

final reminder before I start filling a new request. I'm able to treat the request for extra dinnerware within three to six months—fitting it in with other work I'm doing.

In bringing things more up to the present on through the late '70s, I continue to add examples to the selections that are stored for use in the showroom. When clients come, they see perhaps four or five major shape themes and a variety of sizes within any given example. For bowls I might have eight or nine specific concepts that deal with every specialized part of a setting. We've essentially discontinued adding to the waiting list since it's by now somewhere between seven to eight years long. It's gotten so unwieldy and difficult to convey the facts of the situation that we have to discourage all but the extremely hardy potential client.

We work hard to avoid misunderstandings more than ever because of the long time involved. First of all, there can be no fixed price. Certainly, a price today won't hold for even next year, so there is no way to deal with what it would be like in seven years. Secondly, the work will continue to evolve and change as it always has, and I wouldn't be interested in doing something that represented today's work seven years from now. But certainly the clients could change their mind at any time, and I don't feel that it's important for them to notify me because I work my own way through the list. If I do find someone has gone on to purchase something else or given up on me totally, I move on to the next name. Fortunately, this has only happened once.

I don't ask for a deposit until it is actually time to do a client's dinner set so there is no difficulty over money and the length of time that has passed. My present average output per year varies a fair amount, depending on other things that I may be involved in, but basically I would say the output has been in the vicinity of eight or occasionally ten dinner sets a year.

Due to the fact that the wait has been a factor in people's decisions, more are ordering larger groupings than they used to, so instead of getting six place-settings, they now get eight or

ten; instead of getting eight they get twelve and sixteen place-settings. It tends to be a pretty dominant part of the work cycle even with a large kiln such as I have, but still, sixteen place-settings with maybe five or six parts in each setting tend to have a big influence on available space, so output can vary each year.

Occasionally the list is nagging, but it basically is a good feeling, it keeps me moving, keeps me exploring ideas because I certainly don't want to do something I've done before since I don't have a "line" and don't have a catalog and absolutely no reason to freeze the progress with ideas and surface treatment. This is a nice, purging kind of pressure to keep exploring. Showing clients an entire new grouping of things and having them become excited—in turn excites me to suggest even further evolutions and changes. By the time a set is done it is a blending of their needs, their responses, my reactions, and it turns out to be a very stimulating way to work.

Sometimes I feel badly knowing that those people are waiting for their sets. I wish there was some way to deal with it, some magic wand to wave and to do dinner sets faster and still respect them a great deal, but I haven't found the solution. Most people understand, fortunately. To me it points out the need to take a position once you've finally found an answer. It took us a long time to feel even moderately comfortable with it, but then it has to be lived with as a decision. There



will always be faults or deficiencies and certainly the system has a few, but I find no way to bring in a helper, bring in a magic dinnerware machine, jigger and jolly and mold and so on and just come rolling by the pots and decorate, decorate, decorate. I find any time I imagine that—or frankly, in the past, any time I've

even come close to trying that—the finished ware is so diminished in my eyes that I have very little respect for that kind of attitude in approaching my own work. So, it's far better to plod ahead and keep some kind of a balance between the dinner sets and all the other work that I want to do—teapots, casseroles, planters, constructed pieces and so on. Keep productivity balanced in all those areas, and they refresh each other, they blend and balance into each other and the whole output is enhanced.

My pots aren't by any means inexpensive in the spectrum of handmade ware. When I first began making dinnerware, I priced it lower than pots of similar size and nature that were just a general part of my output.

When pricing that early dinnerware, I think I was feeling that the people who were buying the set deserved a cost break because they were making a major commitment in buying a good deal of ware. So in the first three or four years, I did keep that price differential and even gave an extra place-setting as sort of a good omen, call it that, and didn't charge for it. Perhaps I went a little overboard in compensating for what I thought were very special circumstances.

As the years moved ahead I was forced to start dealing with the reality of inflation; I never have been one to analyze these things down to what each thing costs penny by penny, but I have a keen grasp of the overall economics of my studio simply because after a number of years of watching income and outgo, savings, and how this all works, you get a good hold on how to price your work, awareness of your worth or certainly your own experience.

I suppose in a broader spectrum, looking at yourself in comparison to what is available in the marketplace from other craftsmen, is wise. Look at good or bad commercial ware, from the extremes of a very low price like \$5 a place-setting for imported ware, up to \$600 per single place-setting for fine china. There is a tremendous price differential and spectrum of work available. I have learned that there is no need to feel restricted to any one category because it's somehow inherited with the territory of



It really doesn't get tiresome to do a very large dinner set, even with the idea that you are actually going to do about a third more to be sure of getting the proper quality for each part. I never would sit down and try to do a whole dinner set in one short span of time. Instead, I schedule the work over the course of ten days along with a great deal of other work of different types.



