



Mount Pleasant Potters' Guild

Sale Pricing Considerations for Members

A Thoughtful Guide to Determining Price Points for Your Pots

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Mount Pleasant Potters' Guild

TOP TEN POTTERY PRICING TIPS

1. Comparison shop! The best way to begin understanding what to charge is to see what “the going rate” is for pots similar to yours, in a similar location and type of sale.
2. Charge extra for larger things, more complex forms, and more expensive materials.
3. Is your pot extra-special? Consider your process, your experience and skill level, and how in-demand your pot might be.
4. Once you decide on the price of one piece of pottery, you can set prices of other pieces in relation to the first—e.g., if medium is \$X, large is \$X+20-30%.
5. Be fair to yourself! Don’t undervalue your work; cover your costs and ideally, your time.
6. Different sales and sales channels might warrant different pricing approaches—just make sure you understand fees, terms and conditions.
7. Price is far from the only factor in someone’s decision to buy pottery, it’s really about an intangible connection to the piece.
8. If you sell out, you could likely charge a bit more for your pots; if you don’t sell anything, it could be that your prices are a bit high.
9. It’s ok to adapt! You might adjust your pricing after your first couple of sales, or change approaches along the way – everyone does that!
10. There is no “rule for how much a mug should cost” —you decide how much to charge for your pottery, and you don’t have to justify it.

Introduction

One of the most common questions we're asked by Mount Pleasant Potters' Guild members participating in their first sale is, "How much should I charge?" This is not unique to them – pricing is an ongoing challenge many potters face, and is an often-heard topic of conversation among potters who sell their creations. While longer-term potters gain more comfort as they gather more experience, second-guessing your prices is completely common. After participating in over a dozen guild and other sales, I still grapple with this!

For many years, the Guild provided a brief pricing guide, intended to show example prices, with the acknowledgement that members would, depending on different factors, price a bit more or less than the guide. For more recent sales, we've made the decision not to do so, because we recognize that those different factors we mentioned were too numerous, varied, and entirely valid. But for many (new and long-time) members, the question of "how much is about right?" remained.

To assist members, I've assembled this guide on how to think about pricing. The inspiration for this document were the wise words of Ellen Currans, a functional potter and founding member of the Oregon Potters Association, whose articles were shared with me by Gloria Maher.

Like Ellen's, the ideas provided here could apply to any type of market or sales channel, and are presented in the spirit of education. I've included a list of important considerations in pricing your work, some different pricing approaches that potters employ, as well as Ellen's articles and other resources on pricing philosophy for your contemplation.

These are not intended to be rules by any means, nor will everything apply to all guild members. This is simply a description of the collective insights on this aspect of pottery that I and others have learned, for members who are interested.

Whatever strategy you use and considerations you make, I wish you the best of luck in all your pottery sales!

Tracy Martell

on behalf of The Mount Pleasant Potters' Guild

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Variables to Consider in Setting Prices

Here's a look at factors that impact the price of a piece of pottery, including features of the pottery and process, equipment and other external dynamics. These considerations would apply for Mount Pleasant Potters' Guild markets or any other sales channel.

Your expenses:

- Are you covering your costs? When you think of the cost of all your materials and inputs to making a piece, do you have a general idea of how much it cost you to make, and are you fully funding your work? Once you begin selling your work, it's a good idea to be aware of how much it cost you to make – clay, glazes, studio time, firing fees, energy costs, and tools and equipment all add up.
- Are input costs on the rise? If prices have gone up recently, you might consider raising your prices. If you already had an idea of what to charge, adjust by a percentage – add 5%, 10%, or whatever amount you figure your costs have increased by.
- What materials did you use? Boxes of clay can vary in price by over 50%, depending on the type. Glazes, too, vary in price depending on the ingredients. While it can be difficult to communicate to buyers the reasons for material cost variations, keep the materials you use in mind in setting your pricing.
- What processes or finishes did you use in making the piece? Additions of other elements to a piece should be accounted for as well. For example, adding rope or chain to a hanging planter or wiring to an electric lamp base will naturally add to the price. If your making process or firing was particularly expensive, consider that as well.
- Do you have other costs to consider? For instance, some potters are making pottery in a public studio where they pay a fee, some potters have home studios and need to plan to cover equipment maintenance costs over time. Everyone's situation is different, and you can and should consider these factors in deciding on your prices.

