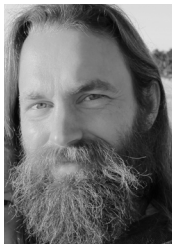


# Driftless Terroir: I Surrender to the Rhythm of Life on This Land

*Driftless Terroir (ter-WAHR) is a series featuring guest voices celebrating the intersection of land and culture — the essence of life in the Driftless Area — with topics including art and architecture, farming and gardening, cooking and eating, fermenting and drinking, and more. To read past columns, see [voiceoftherivervalley.com/archives](http://voiceoftherivervalley.com/archives). To contribute to Driftless Terroir, e-mail [info@voiceoftherivervalley.com](mailto:info@voiceoftherivervalley.com).*

I wake up at 6 a.m. and gather my thoughts. “This is going to be a good firing,” I think to myself. I packed all my fragile pots the day before, into boxes with newspaper, and loaded them into my truck. The drive down is beautiful — through downtown Dodgeville and onto the highway, past the Cowboy church, around the crumbling barn just past the Pecatonica River, through Potosi, and then along the Mississippi to the anagama kiln.



**Eric Friedericks**

I have a particular fondness for bottles. Their wide shoulders and narrow necks allow them to be placed throughout the kiln, in places where other shapes won't fit. Up toward the front of the kiln with the crusty ash deposits, and toward the back the more subtle patterns of the flames are captured. The back of the kiln is loaded first. We crawl in through the small door. The chamber opens up toward the front and tapers down to a small exit flue in the back. The temperature is usually the lowest in the back, so we reserve the space for planters and sculptural pieces that don't need to be fully matured. As we continue stacking the shelves and loading into the belly of the kiln, bigger pieces like onggi jars and tall vases are placed. This is also where glazed dinnerware goes, as it is more protected. Around the firebox where the wood is thrown, are placed thicker, more rustic pieces, meant to be covered with drippy melted ash.

It's always an exciting and special time when the kindling is gathered and the fire is lit. It signals the true beginning of the work. At first it's easy — just like sitting around a campfire with your friends — but as the temperature climbs, the kiln needs exponentially more wood to keep climbing, and by day six or seven, it doesn't seem like it will ever reach temperature. We slowly transfer the wood-heat throughout the kiln. The front reaches temperature first, and then we start throwing wood into openings in the sides, pulling the flames back. Thick smoke and flames pour out of the chimney and peep holes. Usually, there is someone in command, watching the pyrometer closely, signally when it's time to stoke, relieving the rest of us from needing to think too hard about anything but carrying wood and staying safe. The rhythm is intoxicating, like the slow heart beat of a living, breathing dragon.

When the temperature gauges in the back of the kiln finally go down, and the leader calls it quits, we shut it down tight, allowing for a slow cooling. A week later, we crack open the door, pull the pots from the shelves, and line them all up in the grass, like pirate's booty.

I wake up at 6 a.m. and gather my thoughts. “This is going to be a good year,” I think to myself. The seeds have been ordered; they are just waiting to be planted. It's in the 40s, so I decide I'm going to ride my motorcycle today. The ride is beautiful — past the gate to the House on the Rock and then down into Wyoming Valley, past Taliesin, along the Wisconsin River, then into the rising



sun, all the way to Vermont Valley Community Farm.

