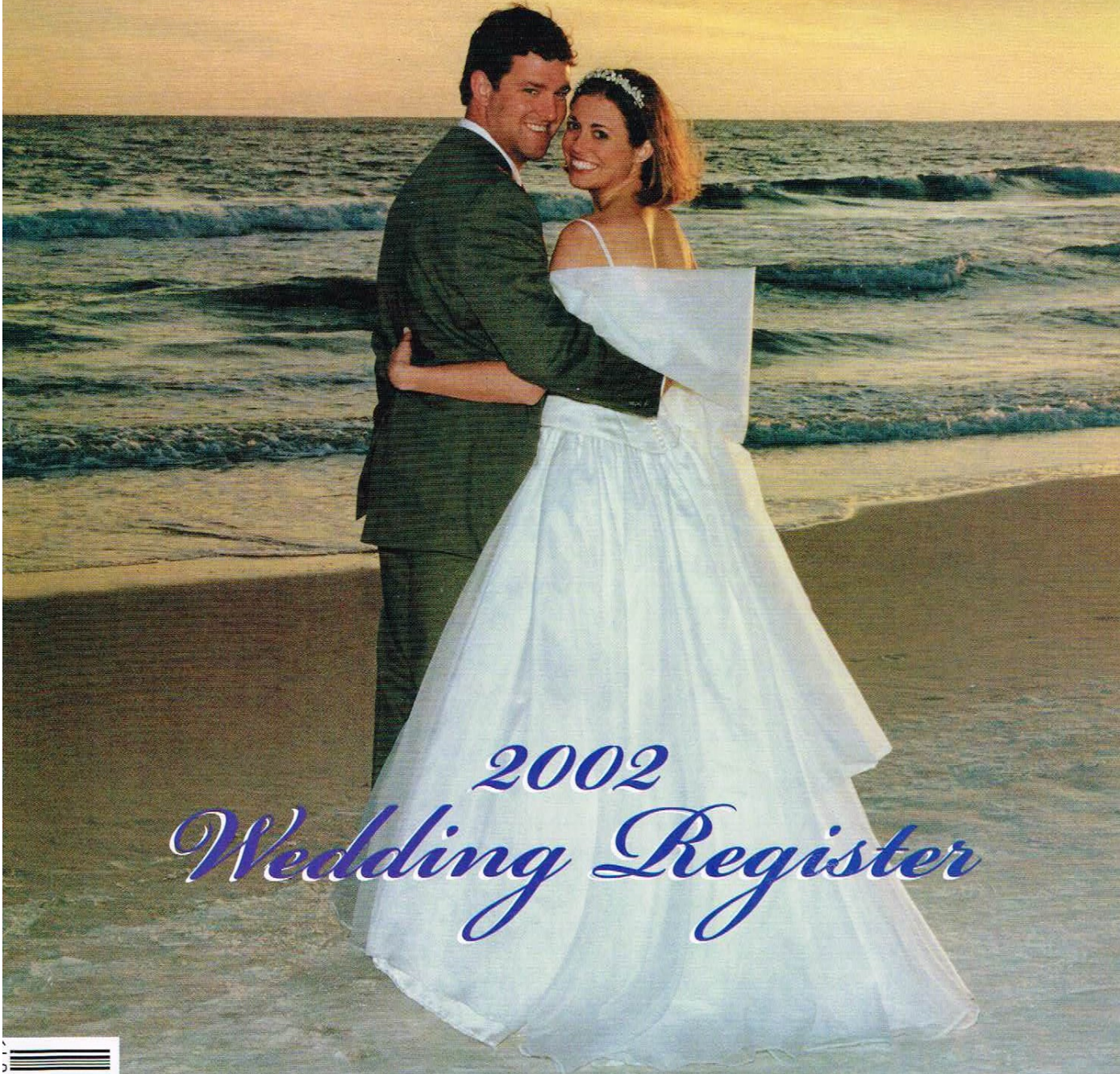
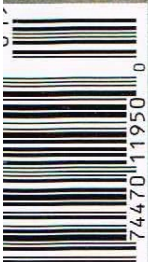