Your time and effort:

- How much time did you spend on the piece? While achieving minimum wage for our making time might not be realistic, consider how much time and effort went into a piece in its pricing. If you put extra effort in, price your work accordingly. Complex forms, intricate decoration and extra detail all can command higher prices.
- Your level of experience and expertise is a factor. In most professions, your earnings increase as you gain experience. Your pottery is no different; you have likely improved over time and you've invested more time and money in your skills and training as you progress. It makes sense for a more experienced potter to charge more for their work than a beginner does. In fact, some potters even have a fan base that seek out their work, driving up demand!

Form, function and firing:

- Did the piece involve a special process or firing? Special techniques such as Raku, wood or salt kilns, etc., will impact your price. Generally, “rarer” processes and materials can be reflected in your price.
- How in-demand is the item? Perhaps you’re the only person in the area that makes artisanal double-walled shaving bowls that command a certain price among moustache enthusiasts. Perhaps you also make simple cereal bowls by the dozen. Less common items can demand higher prices due to scarcity, though the market for them can be niche. On the other hand, common items generally have a more well-known price range that customers are expecting, while they appeal to a larger number of people.
- Seasonality affects the demand for certain designs; gardening items are more popular in spring, while Christmas and winter themes have their day later on in the year.
- Non-functional ware – art pieces, sculpture, and other one-of-a-kind pieces can be harder to price, as they are so much harder to compare to other things because they’re wonderfully unique. Still, other factors listed here can apply.

External factors:

- The economy in general is a factor. We’ve seen the price of just about everything skyrocket in the past few years, and pottery inputs are no different. If the cost of everything is increasing, it makes sense that your prices would increase as well. On the other hand, in a depressed or recessionary economy, many have less to spend, which can negatively impact the success of any craft or pottery market. These factors are certainly beyond the control of potters, however, they might want to consider “which way the wind is blowing” when deciding on prices.

Pricing Approaches

Here are different approaches potters have told us they've used to decide on their prices.

- Setting a “reference price”: some potters set a price for one or more items in their collection, then adjust up or down from that point. For example: *I decide a medium bowl is \$X dollars, so a small bowl is \$X minus 25%, and a large bowl is \$X plus 50%. Or, I decide a simple mug is \$X, but one with additional decoration is \$X plus 20%.* To determine the “reference price,” you’ll have to rely on an additional approach.
- Testing different prices: potters sometimes try different prices at different sales for the same items. For example: *I decided to charge \$X for butter dishes at my first sale, and they sold out, so I decided to raise my prices for the same items at the next sale, as I think I might have asked too little. But, fewer of my bowls sold than I expected, so I might lower my prices at the next sale to see if they do better.*
- Set pricing: some potters like to charge the same amount for certain items in the same or different sales; if you have a firm idea of your prices, well done!
- The psychology of customers is tricky – it’s not unheard of for a potter to raise a price of a pot that won’t budge, to have it sell immediately—so keep in mind, the right pot to the right buyer is often simply serendipity.

A few words on bargain pricing:

- Reduced pricing: sometimes we have a pot or two that we’ve brought to too many sales and we just don’t want to see again, so it’s common for potters to decide to ask lower prices on some items they’re especially motivated to part with.
- Use a fresh instead of marked-down price sticker, special “SALE” stickers aren’t permitted at Mount Pleasant Potters’ Guild sales.
- Extremely low prices aren’t the best approach, for a few reasons. First, it can backfire psychologically, as very inexpensive items are associated with lower quality. Second, it isn’t fair to yourself; if your work is of a quality to sell, you deserve to earn a fair amount for your work. Third, in a group sale, it can devalue the work of the participants as a whole, in that extremely low prices will look out of place among others’, and call into question others’ pricing.
 - *Modest pricing is perfectly ok, and it’s common to knock a few dollars off the price of a pot you’d like to get rid of, but it’s not recommended to undervalue your work.*

