

Teaching Artist Charlotte Lamm guides a teenage pottery student in the Clay Studio.





BY SUSAN B. APEL ✱ PHOTOGRAPHY BY HARKINS PHOTOGRAPHY

# CRAFTSTUDIES

## MOVES TO **WHITE RIVER JUNCTION**

A NEW HOME  
THAT'S JUST RIGHT

**C**raftStudies appears to have ended up where it was meant to be. The 70-year-old arts center recently moved into its new space in White River Junction, Vermont, one of the Upper Valley's hubs of the creative economy. The center is hoping to serve 1,000 students per year through at least 160 unique classes, workshops, and camps at its new location.

The move across the river is breathing new life into the center, which previously shared space with the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen in Hanover, New Hampshire. There, for nearly 70 years, CraftStudies annually engaged more than 700 students of all ages through classes, camps, and workshops in the crafts of pottery, jewelry design, basketry, and bookmaking as well as textile and paper arts. In the midst of the global pandemic of 2020, both the crafts center and the League's gallery space were forced to close. The gallery's closing became permanent, the building was sold, and CraftStudies converted itself into a separate Vermont nonprofit. It began looking for a new home.

The new location at 87 Maple Street is comparatively spacious, with three connected studios equipped to support the teaching and learning of ceramics, jewelry design, and fiber arts. The building is ADA accessible and has direct access to Advance Transit. In addition, it offers what has become that rarest of amenities in White River Junction—free on-site parking.



**Below, from left:** Creative Media Manager Katie Kalata Rusch, Executive Director Lisa Brahms, and Clay Studio Coordinator Becca Osborne.



### Who Is at the Helm?

In 2021, Lisa Brahms became the center's executive director. She earned a PhD in Learning Sciences from the University of Pittsburgh, where she focused on informal learning, or how people learn in designed environments outside of schools. Just before joining CraftStudies, she served as the director of education at the Montshire Museum of Science.

In her new position, Lisa is leading a small team of administrators and studio managers, with approximately 20 teaching artists and 30 volunteers. Her staff includes Becca Osborne as clay studio coordinator, Case Hathaway Zepeda as jewelry studio coordinator, Tony Luckino as lead monitor, and Katie Kalata Rusch in a newly created position of creative media manager. Lisa says, "Our studio coordinators keep the studios humming with a lot of heart and hard work in collaboration with our incredible team of dedicated volunteer monitors. Katie's eye for design and attention to detail have truly raised the bar."

### Welcoming Beginners to Experienced Artists

Classes at CraftStudies are varied and numerous, and to judge by the number of "sold out" notices on its website, extremely popular. The three studios—pottery, jewelry, and fiber arts—welcome all levels of skill, from rank beginners to experienced artists. For example,







**Clockwise from above left:** Teaching Artist Kerstin Nichols facilitates Jewelry Design for Teens. A student shapes a vessel on the pottery wheel. A student trims a pot. A student explores metal patterning. Two students use hammers to form jewelry.





1. Teaching Artist Emma Percy demonstrates a stitching during a bookbinding class.  
 2. Teaching Artist Molly Morin assists a student with a needle felting project. 3. Volunteers Anne Webster Grant and Amy Marcoux help community members make buttons.  
 4. Teaching Artist Eric Moore demonstrates throwing on the wheel. 5. A teen jewelry student adds flux before soldering.  
 6, 7, 8. Teen pottery students.





Introduction to Hand-Building Bowls starts with the basics; other courses offer Intermediate and Advanced Wheel Work, and “an intensive, weeklong workshop in Wheel Throwing.”

Instructor Eric Moore notes how satisfying it is for both student and teacher “to witness the progression from the first class to the last one. I had a student who, by the end of the first class, didn’t have a single finished piece made. Fast-forward only six weeks later and he was able to not only produce quite a handful of pots but also started experimenting with surface decoration, handle attachments, and glazes! I am constantly in awe of how fast people can catch on to pottery.” Rosemary Orgren, metalsmith and a longtime board member, finds that classes provide “a thrill and pride in being able to safely use a torch to create pieces of jewelry . . . along with learning to use a number of other tools, some of which seem, at first, exotic.”

New to jewelry making? Try the Introduction to Jewelry Series. An introductory fabrics arts course, Sewing Basics promises to grow your sewing confidence in making everything from pillowcases to tote bags. Then there are the courses that catch the eye for their unexpectedness: Wooden Spoon Making, maybe, but how about Squire Boots, in which you’re invited to design and create your own pair of leather boots?

Charlotte Lamm teaches classes for teens and tweens. She is among the teachers at CraftStudies who actually began as students, in her case, as a preteen. “Being a teacher allows me to create a place where kids feel safe and comfortable to express themselves and have fun. As a former student of this organization, I know how valuable that is for growing teens. CraftStudies was a safe space for me growing up and I want to provide that for as many young artists as I can.”

### Community Partnerships

CraftStudies also hosts community events. This past summer it joined with the Town of Hartford’s summer concert series at Lyman Point Park; concertgoers sampled crafts such as button-making and napkin-dyeing.



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**Top Left:** Mountain pendant in 14K white gold, with bezel set multi-colored Montana sapphire and diamond moon.

**Bottom Left:** Pemi Collection cat’s eye tourmaline ring with 14K yellow gold wide textured band and flush set color-treated apple green and dark green diamonds.

**Above:** Moonstone pendant in 14K white gold with sapphire halo and tsavorite garnet milgrained bail.

**Below:** Pemi Collection Pebble stud earrings in 14K yellow gold with rustic yellow rose cut pentagon diamond.



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Offered in partnership with rePlay Arts, an art supplies Swap, Drop, and Shop day encouraged all to bring gently used items needing a new home: leftover wallpaper, upholstery books, paints, crayons, stencils, sewing supplies, beads and jewelry clasps, a spare easel. Prices were pay-what-you-want and sometimes free. The summer was replete with numerous camps for kids. And students who have previously taken classes at CraftStudies spend uninterrupted time working on their own projects in the studio.

This autumn (October 21) will see the return of BowlFest, in which customers purchase a handmade bowl, sculpted by CraftStudies' teaching artists and volunteers, which is then filled with food. Proceeds from the event benefit CraftStudies' scholarship program and local organizations fighting food insecurity.

A move across the state line and the proximity of other arts venues in White River Junction means that CraftStudies' future plans include community collaboration. Teaching Artist Tony Luckino teaches a pottery class in partnership with Bugbee Senior Center and says, "I really enjoy working with creative seniors. They come to class with varied art backgrounds or sometimes with no experience at all, but all have stories to tell and a willingness to try something new."

The work of forging alliances is already well underway as CraftStudies is partnering with the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, the Hartford Parks & Recreation Department, and the Hartford Public Schools, as well as Junction Fiber Mill, White River Ballet Academy, and rePlay Arts and local artists. Lisa Brahms sees it as a continuing and ever-growing endeavor: "We look forward to expanding such partnerships and pathways for community participation in the months and years ahead." 🌟

#### **CraftStudies**

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