



RANDY SINER | NMBW

In the pictures at left above, Lia Lynn Rosen of Clay Kodesh begins the process of shaping and forming a pot. At right, she displays one of her finished works.

## Clay Kodesh's Rosen imbues art with spirituality

BY DAMON SCOTT | NMBW STAFF

Lia Lynn Rosen left Albuquerque in a quest for the Santa Fe spirit and more foot traffic to her art studio.

The ceramic artist and teacher operated Clay Kodesh out of a garage in Albuquerque's Southeast Heights for many years, but said it was never conducive for consistently drawing customers.

After just two weeks in Santa Fe, Rosen said two couples — one local and one from Los Angeles — stopped by and bought her work. She said people regularly stroll around the studios in the area, including the Upper Canyon Road neighborhood where her new studio is located.

"[Customers] are here to buy and bring back a piece of the Southwest. I feel that people want us to be [here so] they can return to their crazy and complex lives and [take] a piece of spirituality home with them," she said.

Rosen also recently revamped her website. Now that she is in a more central location, she is getting the word out in person and through her website that she's more accessible as well, whether during business hours, by appointment or one-on-one in a pottery class.

The new digs and website got Rosen noticed by microlender ACCIÓN New Mexico • Arizona • Colorado. Lynn Trojahn, vice president of advancement, was first introduced to Rosen's work when she bought her pottery as gifts.

She said Rosen is a "quintessential" ACCIÓN client, and since Trojahn is also Jewish, Rosen's work means a lot to her.

"It's challenging for entrepreneurs who are artisans to have little collateral and [get] just a small amount of capital," Trojahn said.

Rosen said her motivation as a businesswoman is threefold. She wants to make a living, teach and pass on what she's learned as an artist and educator since 1980. The 55-year-old began her pottery training in 1972 at age 17.

"I think that artists have a deeply rooted commitment to follow their vision or calling, combined with the incentive to survive financially," she said. "These [ideas] feed each other and form a basis for one's life work."

Her life work reflects Jewish and Southwestern traditions. Much of it ties into Jewish customs, such as a mezuzah, which contains Hebrew verses from the Torah. Other works are what she describes as awareness pieces. In 1992, she created three "Blessing Shields" that dealt with the subjects of AIDS, breast cancer and a hate crime involving the murder of a gay person.

She said Jewish religious life has evolved over the past 20 years to include women's views and authority, and that "has affected my ability to create new forms of ceremonial arts that reflect a feminine sensibility."

She built her new website around those influences, which also include African indigo-dyed garments, American Indian storytelling, Southwestern Puebloan clay tradition and Middle Eastern amulets.

Rosen used to get the word out to potential customers primarily by accessing her "small world" — Jewish feminists and Jewish artists. Her work initially only served

### Vital Stats:

**Company:** Clay Kodesh Arts and Learning  
**Owner:** Lia Lynn Rosen  
**Address:** 1519 Upper Canyon Road, #16 Santa Fe 87501  
**Phone:** (505) 463-5822  
**Website:** claykodesh.com  
**Employees:** one  
**Revenue:** \$37,000 (2009)

### Strategies:

1. Invest in and emphasize the "dying arts" of honest craftsmanship and custom, personalized work.
2. Exhibit both quality and welcoming access in everything you do. "I want folks to know they can come see me in person, call me up, and also learn to do what I do," Rosen said.
3. Work from the heart — it will be felt and responded to in kind.

that niche market. But she has realized that the market is not defined by a customer's affiliation, but by qualities that all customers share. She has opened up her customer base by not focusing solely on Jewish-themed works, but pieces that have a more general appeal.

"I now find that every human being has a desire for ways to contact the spiritual through our daily acts — as when using a beautifully made pot — [and] everyone needs to give to others in meaningful and lasting ways — perhaps in [giving] a piece as a gift," she said.

Custom and handmade work are the focus of her business. When building a piece, Rosen asks customers about their preferences, wishes, prayers and aesthetics.

She said it's important to honor customized and personalized work in an age of the quick fix.

"It's hard work and takes more time than most young people have to learn a craft tradition. It's also a hard way to earn an income, so there are fewer and fewer people who choose to make a living this way."

However, many pursue art as a hobby or in retirement, and Rosen will continue to focus on those folks. The price range for her work is generally between \$36, which she said is a lucky number in Jewish life, and \$850 for the most complex pieces.

Rosen has a master's degree in art education from Columbia University's Teachers College and is a graduate of the South Bear School of Pottery in Decorah, Iowa. She is also a licensed K-12 New Mexico arts educator who has taught art to students, adults and at-risk youth. Rosen said the recession has reduced her opportunities to teach. She is considering forming a nonprofit to reach economically strapped kids, and is mentoring a young woman at Highland High School through the school's gifted program.

She said there is still a market for reasonably-priced private lessons for adults and children, and she plans to use her studio for that side of the business, hopefully by November. Her lessons start at \$50 an hour for a private session and \$25 for a group lesson.

"I've been lucky myself to have very reliable and business-savvy teachers and mentors that have kept me going," she said.

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