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**GOLD
LIST**

IN THE CLOUDS

REFERENCING HIS KOREAN HERITAGE,
A TEMPE CERAMICIST INTERPRETS
NATURE IN MODERN FORMS.

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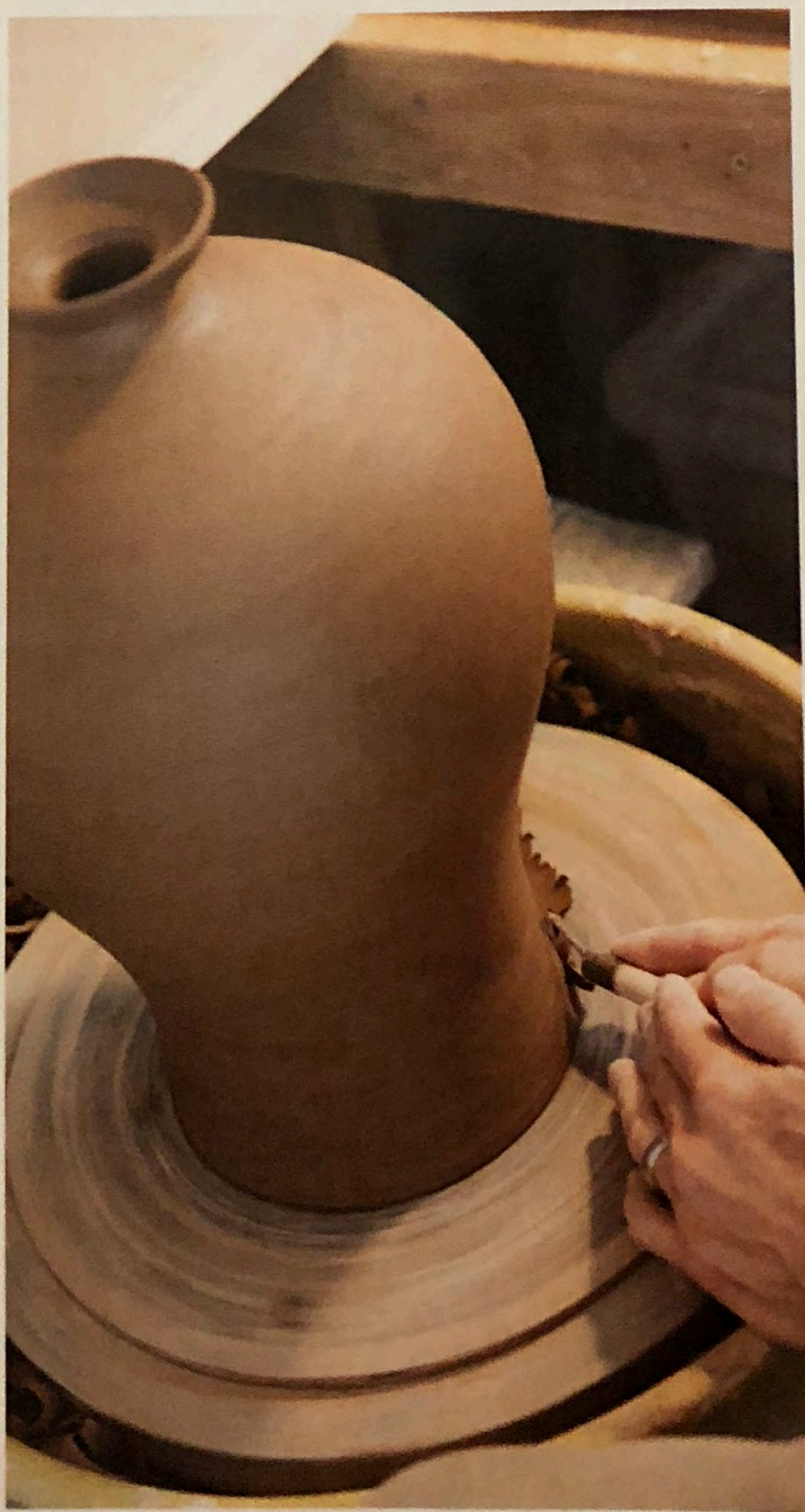


It's not unusual for artists to take inspiration from nature, and Tempe ceramicist Sam Chung has chosen one of the world's more enigmatic sources. With their fluid lines and simple contours, the works in his recent "Porcelain Clouds" series represent an eye-catching reimagining of the natural phenomena.

