

culture

JOIE DE VIVRE



LES ARTISTES

POTTERY: A LOVE STORY

Emily and David Wortman create a tourist destination of their out-of-the-way pottery store in Duson

by Will Kalec portrait by Romero & Romero

SYMBOLS OF HOME: Catering to both locals and out-of-towners who visit their pottery shop looking for either mementos of home or keepsakes from a trip to Cajun Country, many of Emily and David Wortman's pieces feature classic South Louisiana icons like crawfish or, like on the pot above, fleur de lis.

WORTH THE TRIP: The Wortman Pottery showroom in Duson is definitely off-the-beaten path, nestled amongst rice fields, but offers visitors an authentic tourism experience in Acadiana.

Q&A

Emily and David Wortman

1

Was opening a pottery shop always the dream when you two started seeing each other?

David: The plan was for me to get a university teaching job. That would have been the easy path. And so the first big push was to do that, although that was nearly impossible for all the newly-minted MFAs, let alone the older-minted MFAs. So it was two choices, and when it looked that May that I wasn't getting a teaching job, we started making pots full-time.

2

If teaching was the easy path, does that make pottery the hard path?

David: Well, working for a university you got a salary, a retirement, health benefits. **Emily:** But we did do some art shows while we were at Tulane, so we had an idea of what this world would be. We did Jazz Fest while we were at Tulane (in 1976). So this life wasn't a complete shock to us.

3

Has there been an evolution in your pots?

Emily: Oh yes. People will show us pictures of pots we made and they'll tell us that it's their favorite piece and so on, and we'll just say to ourselves, 'Oh no.' Because you know you're doing so much better work now. Our glazes have changed, David's pot shapes have changed. It's different, in a good way.



Authenticity begins where the pavement ends, down a bumpy gravel road that's hell on rental cars but easy on adventurous souls. It seems silly looking back now, what with countless visitors who've stepped foot in the Wortman Pottery showroom over the years, but owners and creators Emily and David Wortman actually worried about tourism logistics like that 10 years ago when they wrestled with the notion of ditching their nomadic art show life for something stable and permanent.

Turns out, those concerns were unwarranted. A little dust on the tires or dings to the undercarriage of your \$39-a-day Chevy Cruze isn't much of a deterrent for those seeking something real, a place that isn't cookie-cutter Cajun.

Rice fields and crawfish farms are nature's guardrails on both sides of the road, as indigenous Louisiana birds fly overhead like they were lifted from the John James Audubon book on your grandmother's coffee table. The wood-frame pottery studio sits on a slab of land that's been in David Wortman's family for more than a century. Shelves of nationally-renowned handcrafted pottery, much of which is accented with ceramic regional ornaments and decorations like crawfish or oyster shells, cover every wall of the showroom — the physical manifestation of a relationship both personal and professional.

As if this whole scene couldn't get any more Rockwellian, out back, there's an old plumber who's fishing in the pond. But, don't count on him being here when you





“We really broadened our horizons and in addition to art shows we did wholesale to craft galleries, so we stayed at home making a lot of pots and shipping those out,” Emily says. “And when we got into that, we thought, ‘Well, do we really need to be on the road this much? Maybe it’d be better if people came to us?’”

“Then, you get into the rural tourism mindset: Do people really want to drive down a little gravel road? Well, turns out they do!”

The Wortman’s Pottery is art for everyday use. The bowls, pots and pitchers that come from Duson and are shipped throughout the country are inspired by work of famous Mississippi master potter Peter Anderson of Shearwater Pottery in Ocean Springs — pieces that David says he’s been eating out of and drinking from since he was six years old.

“With pots, handles have to work, knobs have to work,” David says. “Handles on pitchers and mugs have to feel good in your hand. Spouts need to pour properly and not drip too much. So [there are] a lot of considerations when you’re making pottery. Yet there are potters out there who follow all those rules, and make things functional, who create pots that are vastly different from the other guys’ pots. There’s room to make a pot have a style and a feel.”

Wortman Pottery is crafted using multiple techniques, including wheel-thrown, slab and hand-built pieces. Many of the molds used are the same molds Emily designed in the 1970s.

