



happy accidents

The unlikely story behind a Sacramento ceramics studio.

*by catherine warmerdam
photography by create + gather*

Alejandra and Luis Magaña had no intention of founding a ceramics studio together. In fact, Alejandra confesses she had little affinity for working with clay as an art student in college. “I just wasn’t very good at it,” she says. But when she landed a job as a high school art teacher in 2015, she was forced to bone up on her wheel-throwing skills.

So the couple, both of whom studied art at Sacramento State, bought a potter’s wheel and starting practicing together. Using their tax return money to purchase a kiln, they eventually fired more pots than they could reasonably store in their newlywed apartment. Why not try to sell them and make a little side money, just for fun? When customers at an art fair in Elk Grove responded enthusiastically to their work, the idea for a business was born.



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Today, Echeri Ceramics occupies a light-filled production studio in a warehouse complex off of Florin Perkins Road. Luis handles all of the throwing production, spending many hours a week hunched over a potter's wheel shaping soft clay into mugs, bowls and vases. Alejandra, meanwhile, manages the glazing side of things. She's also responsible for meticulously hand-painting the studio's signature pieces, which are embellished with lines, faces and botanical shapes.

Echeri's designs and colorways are influenced largely by memories of Mexico (Luis was born in a rural area in the state of Michoacan; Alejandra, a first-generation American, visited Mexico with her parents to learn about her heritage) and the distinctive patterns of the country's textile artists.

As Luis explains, "The patterns in Mexican textiles communicate where the makers are from. Every town has a certain kind of pattern. We wanted to figure out how to translate those designs into our ceramics, but in a more abstract way."

Like the artisans who serve as their inspiration, the couple takes pride in showing off how the human hand is evident in all of their work. "I may produce 1,000 cups within a certain structure, but the work is all very personal, and each piece is unique," says Luis.

But that doesn't mean Echeri's utilitarian objects are too precious for everyday use. "We don't want our stuff to be in a china cabinet where it only comes out on special occasions," says Alejandra. "We want our pottery to see the good, the bad and the ugly of your daily routine, like when you're eating pasta over the sink." 🍝



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