When prospective customers come to look at dinnerware, they are offered a variety of shapes and styles for each component, such as the mugs, goblets and bowls above.

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being a craftsman. But I've tried to feel my way through the pricing problem by sensation — how it felt to see the finished ware, and how it related to other things. This isn't going along to every store and holding up your work to what you see. After a while you do sense where you fit into the spectrum.

Let's go back to 1968. I was charging \$22.50 for a four-part placesetting—a plate, bowl, salad plate and a mug of average size. According to my normal prices for the other ware of a similar nature, it would have been more like \$30 or \$35. But it wasn't, and gradually I've raised the prices about every other year. I've tried to balance reason with economics and today, 1979, that same hypothetical placesetting has moved up to more like \$55 or so. In this ten-year span, it's a bit more than doubled and I make different prices now for complexities. If all the edges are going to be altered on the ware, I raise the price \$2 or \$3 per piece, which is really a small token charge for considerable extra work.

I don't concern myself with whether or not everyone can afford my work. At some point, that becomes counterproductive for the growth of the work. I won't be restricted to a cutoff point on price so if someone wants a very elaborate set and I want to do it and feel it's going to be constructive, then price has to become secondary at that point, yet I don't feel that I'm making dinnerware for the elite. I have just as many people who are buying dinnerware for their 40th wedding anniversary as I do young couples who are just getting started.

A dinner set right now, if you were buying twelve placesettings, might well cost — depending on what was chosen—\$500 to \$700. I've had a family buy eighteen or twenty-four placesettings occasionally, but that is not very common. Basically, I've adopted the attitude that I'm proud of what I do and it should help me live my life in whatever manner I would choose to do it. I am not going to do it as charity. I do give away a free mug that's a token towards durability and keeping people aware that I am in spirit on their side and I hope they have

no breakage but here's a good luck extra mug or extra cup.

I do give a guarantee clearly written on my information and price sheet that people take away when they're thinking about getting dinnerware. It says in effect that I guarantee the dinnerware against breakage in normal use (outside of dropping) which is my way of saying I am responsible if, for example, hot coffee were poured into a mug and it simply fell apart, or if someone put very hot food onto a plate or into a bowl and it cracked. Certainly I would want to know about this and I wouldn't want the owner of the ware to be embarrassed by it, as if it was their fault because certainly the ware has got to stand up to that kind of treatment yearly. So I spell that out both at the time of initial inquiry and when the set is finally delivered. That guarantee is pretty well lifelong and I've had remarkably few incidences of breakage, but truly there are always a few. I can't say how many per year — some years none, another year one or two pieces from settings, but it has not been a serious problem and I certainly feel that the good will and the communications that I have with my customers is a vital thing that I wish to enhance in every way and this is just another one of the ways that it can be done.

Almost every set that I've ever made is still in use; in fact, the most bizarre instance happened once maybe eight years ago. We had a customer say that their apartment building had been hit by a small airplane, had burned to the ground and by some



miracle, their dinner set had survived. That's not a typical accident, but it stuck in my memory.

At any rate I sense the vast differences between then and now but there is no problem as far as what happens when a customer from ten years ago comes back and says they would like to add to their dinner set. Back at some

point in the past I was saying, "Well, I'll always be able to come close to matching what you have in your set." I've really been forced to face the fact that there are material changes; how you fire the kiln evolves and changes, and above all, your personality changes. So when people do come back, I explain it to them and enlist their sympathy. I've never had anybody say well just forget about it because it's not going to go together. I just show them what I'm doing and make some effort to make it compatible with what they have and that's worked out very well.

This now deals with the Mondale commission and the background is something that CERAMICS MONTHLY has dealt with already (See "White House Crafts and Craftsmen," December 1977). It had to do with American crafts at the White House, an event of several years ago. I was invited to be part of that, as you know, and that I believe was my first exposure where Joan Mondale would have been aware of my work. A year or so passed and early in 1979 I was contacted by Mrs. Mondale's secretary and informed that she was considering acquiring some handmade dinnerware for the Vice-Presidential mansion and that there were several potters under consideration, and that I was one of those and could I send examples of work for consideration. So I sent a comprehensive selection of what I could do — complete placesettings of five basic style approaches with a great many color variations — and stressed my attitude in a letter concerning the feeling that I was trying to generate; that they weren't a matching effort and that was the way I was most comfortable in working — with freedom of approach, to have each part of each setting have its own personality. Fortunately their reaction was that they did like that approach, and I had the honor of being selected to do the ware.