Some more strategies to consider:

- Would a set make sense? Sometimes grouping things together makes an attractive set for potential buyers, for example: candlesticks in pairs, a set of bowls. This can allow you a bit more flexibility in pricing. It’s always a case of a “discount for multiples.” A fine set of nesting bowls may warrant a better price than they would if sold separately. Alternately, you might wish to sell a set for a bit lower than an individual price, to encourage a sale of things that might not sell on their own.
- Do you want some of your less expensive-to-make work to subsidize other, more input-intensive work? For example: *AB makes a large number of simple bowls that are*

inexpensive to make, so they have a relatively large profit margin on them. AB also makes some process-intensive bowls with higher-priced clay and glazes, and while they charge more for the fancier bowls, it doesn't make up for the extra time they spend on them. But since AB enjoys making the fancy bowls, they figure the higher cost to make them is offset by all the simple bowls they sell.

More Approaches for Determining Pricing

Here are a few ideas for more places to look for information on pricing from other pottery communities, as well as when to use your own, internal guidance.

- Tap in to the pottery community: your fellow potters are an excellent resource for strategies and considerations for pricing pots. It's not too nosy to ask another member that you know how much they charge – and the rationale behind their pricing.
- Research online: there are plenty of online resources that potters can access for advice. Community forums like r/Ceramics on Reddit.com and pottery threads on other platforms have discussions on the topic, there are videos on YouTube, and there are articles on pottery-related websites that are easily found with a Google search.
- Comparison shop: you can get an idea of pricing by looking at the market in general. Consider attending other craft sales and noting how other potters price their work. Check online pricing on websites like Etsy, though be aware that some pricing includes shipping, and online prices tend to be higher than prices charged in-person. Decide how your work stacks up to the other examples, and once you have some prices for comparative work, use that as your guide.
 - *Be careful with comparisons to other potters; a potters' location, skill level, materials and type of work may not be directly comparable to your own.*
- Market research: ask other people you know their opinion - "honestly, how much would you pay for x?" Ask yourself the same question. This is often a "gut check" for many potters as well.
- How motivated are you to sell the item? Potters sometimes reduce the prices of things that have not sold after multiple sales, or if they find they can no longer store all that they have, or need to make room to make more. Alternately, it's not uncommon to put a higher price on something that's very dear to us; it's okay to decide not to part with something you'd prefer to keep rather than sell for less than your hoped-for-price.
- Follow your own philosophy: ultimately, you are the person who decides how much to charge for your work. Some of the considerations outlined herein might be irrelevant or inconsequential to your philosophy on pricing. You might also find your philosophy evolves over time and with (good and bad) experience.

Tips for First-Timers at the Mount Pleasant Potters' Guild Sale

- A good rule of thumb is, if you sell 50% of what you brought, you had a successful sale! If you sell out, you could likely charge a bit more for your pots. On the other hand, if you don't sell much, it could be that your prices are a bit high.
- Bring blank price stickers with you on set-up day; you're free to adjust or add pricing after you unpack. Just be sure you'll have time to do so!
- It's not uncommon to peek at other potters' prices on set up day! This is the last, best check to determine if you're in the right ballpark for certain items, but you don't have to be influenced by others – there are a variety of different processes, materials, and experience levels represented.
- If you find it helpful to access the community and chat with other potters about pricing strategy, go ahead! If not, you don't have to even look at what others charge for their pots.
- You're free to set the prices you choose, but we kindly ask, please don't seriously undervalue your work.
- Keep in mind the spirit of the sale – it's diverse and inclusive, and not intended to be competitive between potters.
- Price is never the only factor! At our pottery markets, customers frequently tell our potters about a personal connection they felt to the piece they're buying. There's a person out there for every pot!

Different Types of Sales and Sales Channels

There are plenty of opportunities to showcase and sell your work in the Calgary area and, thanks to online sales, worldwide. However, very few sales channels (apart from friends and family!) are free, and none are effortless. Here are some thoughts on how and where you sell can impact what you charge.