This theme resonates on multiple levels for Chung, who works from a home studio and has exhibited in celebrated galleries including Tansey Contemporary in Denver, Cross MacKenzie in Washington, D.C., and the Harvey/Meadows Gallery in Aspen, Colorado. "Clouds are an auspicious symbol in Asian art," Chung says, a finding he discovered several years ago in a design book of Korean cloud motifs. Their ever-shifting shapes also serve as a metaphor for the artist's experience as a second-generation American "floating" between his American and Korean identities.

Inspired by ceramics from Korea's Joseon and Koryo dynasties, Chung models traditional forms while infusing them with his own distinctively modern sensibility. In his recent pieces, for instance, "cloud shapes project out of the pots, as if they're breaking out of tradition and history," he explains. There's an elusive magic to his artistic process, which also requires mindfulness. "If there's anything that forces you to be present and focused, it's throwing a pot on a wheel," Chung says. When a form is finalized, he uses a sharpened wood dowel to compose cloud shapes on the surface. "Things happen somewhat intuitively when I'm cutting out certain parts of the contours," he says. Once the form is complete, he brushes the clay with white slip and fires it.

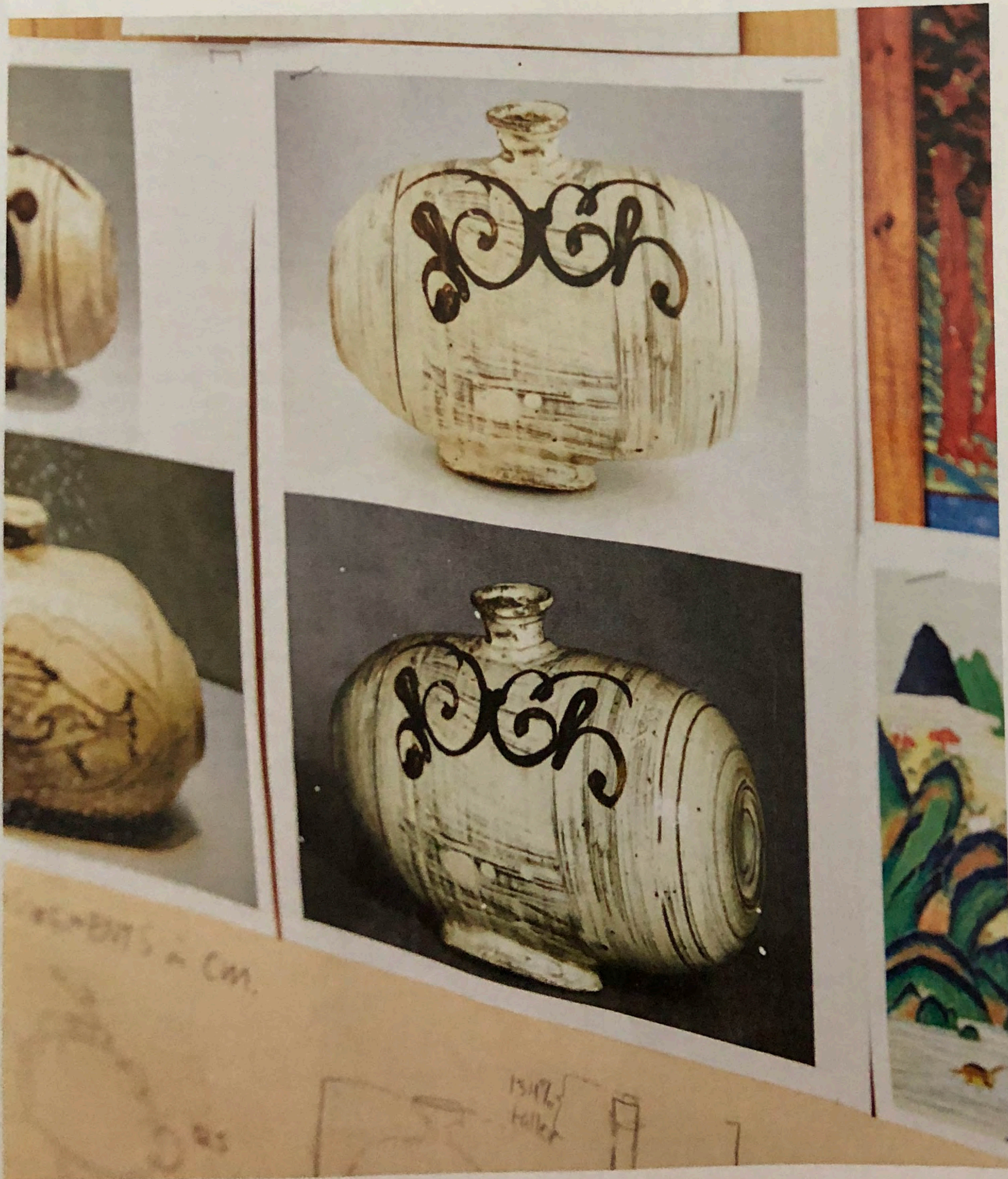
Like the cloud forms emerging from his pots, Chung, too, is breaking away as his artistry evolves. "With each show, I try to push into new territory," he says. Prior to his cloud series, Chung worked in more cubist shapes. He introduced clouds in 2009 and, in 2016, expanded his materials beyond porcelain to include a darker, coarser stoneware clay inspired by Buncheong ware, a traditional Korean pottery dating from the 15th century. For his stoneware pieces, he's