“Within the first week of us making pots, we realize we had to divide up things or else we were going to get divorced,” David says in a humorous tone but with more than a sprinkle of sincerity.

“We really divided it up so that David is the pure potter and I’m the hand-builder,” Emily says. “I’ll make things and attach them to his pots. And then, I load kilns and do other things that he can’t stand to do. We both glaze pieces. But all of our work, we both touch at some point. So it’s always hands-on. It’s all collaboration, from beginning to end.” ■

come around. He’s not a featured attraction of this rural tourism destination. He’s just waiting to get paid.

“It’s very country,” Emily says through laughter.

For the entirety of their relationship, David and Emily have made pottery together, dating all the way back to when they met as students at Tulane in the mid-1970s. Once regulars at weekend art shows and craft fairs throughout the Southeast, the artistic power couple now lets patrons come to them, offering the type of hospitality and tokens of Cajun country that can make the trip worthwhile.

“You know, we are 3.3 miles from I-10, from the exit,” David says. “But having the shop is still relatively new to us. Why we didn’t adopt this style — selling out of a showroom — early on, I don’t know, but everyone was doing art shows and making money doing it.”

Emily interjects.

Emily and David Wortman of Duson take great pride in producing pottery pieces that are not only pretty to look at, but also functional in design — making sure bowls are deep enough to eat out of and spouts pour correctly, for instance.



HERE'S THE CATCH

Steeped in history and tradition, commercial fishing is a long-standing pillar of south Louisiana's economy which is currently under siege as global trade continues to affect the bottom line of local fishermen

BY WILLIAM KALEC



DOWN HERE,

fishing the fertile inland waters and the bountiful Gulf of Mexico for sustenance and a salary has been a way of life for as long as anyone can remember. It's not just what the fishermen do. It's who they are.

“Yeah, this is my job, but it's more than that,” says Acy Cooper, Jr., a longtime commercial shrimper and board member at Louisiana Seafood Promotion & Marketing — a state-run advocacy group for the industry. “My family's life has been spent on the water. A lot of families have grown up on the water.”

That sense of generational pride — a routine wrapped in romanticism — is the backbone of the economic powerhouse that is commercial fishing in Louisiana.

As the nation's second-leading seafood supplier, Louisiana accounts for 70 percent of the oysters caught in the United States, harvests 313,000 alligators annually, 110 million pounds of crawfish per year and boasts a shrimp industry that employs 15,000 people and generates a \$1.3 billion annual economic impact. As a whole, Louisiana Seafood is responsible for a \$2.4 billion yearly economic impact.

One out of every 70 jobs in Louisiana is tied to the seafood industry.

“There was a time where kids would drop out of school early — I'm talking 8th grade — because of the opportunity to make money on the water, fishing and shrimping,” Cooper says. “I tried to get my boys to go to college, but they got into the family business with me.”

“But it's not like that anymore. That's becoming rarer and rarer with the ways things are today. Why would you want to do this?”

Though fully-ingrained into the south Louisiana culture, independent commercial fishermen have seen their profit margins dip dramatically in the past decade, as operation costs continue to rise while an influx of foreign imports — particularly from Asia — have driven down the price per pound to break-even-at-best levels.

“For generations, Louisianans have developed a culture and economy surrounding our seafood industry,” Louisiana Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser, said at a press conference in July 2018. “We are especially proud of our shrimp harvested directly from the waters of the Gulf of Mexico; however,

“WE ARE ESPECIALLY PROUD OF OUR SHRIMP HARVESTED DIRECTLY FROM THE WATERS OF THE GULF OF MEXICO; HOWEVER, THE ENTIRE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY HAS BEEN IN SEVERE DECLINE OVER THE LAST DECADE DUE TO UNFAIRLY IMPORTED SEAFOOD.”

Louisiana Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser



the entire seafood industry has been in severe decline over the last decade due to unfairly imported seafood.”

