

ONE A PART OF THE COMMUNITY

Unlike my husband Scott who knows all the people in our street and is up for a chat random people on the street, I'm happy with my own company or mixing with just half a dozen close friends one or two at a time.

So how did we end up having a community arts hub in our house with dozens of visitors every week?

It evolved slowly. One hundred and thirty years ago, William Gribble started baking bread for residents of a new Sydney suburb called Marrickville. That bakery was an important part of the Marrickville community until the 1950s. It was 18 years ago when we bought that old bakery building to raise our kids. Now I have kilns cooking away constantly turning clay into ceramics for locals.

The Bakehouse Studio had its beginnings when our girls were two or three years old. They loved the studio space and I started running kids art classes for their

friends – most parents want their kids to paint, but not necessarily in their loungeroom. Then some parents lamented that they'd never rarely had the opportunity to make art when they were young and asked whether I would teach them too?

My private art studio soon became a community resource – like that original bakery had been. When I gravitated to ceramics, everyone came with me. There is something about ceramics. It sounds clichéd to say that it's 'grounding', but it is. Clay is dug out of the ground and we transform it into vessels to eat and drink out of, or to just look at.

I suspect for some people, coming to the studio gives them permission to be creative. For others, playing with clay is only part of the reason they come. The conversation is important. As are chance encounters with interesting people.

Nine years ago, we turned the flat above the studio





Photo - Melanie Anderson - WOW - Sydney 2019

into an Airbnb. That introduced a whole new layer to the community. People from all over the world came to stay, drawn in part with what they could glean from the listing about our community. Some of those people come back occasionally and our Christmas lunch always includes Airbnb visitors.

I don't need to leave home to be part of the community because the community comes to me, which I love. They come not just to see me, but to see each other and be part of a community of like-minded, creatively inspired people.

I'm always surprised at how many unexpected visitors we have over the course of a week and a weekend. They come to drop off work to be fired. To pick up work. Or just to have a coffee. I can't imagine living in a 'normal' house. I think I would find it terribly lonely.

So for me community feels like a place where I'm

needed and belong. A place where people come together to share their weekly stories, adventures and challenges. We celebrate our Bakehouse community each year with a pre-Christmas exhibition weekend where we invite the wider community to come and see how our work has evolved and find handmade Christmas gifts.

I'm pleased to say that Covid has not negatively impacted on the cohesiveness of the Bakehouse Studio, with groups continuing to meet (practicing social distancing and hand hygiene) throughout these times. More than ever in these times, people have found the need to come together and create, to be part of a community.

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