



a natural state

Artist: Billie Anne McKellar

Video 4: Firing

Steve McKellar: My mother-in-law used to tell me when I burned her pots – you know, her would burn pots...She'd always say "you're planting the pots" because I'd rake the ashes back like that, and put the pots in, and then rake it back, and she'd always say it was like I was planting 'em. (sound of raking) Hmm. Gosh. Is that all you got, Becky?

Becky Garris: No, we got three more things of it in there.

Steve McKellar: All right, I'm going to let you try go all the way up and to the back. Check if you can.

Steve McKellar (voiceover): When my mother-in-law would make 'em, she'd always – I'd always wait until she had at least anywhere between thirty and forty pots. What I'd always do is she'd get up like at 3:00 in the morning and put 'em in the oven and start heating 'em. I always try to burn that many at one time, because it was an all-day process for me and her because I stayed and I kept the fire burning at least eight hours because I wanted a good burn on all of them.

I found out over the years, that if you get a lot of ashes like that, and you rake 'em back and you put your pots in and you pull your ashes up, so your bare wood don't hit it, your pots don't break as much and they won't crack as fast. But when you put 'em in there and you just start - even if you lay the dry wood up against 'em. It'll pull the finish off of them. A lot of times that flame coming off the wood will cause 'em to bust.

And a lot of time when you put this in here and you start pushin' these ashes all around, they make pretty good and everything and it start to sound like popcorn going off. That's a pot busting. And it ain't nothing you can do about it.

Usually what we do, when me and my mother-in-law burned 'em, once we built 'em up like this, we let this burn down, build another - build it up again. Burn it down again, and build it up again. Three times. And that's good (to Earl). And you know we try to use oak, some hickory. I have used a little cedar. But, you know, the main thing is getting your oak and your hickory in there. The hickory really gets the fire real hot.

Billie Anne, you want to get – you want to put Donna's gloves on and set the pan out here, and I'm going to rake 'em out right here and you just pick 'em up. Now if your gloves start getting hot, stop. Because they're going to be hot.

(Turns piece over) You see the different colors on it? Its got some red and grey.

I always try to say a little word before I put 'em in the fire. I don't, you know, say it out loud or anything. I believe God's got a lot to do with it, and I try to ask him always, you know, to bless the fire, to bless the pottery, and I've always had good luck with it. *End.*