Location matters:

- Prices for handmade goods vary from city to city and venue to venue. Like many things, prices in a larger city with a hot economy tend to be higher than in a smaller population centre. Just like property values and the incomes of people who live there, prices can vary neighbourhood to neighbourhood within a city.
- Retail stores and galleries tend to charge higher prices than independent vendors at smaller or pop-up markets. Some markets are a bit more upscale than others; compare an informal event like a community centre craft fair to a holiday market at the convention centre that charges admission.
- Know your audience and think about what they might be expecting. This is not to say you must lower or raise prices depending on the venue, but it could also guide you in what you choose to bring to each sale, i.e., your higher-end vs. simpler items. For example, simpler items could be popular at a community craft fair with families and children in attendance, while you would likely bring your most elevated work to a specialty market.
- In-person sales and online prices tend to be different. Shipping and handling fees aside, online pricing does tend to be a bit higher than pricing at in-person sales. There are a few possible reasons for this: photographing and creating listings to sell online is time-consuming; even if postage is paid for by the buyers, shipping supplies and the time it takes to pack and ship have a cost; and, the local-market effect is removed, meaning potters are competing within a wholly separate marketplace regardless of local economy.

Vendor fees and other costs-to-sell will vary:

- Commission rates, table costs, and fees vary, and potters who sell their items in multiple venues will encounter different, unavoidable costs to sell. Consider how much different costs and fees might impact what you net from a sale of your pottery. Most importantly, be sure you understand all the fees, terms and conditions before you commit to anything, to avoid any unpleasant surprises.
 - Retail stores and galleries often take upwards of 40-50% of the sale price as commission on consigned goods.
 - Table rentals at local markets can be as low as \$30 and as high as \$1500.
 - If you use a payment processing service like Square, you will have to pay processing fees of some kind.
 - Online platforms like Etsy or eBay have various fees to list and or process sales for sellers.
- Do you need insurance? More and more private venues, such as farmers' markets, are requiring vendors to carry liability insurance. Check the terms and conditions of each

venue carefully, and if you don't have the required insurance, consider the cost of insurance as part of your table rental.

- Understand your shipping costs: If you are shipping your work, make sure you account for the cost of packing materials. It's essential to research shipping costs: if your pricing includes shipping, you'll need to include enough to cover any potential location, as shipping costs vary wildly within Canada and internationally. Alternately, if you're passing shipping costs on to the buyer, be sure you can accurately calculate the charge. Postal rates and fuel surcharges change often, so review on shipping costs from time to time to ensure you don't get a surprise.

Some sales are easier than others:

- The effort you need to put in to selling varies. For example, potters who find in-person sales to be too time-consuming may agree to higher commission rates for passive sales channels, i.e., when a retail store is doing the sales work for them. Alternately, the effort required to hand a customer a pot at an in-person sale is far less than to pack and ship the same piece sold online. Ultimately, this is a trade-off of time and money, and will be down to each individual to decide which is more important to them.
- The Mount Pleasant Potters' Guild pottery sales, being large, collective efforts, allow members to participate in something they couldn't manage on their own. Likewise, potters might consider teaming up to participate in various local markets; more hands make lighter work and splitting vendor fees takes some of the risk out of the venture.

Additional Resources

- "How to Price Your Pots," MudTalk Podcast Episode 015: <https://expertclay.com/podcast/015-price-pots/>
- "A Beginner's Guide to Pricing Your Pottery," Pottery Plus, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSYvR8ulw6Q>
- "Pricing Pottery," Dara Green, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cvi0YujQ5aQ>
- "13 Things to Consider While Pricing Pots," by Brandon Schwartz, ExpertClay.com: <https://expertclay.com/pricing-pots/>

Ellen Currans' Thoughts on Pricing Pottery

Ellen Currans was an Oregon-based functional potter, whose ceramics career spanned 6 decades. First taking up the wheel in 1958, Ellen switched to slab-building much later in life, making functional ware at Cedar Pond Pottery studio at her home in Dundee, Oregon.