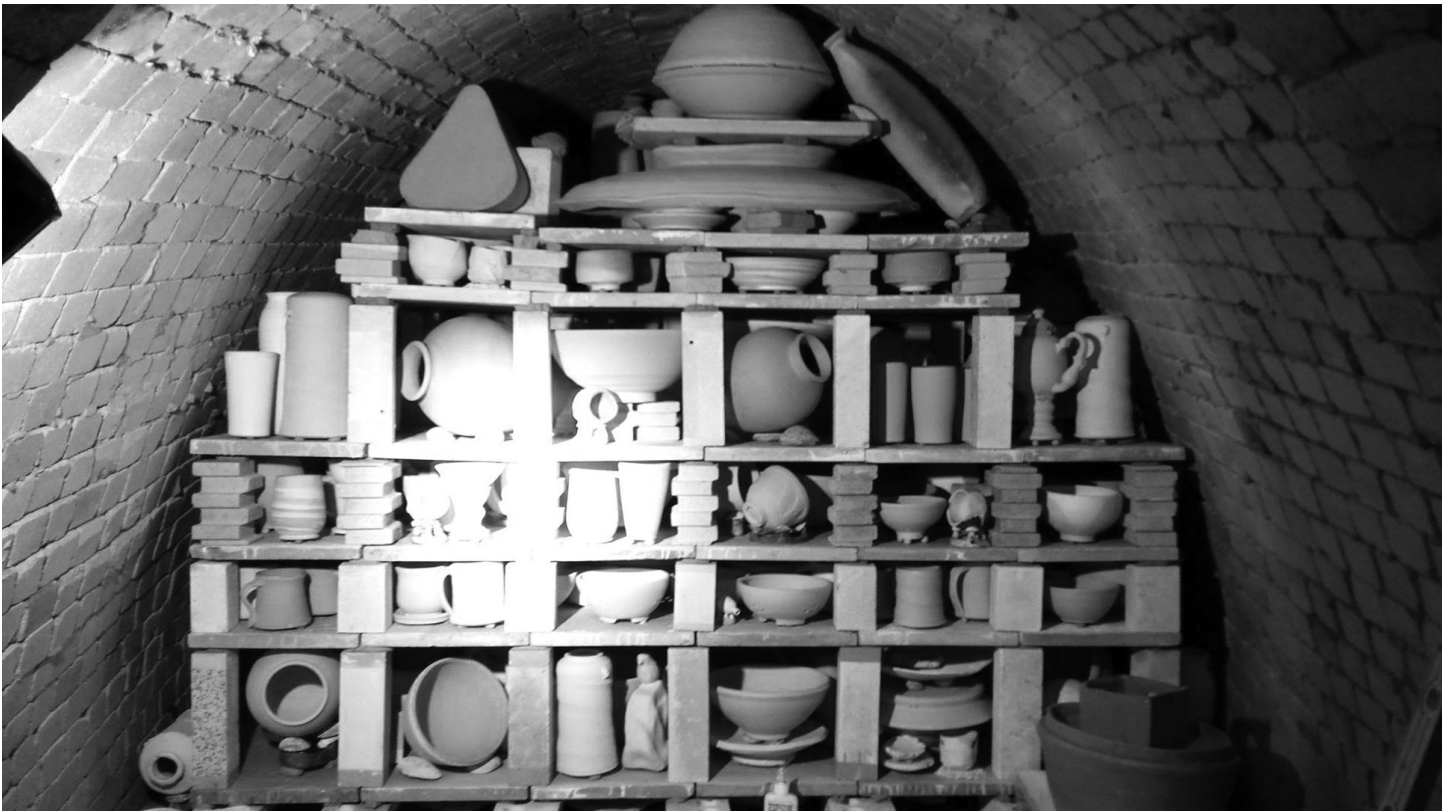
I have a particular fondness for brassicas. They fill out the entire growing season. Radishes are one of the earliest crops, and welcome your taste buds to the spring with their sharpness. Broccoli fills out most of the year with dark green, tasty goodness, and storage cabbage fills the fermentation jars well into the winter.

The greens for the spring share are grown in the hoophouse. Some crops, like celery and onions, need to be started early in the heated germination chamber, because they take the longest to mature. Lettuce is seeded throughout the year, as it grows the fastest. Tomatoes are tricky. They can't be put in the ground until all threat of frost has passed, but we give them a head start in the greenhouses, so, when they start fruiting, the plants are fully 6 feet tall and full of blossoms. Many crops are planted into plastic mulch to keep the weeds at bay and the ground moist.

It's always an exciting and special day when the first seedlings are transplanted outdoors. It signals the true beginning of the work. At first it's easy — there isn't anything to weed or even harvest yet — but as the season rolls along, things compound

**Life is about rhythm. We vibrate, our hearts are pumping blood, we are a rhythm machine, that's what we are.**

— Mickey Hart



Photos courtesy of Eric Friedericks

From the fields and hoophouse to the kiln, the rhythm of life close to the land is intoxicating. This is going to be a good year.

on each other, and by July and August, it doesn't seem like you will ever catch up. We slowly fill the plots with plants. The lettuce gets weeded and harvested first, and the snap-peas are trellised before the tomatoes are even brought outside. Soon, the cucumbers and squash are being picked every other day, even on the weekends, and the melons and sweet corn are approaching their limited harvest windows. Crew leaders are essential to keep the capable and efficient hands organized and on-task, getting our food delivered, on time, every Thursday. The many parts all work together like an elaborate grandfather clock, chiming once a week.

As the crops are fully harvested, the plants are mowed and tilled into the ground, and cover crop is planted ahead of the coming winter. The final "storage shares" are packed. Bins of colorful winter

squash, onions, roots and greens and lined up like pirate's booty.

Living here, working so intensely connected to the land, we must surrender ourselves to the rhythm that presents itself. We reflect on the obstacles that we overcame, what worked and didn't, and breathe a collective sigh that yet another cycle has been completed. I take a good, slow look up and down the valley, fields and workspaces frozen blank slates, ready for the sun's slow descent into the south, only to rise again, greeting the hands eager to dig into the earth yet again.

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