Recognizing the issues plaguing the seafood industry — particularly in the shrimping sector — Nungesser implored Louisiana’s Congressional delegation to introduce a 10-cent-per-pound inspection fee on all shrimp imports. The legislation would first insure the safety of foreign-raised seafood, which often is injected with antibiotics and other chemicals to produce a larger haul. Second, the inspection fee would make Louisiana-based seafood more competitively priced.

While holding foreign seafood to the same health standards as domestic seafood, will aid the cause of those who make their living on the south Louisiana waters, it won’t solve the issues dogging local fishermen completely.

One potential solution would be for the federal government to subsidize certain fishermen or certain types of seafood catches the same way it subsidizes American farmers who grow certain crops when that crop commodity falls in price. For instance, sugar cane and sugar beet farmers receive more than \$1 billion annually in government subsidies.

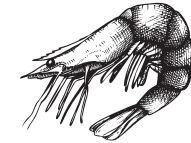
Cooper strongly endorses placing a firm cap on foreign imports allowed to enter the American marketplace annually — a suggestion that seems somewhat radical to free marketers except that these restrictive policies are already in place for many agricultural goods. Doing so would prevent foreign sources from flooding the market with product, thus artificially driving down the price per pound to the point where it financially cripples domestic operators.

“Once this gets in your blood, you can’t get it out of you,” Cooper Jr. says. “I wouldn’t know what else to do, honestly. I know a lot of us on the water are the same way. But we’re older, and it’s just getting harder and harder at these prices. You start to worry about things like expenses, and how am I going to pay my bills?”

“For as hard as we work, those are things a shrimper should never have to worry about.”



THE IMPACT OF A SPECIES



SHRIMP

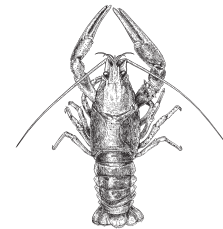
The shrimp industry accounts for **15,000 jobs** and an annual impact of **\$1.3 billion** for Louisiana.



OYSTER

Seventy percent of the oysters caught in the U.S. are from the Gulf Coast.

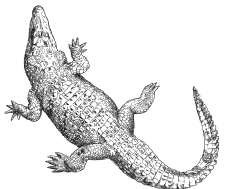
Louisiana’s commercial oyster industry, which accounts for almost **4,000 jobs**, has an economic impact of **\$317 million** annually.



CRAWFISH

Louisiana has more than **1,000 crawfish farmers**, plus more than **800 commercial fishermen** who catch wild crawfish.

The **110 million pounds of crawfish** harvested each year have an annual economic impact of **\$120 million**.



ALLIGATOR

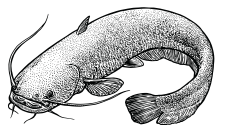
313,000 wild and farmed alligators are harvested per year in Louisiana.

Alligator harvests have a total annual economic impact of **\$104 million**.



CRAB

Crabs from Louisiana generate an annual economic impact of **\$293 million** and more than **3,000 jobs**.



FISH

A myriad of factors, both foreign and domestic, have severely **cut into the profit margins** for those who make their living on the water’s bounty.

PRIDE OF ACADIANA PLAYLIST

“UL Lafayette Fight Song”

In 1950, the university sponsored a contest among students to come up with an official school fight song.

The winner, the brother-sister duo of Jack and Hilma Labauve, received a \$100 savings bond, for composing the song that’s played after Ragin’ Cajuns scores. Over the years, there have been a few minor changes to the song, such as changing the word Bulldogs (then the mascot) to Cajuns.

“RESPECT”

For some time now, this Aretha Franklin hit has been a staple in The Pride of Acadiana’s rotation of songs. The band performs a fanfare rendition at the beginning of its pregame on-field performance, and belts out longer versions for in-game breaks and parade appearances.

“JAMBALAYA”

Considering this old Hank Williams song features multiple regional cultural references in almost every lyric, it’s no wonder why The Pride of Acadiana incorporates it into its pregame routine.

THE BEAT GOES ON

Jason Missal, director of UL Lafayette’s marching band, manages to leave his mark while honoring tradition

by Will Kalec portrait by Romero & Romero

It’s Saturday — a football Saturday — in Acadiana, a region like many in the South where the sport is equal parts game and gospel.