*"My whole reason for going into pottery - at first as a hobby - was to create things that were pleasing to me... It's the process that's important...The creative process is what's satisfying." **

She began selling her work at local craft markets early in her career, and, in the 1970's, as one of the original members of the women-led Lake Oswego Crafts and Art League, in members' garages. In 1980, she helped found the Oregon Potters' Association, further cementing her legacy of supporting her local pottery community, and in particular, women potters.

*"Ellen's goal was to create what her customers wanted. What they wanted was "her (functional) high-fired stoneware with the signature matte-finish glaze, (primarily) in a soft green hue or rusty beige." She wanted her work to be available to people like her who desired it. For that reason, she kept her prices low and enjoyed seeing her customer base return year after year. She was able to sell essentially everything she made." **

Ellen Currans passed away in April 2023 at the age of 91. Below we've included some of her wise words on pottery pricing.

*Source: <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/legacyremembers/ellen-currans-obituary?id=51747953>

Random Thoughts on Pricing and Making a Living

Ellen Currans, July 2010, Potters.org: <http://www.potters.org/subject113336.htm>

Just my opinion and it applies only to functional pottery. I know very little about ceramic art or sculpture. Pricing is local. The same mug by the same potter can be sold for more money in some places than it can in others: big, more sophisticated cities versus small towns; college connected, long running craft fairs versus Saturday markets; in a highly regarded gallery versus your own back yard sale.

Work by a well-known potter will sell for more than very similar work by new potters. It takes time to be known and for your work to have a following. Mugs sell themselves once you have learned how to make a good one that people love and simply must have for every cup of coffee, even when it is in the dishwasher.

Selling well has a lot to do with making pots people want to buy. (Just think about that for awhile.) In tough times they have to REALLY want to buy, and usually they want something they need or can really use, or that lifts their spirits in some undefinable way.

You are not obligated to price your work to support the prices other potters may be asking. If you are a beginner your work probably isn't worth the higher price anyway. Perhaps their \$40 mugs aren't worth \$40 either. Be a bit humble in pricing at the beginning and raise your prices as your work justifies it. It is really hard to lower prices on the same work when the public has become accustomed to certain price points. Earlier purchasers will feel cheated, and others will wonder why you are underselling your own work.



Mount Pleasant Potters' Guild

Making lots of (well thought out) pots and selling them is the key to making better and better pots. There is nothing wrong with selling beginning work to people who want to buy it. We do not live in a society that supports us while we break up everything we make for years and years. Keep working on your skills so that you become the potter who can easily make many pots efficiently and quick rather than just the few we all hover over as beginners.

Very few potters make big money or become famous, but many have managed to make a good life. Expect to live carefully and frugally. Appreciate spouses, partners, friends and family who support what you are doing. Learn as much as you can from those with skills to teach you because the more you can do for yourself the less money you will need to pay out for services.

Older potters are not looking down on beginners when they give advice about making your own clay and glazes, or learning to weld. They are sharing with you hard won information that has made it possible for them to succeed. We are all free to go about our clay life as we wish. Make our own or buy glazes, stop for a \$3.50 latte every morning or make leaf tea, dig our own clay or never recycle readymade. It is our choice. We get to choose the parts we like and ignore the rest, and perhaps we succeed..... or not.

Potting part time does not mean you are not a serious or good potter. Starting late in life does not mean you are not a serious or good potter. Using low fire glazes in an electric kiln does not mean you are not a serious or good potter. The size and beauty of your studio (closet, garage, where ever you work) does not mean you are a good or poor potter--we all start where we can. Firing in the more esoteric kilns or having your work in the magazines does not necessarily mean you are a serious or good potter, nor do the degrees behind your name. Eventually, the work speaks for itself.

