POTTERS ARE AT WORK in villages all along the Mekong River and its tributaries. Women potters make earthenware—porous pots used for cooking directly over a flame or for cooling drinking water by evaporation. Men make stone-ware—nonporous jars for long-term storage. Mainland Southeast Asia is one of the few regions in the world where both kinds of pottery are still made for everyday use.

For thousands of years, Mekong peoples have produced pottery. In recent decades, metal, plastic, and glass vessels have replaced much of the earthenware and stoneware. At the same time, interest in handmade vessels has risen. In Yunnan, China, urban consumers have discovered unique Tibetan black earthenware decorated with blue and white porcelain shards, while customers in Thailand have purchased traditional pots to decorate their homes and offices.

In 2004, Chev Un, a very respected and skilled potter, was recognized as an Emeritus Artist of Khmer Arts and Culture by the Royal Academy of Cambodia. Photo by Korakat Boonlop, courtesy Smithsonian Institution.