Kickoff is just a few hours away, meaning there’s even less time than that until The Pride of Acadiana — UL Lafayette’s famed marching band — takes to the plastic grass of Cajun Field. Jason Missal, the fresh-faced director of this complicated musical maneuvering, isn’t nervous, though. Excited, yes. Nervous, never.

By now, he reasons, the work has been put in, the sacrifices made, the necessary adjustments ... um, adjusted. There’s nothing left to do but play.

Missal can’t promise victory.

But he sure as heck guarantees harmony.

“Going to a school like UL, it’s a whole new ballgame,” says Missal, who previously directed the band at Abilene Christian University in Texas. “It’s Division I football. The atmosphere is totally different ... and the band is a big part of that. It’s part of the heartbeat. You’re aware of that as the director, trying to keep that energy up. Fans take pride in the team and its traditions and the band and its traditions, as well. It just goes into that total game-day atmosphere.”

The realization that Missal ended up here, should be no surprise. Well, here as in Lafayette, maybe. But here as in a marching band director almost seemed preordained. Missal grew up in a “House of Music.” As he says, “My father was a band director and his father was a band director.”

As an instrumental music education major at Oklahoma State University, Missal was a section leader within the Cowboy Marching Band as a sophomore and junior, and the drum major as a senior.

So when it comes to leading student musicians, Missal has literally marched in their shoes.

“Always as a teacher and a director, you have to consider the welfare of the band and the betterment of the individual student,” Missal says. “So when it comes to musical decisions, logistical decisions, time commitments, I’m making all of those from their perspective. This is a lot of time to devote to an activity, but it’s our hope that the experience they have in rehearsal and on game day and the social, family atmosphere we’re promoting, makes all of it worthwhile.”

More delegator than dictator as a band leader, Missal began to put his own thumbprint on The Pride of Acadiana when he took over for Eric Melley prior to the 2017 football

“ALMA MATER:” Much like the fight song, the “Alma Mater” came to be thanks to a contest. Unlike the fight song however, the words of the Alma Mater haven’t changed over the years.

season. First, he bestowed a lot of responsibility upon fellow music faculty member Brett Landry, who was placed in charge of the band’s percussion section and collaborated with Missal in all things Pride of Acadiana: formations, music selection and so on.

Additionally, Missal placed greater responsibility upon the actual band members, granting them a sense of ownership, and in turn, greater stakes in the on-the-field/in-the-stands product on Saturdays. Doing so enabled Missal to focus his attention and energy on a list of year-one goals, including raising the playing standard of the band, raising the marching standard of the band, and giving it a well-defined sense of structure.

“We’re dealing with, in my first year here at UL, a band of nearly 300,” Missal says. “So not only do you have to be proficient in all the things that make a good band — logistics, music, formation and movement, cohesion — but you have to be part psychologist, too. You have to be aware of the collective morale, as well as the individual morale of individuals and sections of the band. So you have to wear a lot of hats.

“But showing you care about the students as people, showing you value them more than an entity is the best way to get them to buy-in to the goals of the band.”

Understanding the attachment fans, alumni and students have with the school’s marching band, Missal didn’t make sweeping changes in 2017. Most in attendance at Cajun Field might not have even noticed them. Missal’s version of The Pride of Acadiana played in the stands while both the Ragin’ Cajuns offense and defense was on the field, which was different. But the 170-band member pregame routine wasn’t touched. Music selection wasn’t altered much.

In time, Missal hopes to adjust the pregame routine to feature formations that incorporate all members of the marching band and find more contemporary titles to play while in the stands.

“There’s a strong sense of culture here,” Missal says. “The band is a part of that. I swear, as soon as I was hired, it seemed the entire region of South Louisiana ‘friended’ me on Facebook and wanted to know about what was going on. It was great to see that enthusiasm, that excitement for The Pride of Acadiana. It makes you aware of what it means to the fans and students, so it’s hard not to be excited about it and where we want it to go.” ■