Left: In ceramicist Sam Chung's Tempe studio, sketches of new flared jars, influenced by historic Korean vessels, incorporate clouds and mountains. "The ephemeral nature of clouds is symbolic of my moving back and forth between Korean and American cultures," the artist explains.

Opposite: Chung (below, right) creates pieces with a minimalist elegance. Bottles in progress (above) for his "Stoneware Clouds" series are fresh out of the bisque firing. On the potter's wheel (below, left), a stoneware vessel takes shape.

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also altered his technique. "I'm embellishing the surfaces a little bit differently," the artist says. "I'm trying to brush the white slip on the surface of the clay in a way that's more freeing and less restrictive than the very tight, controlled lines I use on my porcelain collection."

With many ideas in the ether, Chung is mindful of separating his gallery work, like his cloud series, from his more functional endeavors, such as the tumblers, mugs and vases available via his online shop. "The difference is in the approach," he explains. When crafting everyday pieces, Chung considers items that can go into production and reach a large audience—who often discover him via his website or social media—while his handcrafted pots come to life more organically. "I slightly vary each form," he says. "They operate in a different world."

Chung has shared his passion with other like-minded creatives over the years. He has sold at Kelly Wearstler in Los Angeles, has worked on tableware with designer Peter Pless and occasionally collaborates with metalsmiths on container lids and with other ceramicists on glazes. He hopes to eventually craft a piece with Phoenix artist Christine Lee, whose main medium is wood—"maybe some type of lighting object, like a chandelier, out of wood and porcelain," he muses.

Only time will tell where Chung's inspirations will lead him, although one thing's for certain: He's staying true to his roots in producing one-of-a-kind handcrafted works. His pieces may look identical and technically perfect, but a closer inspection reveals they're not. "Parts of the brushstroke or the curve or thickness of lines can vary slightly," he says. "I embrace all these idiosyncrasies as part of the process and the story of the moment when the mark was created." ■

Chung unloads finished bottles (opposite, above) from a China-paint firing. Photos of Buncheong-ware bottles from the Joseon Dynasty in Korea (opposite, below) have inspired the artist's forms as well as his move toward a coarser, darker clay. A range of recent pieces fill the top shelf of a display of finished work (below); the middle shelf holds China-painted tumblers and Chung's new line of "constellation" cups, while the bottom displays soda-fired cups.

