





# Jobi Pottery

A Cape cottage industry evolves, yet stays true to its Truro roots.

BY JANICE RANDALL ROHLF  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN CUTRONA

Using the fine point of a small paintbrush, Susan Kurtzman whips two strokes of black over a splotch of blue on an unglazed white pottery bowl, and, voilà, a fish appears. A rapid-fire dot of black makes an eye, and a hasty squiggle yields the illusion of gills. Creating this little minnow has taken five seconds . . . or less. Kurtzman continues. More and more minnows—yellow, red, and green—take shape until there's an entire school swimming on the surface of the bowl. She puts it down, picks up a plate, and repeats the artistic choreography. Nothing could seem simpler; a kid could do it, many would say, and that's where they'd be wrong.

"Joe would sit with me for hours and hours, day after day for months, until I got it just right," says Kurtzman, seated in her Depot Road studio, Retro Truro, overlooking

INSET, TOP: Joe Colliano and Susan Kurtzman. Colliano started Jobi Pottery in 1951 with the late Bill Hastings. Kurtzman bought the business two years ago. OPPOSITE: The minnow is a traditional Jobi design, originally conceived in the 1950s.





Steve Locke, above, whose parents took over the business in the 1970s, mans the production end of Jobi Pottery. OPPOSITE: Red is new to the Jobi line, as is painting the minnows out of formation.

the Pamet River. Joe is Joe Colliano, now 81, one half of Jobi Pottery; the "bi" is for Bill Hastings who passed away in 2002. Joe and Bill were a couple for more than 50 years, and during that time they produced thousands of pieces of pottery in a converted hot dog stand near the Highland Lighthouse. Jobi Pottery, with its unique retro-looking shapes and designs, is now highly collectible.

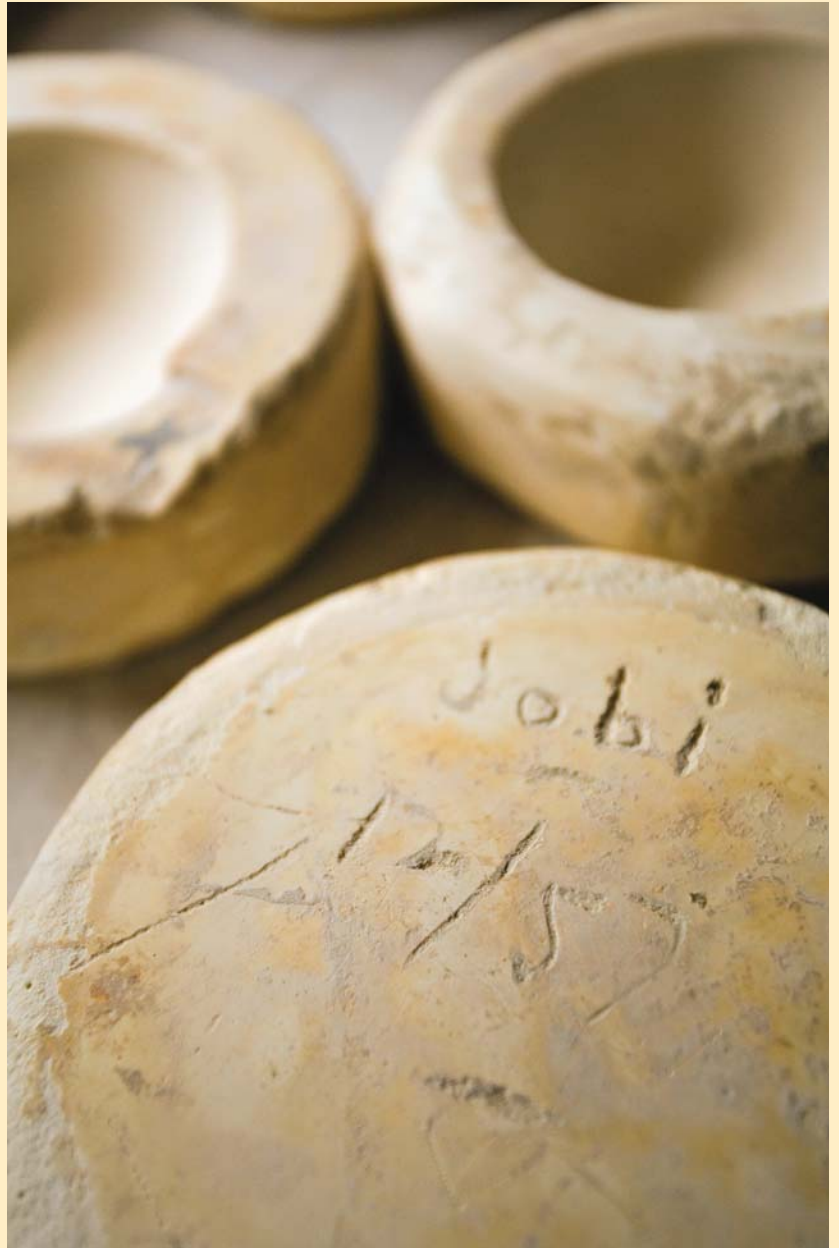
Kurtzman, a former New York City advertising executive who moved to Truro in 2000, was curator of the Highland House Museum when one day, she remembers, Joe walked in and said, "I'm burning everything." Curious, Kurtzman asked the then-stranger-to-her what he was setting on fire, and, fortunately, talked him out of it. In addition to donating some 300 priceless photographs to the museum, Joe took Kurtzman under his wing and today, as the owner of Jobi Pottery, she is dedicated to perpetuating the original designs. Along with the trademark minnows, traditional Jobi patterns include blueberries, cattails, and sandpipers, all of which are currently replicated by