They selected a quite elaborate setting with altered edges on all the parts except the cup and saucer. I explained there would need to be a modest strengthening to that edge trimming because some of the portions were a bit more prominent in their exposure to accidental abuse than a

plain round edge would be. I explained that I would thicken that edge to a slight degree to compensate for that if that design was the choice. The decoration was something that appealed to them very much.

A great deal of decoration, a great deal of activity, no color restrictions — reds, purples and mauves were included as well as earth tones, and this pleased me a great deal. I explained both during the selection process and when the set was delivered that my enjoyment came from feeling very much a part of each piece as it was being done and treating it individually, enjoying it, savoring it. As an almost incidental outgrowth but one that pleased me a great deal, each individual diner at a table is really treated to his own unique grouping of parts and I think this heightens the enjoyment, the anticipation of each course of the meal, and certainly is a conversation stimulant. People can look around and compare what they have to their neighbor's piece, and so on. Certainly it contributes to the ambience during a meal.

There were 16 place settings with six parts to each setting: an 11-inch dinner plate, 7½-inch salad plate, 7½-inch general purpose bowl, a 6-inch bread-and-butter plate, and a fairly good-sized cup and saucer. I sent a technical commentary, a sort of instruction sheet, if you will, to the attention of the staff who would be dealing with these things, mentioning that it was stoneware, fired to 2350°F, by its nature a rugged, serviceable material; that there was no lead used in any of its glaze or clay materials to assure them of the safety aspect, that washing was not a problem either in dishwashers or by hand, that the colors were fast and stable, the surfaces were scratchproof within reason, that certainly no utensils would mark it. I specified that it was not ovenproof in the sense that I might use an altered body for casseroles and I wouldn't advise it going in and out of the oven to preheat it.

It really doesn't get tiresome to do a very large dinner set, say twelve place settings, even with the idea that you are actually going to do about a third more to be sure of getting the proper

quality for each part. Because first of all there is the variety of approach that I take to each piece, the different slips, the different decorative concepts. Secondly, I never would sit down and try to do a whole dinner set in one short span of time. Instead, I schedule the work over the course of ten days along with a great deal of other work of different types, large things, more complicated things, constructed



things. So, each day there are three or four different kinds of activities going on and one of those might be to do a portion of the dinner set. It doesn't ever become a drudgery—otherwise it would show in the work.

I have always felt it was fine to share formulas with fellow potters. The one thing that must be understood is that rarely do the formulas work exactly alike in any two studio situations; perhaps the two biggest factors are personality differences and firing approaches between potters, especially in firing. I fire very slowly with long periods of heavy reduction, yielding a total firing time of up to thirty hours. Slow cooling (thirty-six hours) is another factor too often overlooked in glaze results. So, it is not a case of the old potters' joke about giving formulas out with one ingredient missing — but a case of personal use and circumstance that bring out changes in appearance.

My dinnerware body happens to be the same that I use in general; it's evolved as very durable, dense and chip-resistant:

Stoneware Clay Body (Cone 10, reduction)	
Potash Feldspar	12 parts
A. P. Green Fireclay	75
Cedar Heights Goldart Clay	200
Kentucky Ball Clay (OM 4)	25
Flint	9
Grog (20-28 mesh)	<u>25</u>
	346 parts

I like porcelain, but to this point, stoneware has totally dominated my dinnerware output. I like the warmth that it imparts to the glazes, the flecking and the richness that come through the glaze. I didn't want a body that was too "dirty," that is, filled with impurities that would burn out and form pits which are obtrusive when utensils are moving across the surface.

Almost invariably, I use quite a variety of slips based on a simple white formula:

White Slip	
Borax	3.5 parts
Potash Feldspar	25.0
Kamec Kaolin	25.0
Kentucky Ball Clay (OM 4)	25.0
Flint	<u>25.0</u>
	103.5 parts

In addition, I use six color washes for decoration over raw glaze:

- 10 parts Albany Slip,
 - 1 part Cobalt
Carbonate Blue-black
 - Red Iron Oxide Rust-plum
 - 10 parts Red Iron Oxide,
 - 5 parts Rutile Rust-gold
 - Copper Carbonate
 - Green, red, mauve
 - 10 parts Copper Carbonate,
 - 1 part Cobalt
Carbonate Purple-red
 - 10 parts Copper Carbonate,
 - 1 part Red Iron
Oxide Dark Brown-red

All except the Albany slip wash are then mixed with roughly one-half their volume of celadon glaze (as flux). All require enough water to achieve the desired fluidity.

