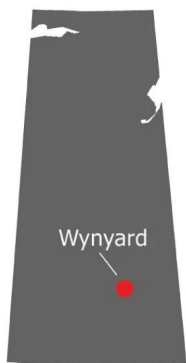


Freba Pottery

THE HONOUR-SYSTEM ROADSIDE POTTERY SHOP

Marea Olafson's roadside pottery shop has no lock on the door and is open 24/7. Visitors can stop by day or night and walk out with their favourite pieces.

Story and Photos by
Ashlyn George





Between Dafoe and Wynyard, on the north side of the Yellowhead (Highway 16), is a tourist gem that gives travellers the opportunity to experience something truly unique. This tiny wooden shop built in the side yard of Marea's acreage runs entirely on the honour system.

Pull in the driveway, pick out a piece you like, leave cash in a tin or send an e-transfer, and make a note of it in the book on the side table—no set hours, no shopkeeper, just faith in the goodness of people.

The shop is rustic—there is no heat, no power, and no electricity. But it's cozy. White paper lanterns hang from the ceiling and there's a bistro table and two chairs next to floor-to-ceiling windows. Visitors might even get lucky and enjoy the company of the Olafson's several cats or dog while shopping. (The black cat's name is Love and he's very friendly. He can sometimes be found with his paws wrapped around Marea's pottery.)

On the walls near the door, visitors have pinned where they're from on regional, national, and world maps. Many have put up notes and shared comments and stories from places as far as Hungary, Belize, Italy,

and Australia. It's easy to see why this honour system concept has captured the hearts of travellers. The experience is just as much about connection as it is about the handcrafted pottery that lines the shelves.

"The honour system works because people are inherently good," says Marea. "The experience allows people to see my art, yes, but also know that they are trusted. And other people get to read their stories too."

Freba Pottery's origins are deeply personal. In 2013, Marea and her family moved back to the Wynyard area to purchase her Amma's ("grandmother" in Icelandic) 1919 municipal heritage house. Marea's introduction to pottery began more than two decades earlier—all thanks to her Amma's interest in throwing clay. Carrying on her Amma's legacy while pursuing her own passion, Marea saw an opportunity to transform the basement in the house into a pottery studio and build the highway store. The name "Freba" is a portmanteau of Marea's two daughter's names—Freyja and Ebba. The shop reflects the multi-generational connection of Marea's family to the area and in her work.

The idea of the honour-system store was born

▲ Marea's roadside pottery shop operates on the honour system and is open to the public 24/7, year-round. You might get lucky and catch Marea restocking her pieces when you stop in.

➤ (Top) Marea's basement pottery studio allows her to create pottery on her acreage and sell it out of her roadside shop.

➤ (Bottom) Marea's love of throwing clay first started with her Amma (grandmother). More than two decades later, she's made a full-time career out of it.



out of practicality and Marea's belief in community trust. With the busy highway right outside her door, she recognized the value of letting people shop when they happened to be driving by rather than stopping at her store during certain hours. It was a perfect fit for the location—and it worked better than she could have imagined.

"The very first year, we had a lady stop from Alaska when we weren't home," shares Marea. "My pottery would not be in Alaska and I would have missed a customer."

I first visited Marea's shop in 2015 as The Saskatchewanderer, the official travel blogger for the Government of Saskatchewan. It's only 50 kilometres west of where I grew up. Driving past her place frequently, I always had admired the Eatons-esque home. But it was Marea's giant hand-painted "POTTERY" signs, stationed at either end of her yard, that tapped my curiosity to pull into the driveway for a visit. At the time, the store was only a year old and Marea was still working full time as a teacher. For me, it was a great story to share online.



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“Ashlyn changed my life through exposure of what I created,” shares Marea. “I went from a full-time teacher down to a halftime-teacher/halftime-potter.”

But that was only the beginning. A few short years later, the COVID-19 pandemic amplified her shop into a destination to visit in Saskatchewan. People could shop safely while still having a personal experience.

“People would leave their cities and towns for a drive,” explains Marea. “You could shop within your bubble.” It was at this point Marea officially stepped down from her role as an educator. She didn’t want to wait to retire to become a full-time potter.

In 2024, Freba Pottery would catch the attention of an even wider audience after a viral video from the current-day Saskatchewaner reached over 1.5 million views. The shop went from two or three visitors a day to 15 or 20 that summer. It was such incredible growth, Marea could barely keep up with stocking her highway store. She would bring 20 new pieces out from the kiln in her studio to find she had sold 30 pieces in the store.

“My red wine cups are one of the most popular items,” tells Marea. “They are glazed on the top and the inside is raw, fully fired and sealed.” The idea is that the wine mugs are like a cast-iron frying pan—the cup will season itself. “The more red wine you drink, it stains the inside of the cup and you don’t have to wash it.”

Her coffee mugs are also sought after. The mugs are extra-large and you can use three or four fingers to hold the handle. “It’s a commitment to caffeine,” Marea jokes.

But it’s not just her shop that delights those who take the time to stop in. Marea is a connector, a storyteller, and an advocate within her rural community. Her robust laugh and energy are contagious. While she loves to create, she also loves to share her passion with others.