Kurtzman and her "apprentices," mostly local people she has trained with the same discerning eye as Joe kept on her. "It's a Jobi tradition to hire local people," explains Kurtzman. "Joe and Bill had Nancy Whorf and Elsa Rose as helpers."

Jobi started in 1951 as a Truro cottage industry. Kurtzman is adamant about keeping it that way. Each piece is still hand-poured, individually shaped, and painted free-hand, all of which takes place within a few hundred yards of Kurtzman's 1830s home. In a shed located equidistant from her house and her studio/shop, Jobi's new owner proudly shows off a recently purchased state-of-the-art Skutt automatic kiln. With the same dexterity as an anal housewife would use to load a dishwasher, Steve Locke arranges multiple pieces of slipware. Locke's parents, Lee and Elizabeth, bought Jobi Pottery from Joe and Bill in the mid-1970s, when the two men had tired of running the business. Although the founders were happy to sell their nearly 250 molds—everything from salt and pepper shakers to large vases—they would not relinquish the name, so the Lockes called their

"JOSEPH CAMPOS AND I HAVE KNOWN JOE AND BILL FOR MANY YEARS AND HAVE ACQUIRED SEVERAL OF THEIR PIECES. THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO COME TO THE MUSEUM WHO HAVE PIECES OF JOBI POTTERY NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME."

—Malcolm Gray, assistant curator,  
Highland House Museum, Truro



Joe and Bill in the early years of Jobi Pottery.



It takes patience and long hours of training to get the Jobi designs just right. For more information, visit [www.retrotruro.com](http://www.retrotruro.com) or call 508-349-2303.

business "Truro Crafters." Now, with Steve Locke working for Kurtzman on production and Joe Colliano stopping by frequently, it is truly a three-generation business. Kurtzman got all the molds, kilns, *and* the right to use the Jobi name in perpetuity.

Grateful for Joe's exacting tutelage and continued vigilance over her handiwork, Kurtzman is, after all, an artist in her own right, and as such she exercises poetic license. "Being an accountant, Joe's minnow design had the fish in formation," says Kurtzman, who has a degree in ceramic design from U.C. Berkeley. "I take the fish out of formation; that looks more like me." All the paint colors used, except for red, which for a long time contained lead, are exactly the same now as in Joe and Bill's day. To ensure this consistency, the glazes come from the same manufacturers: Dunco, Mayco, and Gare.

Three months ago, Kurtzman and Locke were finishing preparations for the second season of Retro Truro. Nearly 3,000 pieces of Jobi Pottery were waiting to be snatched up by collectors and admirers from all over the country and just down the street. In her studio, Kurtzman sat with two trusted helpers, Gillian Canavan and Deb Shaw, wielding paintbrushes. By now, they were so adept at their skill that they could simultaneously carry on a lively three-way conversation and create flawless designs without missing a beat. The cottage-industry tradition



begun by Joe and Bill more than half a century earlier was flourishing, and the sense of family was still strong. Sad that Gillian would be leaving soon for graduate studies in art, Kurtzman couldn't resist teasing her: "And just when I finally thought you'd become so good at this, that I wrapped up my special paintbrush and gave it to you for Christmas." Clearly, the Jobi torch isn't ready to be passed on for a fourth time quite yet. 🗿

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