

MASTERPIECES IN CLAY

Izinkamba of Buzephi Magwaza and Zikoti Magwaza

Many older women of the extended Magwaza family are renowned potters. Their clay pots are found in homes throughout KwaZulu-Natal, as well as national and international galleries and museums.

Buzephi Magwaza

Born in 1951, Buzephi Khanyile learnt the skill of making pots from her mother. After her marriage to Banokwakhe Magwaza in 1975 she honed her talent to become one of the renowned potters of her time.

Her husband's family was well-known for the quality of their beer vessels. Buzephi developed and perfected the craft under her mother-in-law, MaMhlongo. MaMhlongo introduced her to new techniques and ways of decorating pots. For example, adding *izinsumpa* (small raised welts).

Most women in the extended family, including Banokwakhe's second wife, Bizani, and his cousin's wife, Zikoti, were well-known potters.



Zikoti Magwaza

Zikoti Magwaza, of the Buthelezi clan and a distant relation to Gatsha Buthelezi, grew up near the town of Nkandla. She also learnt the art of making pots from the women in her family, which she refined after marrying into the Magwaza family.

Her fellow potters said Zikoti's pots were easy to recognize as she 'gave all her pots hips' – in other words her pots were not completely round but slightly more urn-shaped towards the middle. Her pots, which have a remarkably narrow base, are typically decorated with *izinsumpa* (warts).

Zikoti died in 2022. Although she is survived by two children, five grandchildren and a great-grandchild, none of the younger members of the family have become potters.



Tugela River, KZN
KwaMagwaza in the Thukela Valley



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The Making of the Pots



Harvesting the clay, preparing it for use and forming, drying, decorating, firing and polishing the pots is time-consuming and takes an enormous amount of dedication and skill.



The clay is collected from a riverbed close to where they live. The clay is very heavy and often donkeys are used to transport the clay from the river to the homestead.



The clay is then broken up into little pieces, using stones or a hammer. These smallish pieces are then ground on a stone, similar to those used for grinding maize in the traditional way.



After the clay has been finely ground to look like fine soil, it is passed through a sieve to eliminate any impurities, such as small stones or roots, which would cause the finished article to burst, when exposed to heat.



Once the clay has been reduced to pure fine grains of soil, water is added to return it to malleable clay, which is then stored in air-tight bags until it is removed to be moulded into a piece of pottery.



The technique used by the Magwazas is known as coiling, commonly used in hand-thrown pottery. The pots are burnished in an open fire, usually using dried aloe leaves to fuel the fire.



Thereafter the clay pots are scoured with a stone, to produce a smooth surface and then finally the pot is polished with boot polish to give it a beautiful black or brown shine.

Buzephi and Zikoti make three types of traditional vessels:

Ukhamba

The *ukhamba* is a pot used in all beer drinking rituals. It is decorated with either incised or raised patterns which show the potter's artistic ability.

The patterns on the pots are of no specific significance, although in recent times it has become fashionable to etch people's names and significant dates onto the pots.



Umancishana

The *umancishana* is a smaller version of the *ukhamba*, with the name being derived from *ncintshana*, 'to be stingy with'. It is often reserved for guests or to make offerings to the spirits of the ancestors.

This pot is usually filled with beer and placed opposite the door to the house for the ancestors. At the end of the beer drink, the content is finished by those present before going home. This pot is colloquially known as *Isicathulo*, a shoe, because of its size.



Uphiso

The *uphiso* is a vessel in which to store and transport water or beer. It is a round-bodied pot with a cylindrical neck to stop liquid from spilling when the pot is being carried.



Decorative Items

The demands of the market, which have grown beyond the immediate family and community, have influenced the shape and design of the pots and the patterns found on them. The Magwazas, like most rural potters, now often make decorative items, such as vases or bowls, for tourists.

Miniature *umancishana* are popular as they fit easily into suitcases.

