talented friends I have made.

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