In early 2024, Marea expanded her creative endeavors with the launch of Elemental Claycation. It’s a weekend-long, all-inclusive pottery retreat including a two-night stay in the

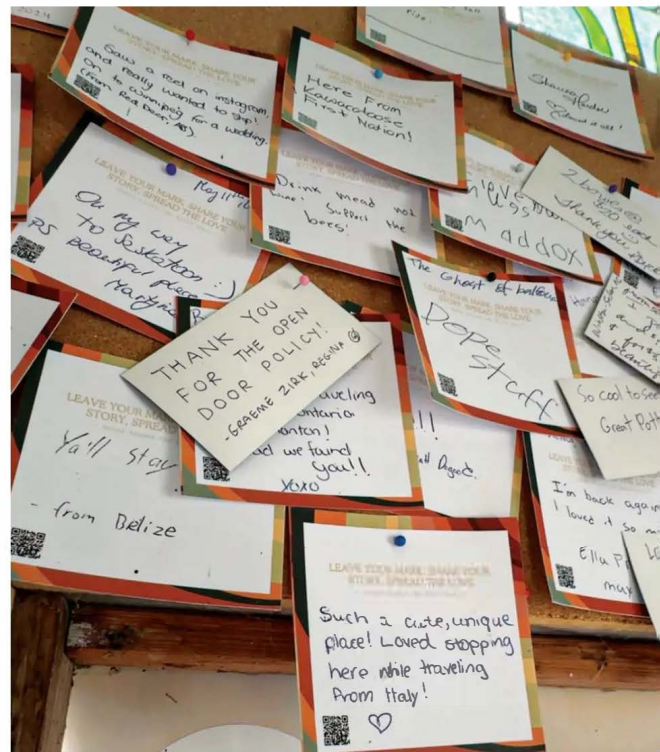
◀ (Top Left) Students in Marea’s Elemental Claycation have the opportunity to create a variety of pieces during her weekend-long immersive getaway.

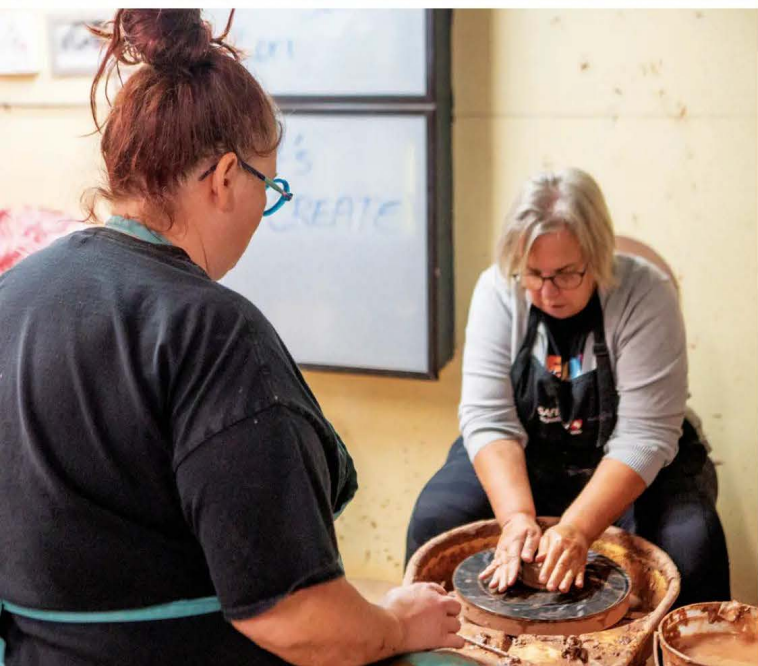
◀ (Bottom Left) Pottery kilns usually fire at temperatures between 930°C and 1480°C.

◀ (Bottom Right) Marea’s honour system pottery shop has caught the online world’s attention with several videos going viral over the past several years.

▶ (Top) Visitors stop in from all around the world and leave thoughtful notes pinned inside Marea’s shop.

▶ (Bottom) Marea’s best-selling pieces are her red wine cups which season themselves.





renovated attic of her historic home. The house itself is an homage to Marea's heritage, originally built by an Icelandic carpenter who homesteaded in the area in the early 1900s. Marea's renovations have preserved the integrity of the house while modernizing it for guests.

The attic space was unfinished for over a century," she explains. "Now we can sleep six people up there and connect them to pottery."

Marea has curated every detail of the retreat while also supporting other Canadian artists and creators—from hearty meals prepared by a local caterer right down to the silk eye-masks and chocolate treats waiting on the boutique bedding. Even the handmade woolen blankets are made from sheep raised and sheared here in Saskatchewan. For her, it's about collaboration and building up others around her.

And of course, the weekend spent in Marea's pottery studio offers more than just learning to throw clay. Guests of Elemental Claycation leave with something they've made themselves, but it's really about bonding over the process of creation.

"It's about connection," Marea adds, "and creating meaningful moments through pottery."

For Marea, her faith in humanity and her honour system pottery shop have provided an incredible way of life for her family as well as for her business. She gets to see how far her work travels, and how it connects people to Saskatchewan.

"It makes me so happy that I can create something and that people are using it, and that it reminds them of what we're doing right here," she explains. "There's an experience around it, and the story is impactful when people talk about where they bought something."

Looking ahead, Marea has plans to expand and enhance her roadside pottery honour system experience. The inspiration for her new project comes from a nearby historic schoolhouse near Kandahar. But for those wanting to know all the details, you'll just have to take a road trip to find out.



◀ (Top) Time in Marea's pottery studio provides guests with an opportunity to tap into their creativity while connecting with others.

◀ (Middle) Every detail of Elemental Claycation's overnight retreat is carefully curated while supporting other Saskatchewan makers and entrepreneurs.

◀ (Bottom) Guests learn the art of glazing and the intricacies of loading and unloading a pottery kiln.