I may use up to three washes on a particular piece—more often two, and occasionally just the white slip alone. The important aspect of how they're used is that I do a great deal of modification of that slip surface — this is not just painting on a simple coat and leaving it at that, but putting on a very heavy coating which still has fluidity. If you draw a tool through it or impress a patterned block of foam material, the slip won't back in and cover the mark, so I do a great deal of drawing and composing on each piece immediately after it's slip coated, before it leaves the wheel. The surface has a sensation of fluidity on each piece. I may see a

theme develop and follow it for two, three or four pieces, and then drift on to another theme, new color, new shapes, a tiny bit of drawing, a great deal of drawing all over the surface and it flows back and forth throughout the making of the dinner set. This is the beginning of the excitement of surface treatment and it certainly grows from the fluidity and fresh sensation that the slip gives.

In the studio there are some thirty different glaze containers available at any time. These would be based on perhaps twelve different basic formulas, and generally they have glassiness in common:

Celadon Glaze I

(Cone 10, reduction)

Bone Ash	5%
Gerstley Borate	9
Whiting	5
Kona F-4 Feldspar	67
Flint	14

100%

Add: Zinc Oxide

5% This glaze is brilliant with fine bubbles, and has good color response. Color variations may be achieved with the following additions: 2% Black Iron Oxide; 1% Rutile and 1% Red Iron Oxide; 4% Rutile and 1% Red Iron Oxide; 0.5% Cobalt Carbonate and 1% Red Iron Oxide.

Celadon Glaze II

(Cone 10, reduction)

Gerstley Borate	9%
Whiting	9
Clinchfield Feldspar (or Bell)	64
Kamec Kaolin	9
Flint	9

100%

This glaze is more subdued than Celadon Glaze I; an addition of 2-4% Red Iron Oxide will yield a gray/green.

Alkaline Matt Glaze

(Cone 10, reduction)

Barium Carbonate	14%
Tin Oxide	3
Whiting	21
Kona F-4 Feldspar	48
Kamec Kaolin	14

100%

Color variations may be achieved with the following additions: 4% Rutile; 2% Red Iron Oxide; 0.5% Cobalt Carbonate, 1% Red Iron Oxide and 0.5% Copper Carbonate.

Yellow/Tan Matt Slip Glaze

(Cone 10, reduction)

Spodumene	9%
Whiting	27
Kamec Kaolin	9
Cedar Heights Redart Clay	55
	100%

Dark Green Matt Slip Glaze

(Cone 10, reduction)

Whiting	19%
Kona F-4 Feldspar	9
Kamec Kaolin	5
Cedar Heights Redart Clay	67
	100%

I use matt glazes underneath a glossy glaze in a dinner set and then of course that surface of the matt glaze is rendered more serviceable.

During glazing there is a recontact, a reacquaintance with each individual pot. Each part of each group is different and has to be treated as a separate personality because it was started that way. So it is really not a question of going up and down a row of glazes. Rather I pick up one piece of ware and study it to see where the patterns are, orient my eye to areas of relative calm and complexity. As I begin glazing with quick dipping and overlaying of two and three glazes on each pot, I'm required to remember the location of all those patterns. Immediately when the pot has lost the water, the wetness, I go to the decorating area with that one pot and do the oxide decorative work on the surface, to compositionally tie together the top glaze and lower layer of slip. I can't wait more than a minute before starting that because I'll forget what was hidden down below all those opaque layers. So it's a time-consuming, rather slow way of glazing and decorating, but one that seems well worth the concentration.

Other considerations: I don't endeavor to texture the surface of the pot heavily, not high relief in other words, because that would be bothersome in use and make food difficult to remove after it had dried. I put texture in the surface but in a very low relief. You can see it through the glaze but you have no sensation of feeling it with your hand.

In terms of shapes and scale I find little limitation in the general consideration of what to do with dinnerware. This is why I

maintain a large group of examples to show people. I don't want to restrict them, for example, only to a 10-inch-diameter plate and say that is what a dinner plate is, because I've had people get 14-, 15- and 16-inch diameter plates as "place-plates" and use smaller utensils on top of those. Others get 8-inch plates and feel that suits their style of living. There are generally useful criteria for volume and dimensions that seem to emerge and most people will select within that range.

There isn't a standard, you know, about how deep a bowl should be. Shall the sides curve in or must they always be open? I've done all these variations and found good use for each type, assuming it's not too extreme. Does the soup cool too quickly in this bowl or that bowl? One learns from listening to customers and finding at your own home how these various things function; occasionally people will accept minor deficiencies because they like some aspect of the shape.

So you listen a lot, you try a lot and as people return to visit you, they let you know how it feels to use the ware. Their friends who may have eaten with them may come and tell you. It is all good information — helps you evolve new ideas; it becomes really a treasure house of useful knowledge that surfaces each time you approach new work.

There is such a vast amount of freedom beyond what one could say are functional parameters for interpretation. Certainly this is the combination of practical and personal that is the real challenge. It's endless and it's why I believe the functional vessel is as open to interpretation as any sculptural form could be. Both are equally challenging and the challenge is the reason we work.

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