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## 2002 *Wedding Register*



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# Where the Elephants Roam

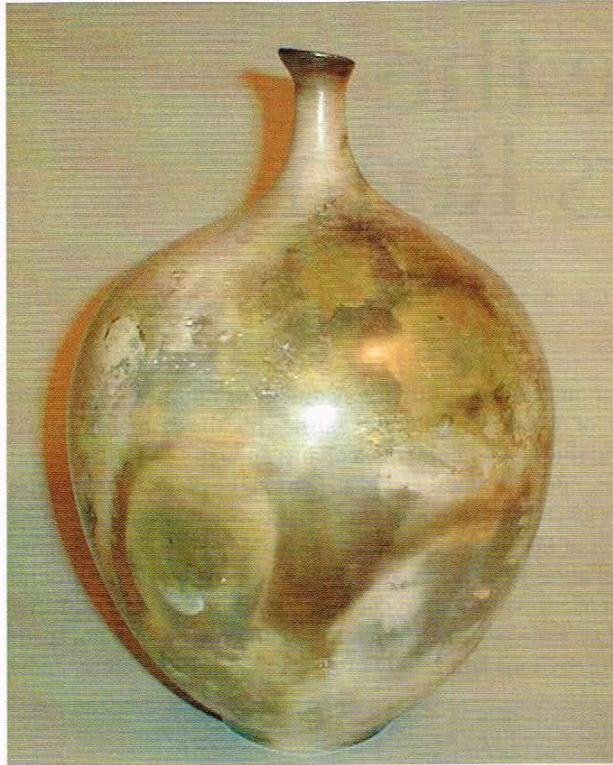
BY MARY CAROL MILLER



Saltillo is a quiet town, a thriving bedroom community that sits in the shadow of Tupelo's hustle and bustle. It's the last place you'd expect to find thundering herds of elephants and tales of bushmen and kudu hunters. But on a suburban street, behind the doors of Antoinette Badenhorst's gracious brick home, that's exactly what you'll encounter. Galloping about her hallways and living room and studio are mighty African elephants, their tusks and tails wrapped gracefully around delicate porcelain lamps and curving along the corners of her magnificent ceramic pottery. They are the culmination of a life spent absorbing the rhythms and beauty of African culture and nature, now



Antoinette Badenhorst, a transplanted South African, now spends her days in Saltillo, creating majestic forms from lumps of clay, like the wheel-thrown and altered pot above, entitled Golden African Lady.



The President's Pot, a wheel-thrown bottle given to President George Bush and his wife Laura

transplanted to the Mississippi countryside. And if Antoinette had paid any attention at all to her husband's early artistic criticism, the world would be a lesser place for the absence of her art.

She laughs as she recalls her first artistic yearnings. "It was soon after I had married Koos, and we were walking past a shop window. There, in the window, was beautiful pottery. I told Koos, 'That is what I want to do.'" She signed up for lessons in Potchefstroom, South Africa, but studied formally for only a few months. Koos cast a skeptical eye on her first efforts and kindly but firmly told her, "You'll never be a potter." Over the years, he has eaten those words on award-winning earthenware dishes, shared his workspace with a growing collection of pottery tools, kilns, and pits and watched with pride as Antoinette's reputation spread throughout South Africa and the world. While raising three daughters, she created increasingly difficult works of porcelain pottery and taught others to transform balls of clay into bowls, vases, and jars. "Anyone can learn pottery," she says with a reassuring smile, remembering her students throughout the years. "I like to open people's minds, and through art, their way of living."

Years spent on the edge of the massive Kruger National Park provided ample opportunity for Antoinette to study the elephants who roamed freely there. Animals had been a major part of her childhood, spent on a Namibian farm with a pet baboon and ostriches in the pasture. But the elephants captured her imagination as no other animal had, and she

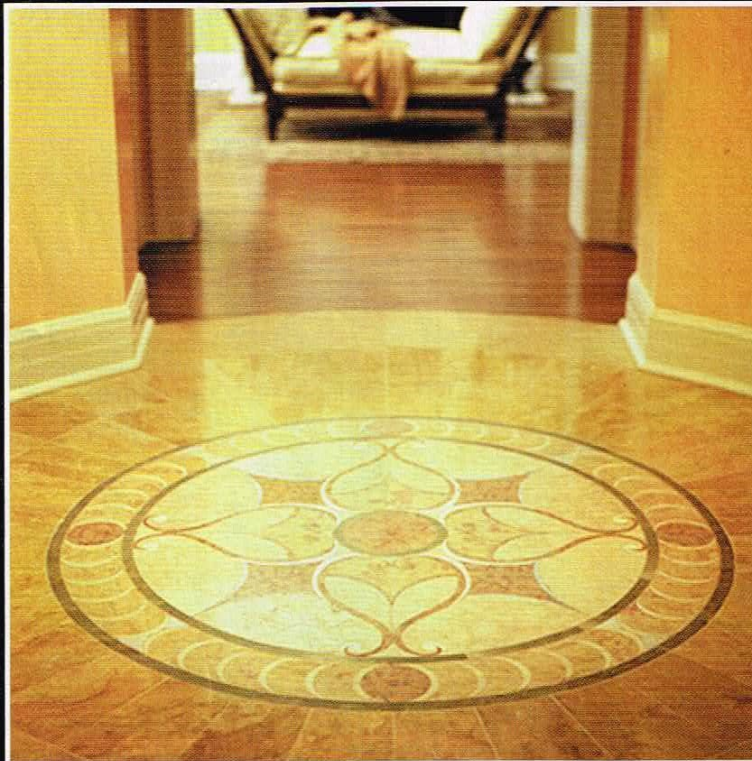


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WHERE THE ELEPHANTS ROAM

began to incorporate them into her pieces. They would come to be an easily recognizable symbol of her talent, and they would follow her into the next phase of her life and career, half a world away.