Most of us have missed some part of the necessary education for being a potter. Hopefully, not as badly as the art teacher Logan has been asked to help. It is up to us to learn what we need to know to succeed. I am appalled at how many potters do not bother to read books or magazines and keep them around to refer back to. The wealth of information available to us is mind boggling. All the glazes and techniques and firing schedules and tools to make are available in abundance. Skip a few high priced workshops and buy books. The more you know about the craft the better able you will be to survive tough times. Many good potters who were setting the rules for show or guild entries some years back, are now doing something else because they could not adapt their way of working or selling to make enough money to live on.

Ellen Currans: Working in clay for over 50 years through all the stages of novice, part-time, workshop junkie, wheel in the kitchen corner, lugging pots and kids to fairs for many years, easing my studio into a bigger and better space from time to time, selling comfortably and then selling all I can make, and now trying to scale back my work to adjust to some kind of semi-retirement at 77. But not quitting. There is always something new to learn.

Tips For Improving Your Sales

Adapted from an article by Ellen Currans, by Betty Burroughs, South Vancouver Island Potters' Guild Newsletter, June 2009: <https://www.victoriapotters.ca/newsletters/June09.pdf>

PUBLICITY IS TREMENDOUSLY IMPORTANT. Do not pass up any opportunity for good publicity about you and your work. An article with great pictures can add thousands of dollars to your sales. Plan to make more of the same or similar pieces shown in the article. Many people will come to the show just to get that piece. If it is one of a kind, have more on hand that are similar. If you or your work is not chosen this year for publicity, try to work up some of your own, in your local paper, your company newsletter, or by sending an e-mail flyer to family and friends. People have jumped from so-so sales to top sellers in the year they have great publicity.

BRING ENOUGH STOCK TO SELL WELL. Surprisingly, many potters do not have enough work on hand to have good sales even if they sell all of it. A good goal is to have twice as much work on hand as you want to sell at the show. If most of your work is highly decorated and labor intensive, you might want to add some plainer, complementary pieces, simpler to make and priced a bit lower. People might then buy the group together rather than just one of a kind, or can afford a less expensive bowl along with a very expensive pitcher.

WHAT TO BRING? Beginning potters may not have much choice. You bring your best work, and be as critical as possible about what is best. It is wisest to not have too much variety in style, glazing, clay types, firing, etc.. A "body of work" should have some cohesive similarities that say it is all done by one person. If you do several kinds of clay work, separate them. Long-time potters have other decisions to make. Have you made the same forms with the same glazes forever? If they still sell well, fine. Continuity is good for customers who want to add to their collection of your work. If some part of your line of work is not selling as well as it used to, is it time to consider that the forms and glazes may be a bit dated? Without changing everything at once, can you begin to add new pieces, more contemporary colors, and perhaps more useful, reasonably priced items. Customers will return each year to buy more if they know you are creating new forms. Have some relatively inexpensive items for kids to buy. If your work is more in the Ceramic Art rather than production mode, in order to survive to pot another day, can you bring yourself to make some smaller, less complicated and less expensive pieces? Mick Casson called it "making some and some". Some to satisfy his own artistic needs, and some sure to sell. It is not a compromise in quality but a recognition that money is tight for many people this year.

PRICING! This just never seems to get easy, especially in a year when the economy is tanking. One potter may be able to mass produce quality work and sell it all at what you think are low prices. They may have years of experience, and low overhead. Another may be renting a studio, have high overhead, selling through 50% galleries, and using labor intensive methods. Each potter has to decide for themselves the return they need for their work. Keep in mind it is easier to raise your prices as your skill and quality increases than to lower them if work is not selling. Established potters have worked for years to achieve the recognition and prices their work now commands.

WHY PEOPLE BUY: People buy because they see something that just reaches out and grabs them when they go by. They buy objects by color or texture to match their décor. (Yes they do!) They buy functional ware to add to the pleasure of eating and to create a beautiful display of food for guests. They buy an important piece of clay art for a special display place in their home or office. They buy what is comfortable and fits in their life style. They buy what they understand. They often buy something similar to what their sister-in-law bought last year. They come back to buy more because the piece they have works the way it should. It feels good in the hand and on the lips. It enhances the food served in it. It sits pretty on the shelf and touches their senses each time they pass.