In March of 1999, after much soul-searching and many hard goodbyes, the Badenhorsts left South Africa for the unknown world of Mississippi. Left behind, along with friends and family and all that was familiar, were Antoinette's kilns and firepits and beloved elephants. The family arrived in Memphis on a cold, rainy night, near midnight, faced with a daunting drive ("on the wrong side of the road!" remembers Antoinette) across a strange city and down to Tupelo. Koos' coworkers had advised that Saltillo, with its small-town atmosphere, might be an easier transition for them, so they settled there and began to build a new life.

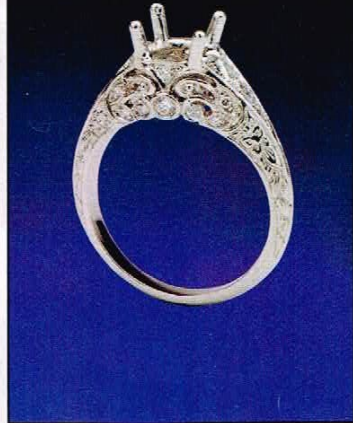
Antoinette had brought a few small pottery tools along with her to America, along with a fascinating collection of African folkart that she says "takes me back to my roots." Hanging on the wall of her home are necklaces of polished acorns and seeds, crafted by native women to look almost like jewels. Next to them is a dark hollow log capped with deerskin, filled with viciously sharp bushmen's arrows. "They still have poison on the tips, but don't worry, I have them covered," she reassures her guest. Paintings done by her mother and daughter depict scenes of everyday life in African villages and the majestic strength of lions and elephants.

"I have the rhythm of Africa in my blood," Antoinette says with a hint of longing, and it's evident in her work that that's true. A major part of coping with a brand new environment was plunging back into her pottery endeavors. Having settled her family in an apartment, she found space in a new friend's barn and gradually accumulated the equipment she would need to resume

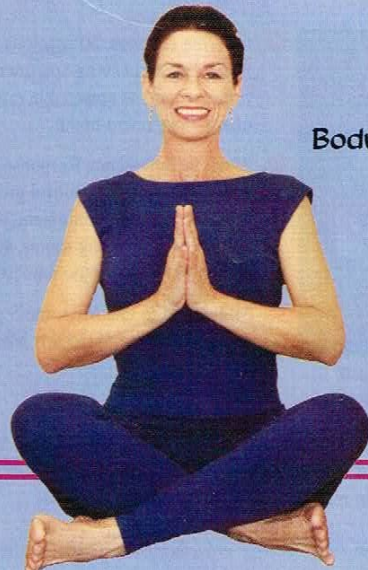


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## WHERE THE ELEPHANTS ROAM

her career. Boxes of clay arrived and porous boards were laid out for her to work on. Fine handtools crafted delicate tusks and floppy, wrinkled elephant ears into heavy white molds. Carefully smoothed and glazed bowls, primitive vases with narrow, African-influenced necks, and ceramic discs with the ubiquitous elephants flowed from her kilns and captured the hearts of her new neighbors. Tall, impossibly thin porcelain lamps were encircled by racing elephants, their skin transilluminated by the bulb within. She experimented with new techniques, layering her clay around grass stems and gauze, creating unusual textures as the organic material burned away in the kiln.

A move to a new house over the summer provided space for a new studio, and now she spends her time there, creating beauty that embraces both her old world and the new. Her work has been enthusiastically received, not only in North Mississippi but statewide and nationally. She won First Prize for Three Dimensional Work at the 1999 George Ohr competition in Biloxi and has seen her pieces selected for international exhibits in Nebraska and several museum collections.

It's never easy to pull up roots and begin a new life. Beyond the obvious complications of cultural differences and minor aggravations lies a network of legal roadblocks and uncertainty. Antoinette hurdled one of those roadblocks recently, receiving word that her move to Mississippi is permanent. It has inspired her to make plans for a new gallery and a chance to teach once again, her passion for eighteen years. "I believe it's part of me to give back to the community what they gave to me, and I have to give myself in full." South Africa's loss is Mississippi's gain, and Antoinette Badenhorst's talented hands will fill many a Southern home with the elegance of the Lost Continent in the years to come.

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